CYBERSPACE AND THE POST-CYBERPUNK DECENTERING OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

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THOMAS LEE, B.A.

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The sub-genre of science fiction known as “cyberpunk” has been subject to varying degrees of criticism, questioning the cyberpunk movement's success in its resistance to late capitalism. Neil Easterbrook, among others, alleges that the cyberpunk movement eventually faded, and criticism on the movement has since dismissed the movement's relevance to literary studies. This thesis seeks to examine the extent of this criticism on one of the cyberpunk movement's introductions to science fiction: cyberspace. This thesis argues that the cyberpunk movement still continues through the trope of cyberspace, and its envisioning of cyberspace within the genre of science fiction has expanded beyond the scope of the cyberpunk movement's focus on capitalism, ultimately decentering this narcissistic fixation on Earth and, thus, envisioning a future for humanity beyond the Earth. Chapter one analyzes two of the cyberpunk movement's representative works, William Gibson's Neuromancer and Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell, in order to examine their construction of cyberspace under the original goals of the cyberpunk movement, an imagined site of materialist resistance. Chapter two investigates how a novel from radical hard science fiction, Greg Egan's Diaspora, decenters the anthropocentrism of cyberspace to claim a different kind of material space for the posthuman. These two chapters culminate in the argument that cyberspace in Chinese science fiction, exemplified by Cixin Liu's The Three-Body Problem, engages in a historical argument that bridges the cyberpunk movement
and radical hard science fiction, and outside of Chinese science fiction, cyberspace distances its subjects from Earth. The aim of this thesis project is to survey science fiction works during and after the cyberpunk movement in order to construct an overarching narrative on the cyberpunk movement's influence in promoting discussion on cyberspace and posthumanism.
The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to my mother, Laura Kim, who has always supported me despite not going to medical school, and to Professor Shinn and Professor Hochman, whose dedication and support I will never forget.

Many thanks,
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INTRODUCTION

The term “cyberspace” has enjoyed a popularity in audiences since the 1980s when William Gibson published his short story, “Burning Chrome.” Since its publication, readers of science fiction have reveled in the imaginative landscapes of cyberspace that writers have portrayed in their many names and forms: the matrix, the grid, and the Net, among others. For science fiction writers who grew up in the emerging digital age, writing about a cybernetic world that is within their grasp, compared to the outer reaches of the solar system, was both intriguing and more relevant to humanity's increasing dependence on the emerging science of nanotechnology. The exploration of space in Arthur C. Clarke's works or the colonization of Mars in Ray Bradbury's Martian Chronicles seemed so distant compared to the promise of a digital space that was accessible to anyone. The subject of cyberspace, in light of this popularity, has been under the scrutiny of scholars since its inception: Fredric Jameson and Scott Bukatman, for instance, have taken strides into labeling cyberspace as a postmodern space or even a space which contrasted the “object-world of late commodification” (Jameson 384). Indeed, cyberspace, as the cyberpunk movement had conceptualized it, became the rallying point for a resistance to then-contemporary trends and politics. Even now, the term “cyberspace” connotes a digital realm that is both alien and infinite with possibilities, and technological innovations seem to make the dream of cyberspace as imagined by science fiction authors closer to reality than ever before. This thesis project considers cyberspace within its literary context: an imagined digital space, separate from material space.
Science fiction works since Gibson have incorporated cyberspace in some capacity, and each iteration has produced some form of criticism or insight on the ontology of cyberspace. For example, in the 1999 film *The Matrix*, humanity is inextricably tied to cyberspace: machines have forced humans into an existence that emulates reality. In this film, the matrix is the site of humanity's imprisonment, and in this case, cyberspace is a problematic space, a “prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind” (Wachowski). *The Matrix* is not alone in these portrayals of cyberspace; rather, these portrayals have become commonplace in science fiction.\(^1\) Cyberspace has been a space for discussion or resistance against issues since the cyberpunk movement of the 1980s. Cyberspace promotes these discussions because cyberspace as a space for resistance in the realm of science fiction markedly differs from the technology that contemporary society has today. That is, cyberspace remains out of grasp in today's society, and the presence of cyberspace as “an alien terrain” (Bukatman 121) in science fiction deserves scrutiny. Directors and writers envision cyberspace as the arena where societal issues are displayed for that scrutiny. So, Neo's situation in *The Matrix* harkens back to epistemological issues precisely because the matrix is a representation of a philosophical problem that is further complicated with other elements in the film.

Since the cyberpunk movement of the 1980s, science fiction writers have staged cyberspace as a space for resistance and for the discussion of contemporary issues. The arena of cyberspace has undergone different iterations over the years, and perhaps the most familiar iteration of cyberspace can be found in the cyberpunk movement, notably Gibson's *Neuromancer*: “[he] jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix” (5). The “consensual

\(^1\) Notable examples of cyberspace in recent films include *Tron* and its sequel, *Tron: Legacy*.
hallucination” of cyberspace is perhaps unsurprisingly suited to be the arena for the issues of urban life. As Bukatman writes, cyberspace “does have its precursors. The notion of a dark and crowded space broken by neon forms and corporate structures is surely not unfamiliar” (121). Indeed, one need only look at the major cities of today's society, New York City, Tokyo, or Los Angeles, to find the precursors of cyberpunk's cyberspace.

So, when considering cyberspace in this context, I find it necessary to look at how recent works in science fiction have incorporated cyberspace as a space of resistance that Bukatman or Jameson have theorized. As society continues to develop technologies that bring cyberspace a closer reality, the issues that Bukatman, Jameson, or science fiction writers² have examined become all the more relevant. Although Neil Easterbrook decidedly states that “cyberpunk is dead” (378), the cyberpunk movement's tropes continue in present-day science fiction. Cyberspace has changed the focus of science fiction narratives, and derivations of cyberspace have become a staple in science fiction. In this thesis project, I argue that since the cyberpunk movement's introduction of cyberspace into the literary landscape of science fiction, science fiction works have used cyberspace as a site of resistance to the anthropocentrism in literature and in doing so, the cyberpunk movement continues its project of resistance through cyberspace.

In Chapter One, I examine the cyberpunk movement's use of cyberspace as a tool to resist the neoliberal ideology of the 1980s. This movement, a reaction to neoliberal policies and the increasing influence of corporations, resisted this trend towards globalization and capitalism. These works imagined gritty dystopian futures where the neoliberal policies of the present resulted in a future where society is all but forgotten. Cyberpunk has earned the moniker, “high tech, low society,” for these portrayals. Despite the goals of early cyberpunk writers, the

² These writers include William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and Ernest Cline.
cyberpunk movement has been criticized for its failure in resisting against the corporate system, but several texts have withstood this criticism: William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). These works have envisioned cyberspace as a space that is separate from material space, a space that corporations or the military-industrial complex have usurped for their own purposes. For Gibson and Oshii, cyberspace is free from the influence of late capitalism, and their protagonists can turn against the paradigm of late-capitalism in the safety of cyberspace. I suggest, however, that cyberspace in both of these works remains connected to material space, and cyberspace is not the site of resistance that these writers originally envisioned.

At around the time of cyberpunk's rising popularity, radical hard science fiction began to grow a following as a result of technologies that had once been in the realm of science fiction, like cloning, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology, and in Chapter Two, I look into the development of radical hard science fiction and how this sub-genre drew from the cyberpunk movement. Radical hard science fiction drew from these cutting-edge technologies, and in fact, these technologies precipitated the call for a new type of science fiction that would draw from these technologies as well as the societal implications in the distant future. Labeled for the sub-genre's complex technical writing on theoretical science as well as its simultaneous extrapolation of the most recent scientific trends in the distant future, radical hard science fiction advances the concept of cyberspace that cyberpunk had first introduced into science fiction, envisioning a future where technological and societal issues come to a head in cyberspace. Greg Egan's *Diaspora* (1997) stands as a representative work of this sub-genre of science fiction. Rather than focus on a critique of neoliberal ideology, Egan's novel focuses on the future of the posthuman
and cyberspace. In this chapter, I propose that Egan's novel decenters the anthropocentric fixation of Earth through cyberspace as a means to claim material space for Egan's decentered posthuman.

Current science fiction, then, has since developed on cyberspace and the posthuman, and in Chapter Three, I examine Cixin Liu's first book of his *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy, *The Three-Body Problem* (2014), as a novel that bridges the cyberpunk movement's political use of cyberspace and Egan's project of disembodiment. Cixin Liu, a nine-time winner of the Galaxy Award and winner of The Hugo Award, is rapidly gaining recognition within the international science fiction community, and in his first novel, his iteration of cyberspace is perhaps the most plausible of the previous two chapters. This iteration of cyberspace serves as a space of resistance against authoritarian regimes, and unlike the previous versions of cyberspace, Liu's rendition of cyberspace in the form of a virtual reality game does not separate mind and body. Because of the lack of this mind-body distinction, the Chinese subject can enter cyberspace, and he can engage in resisting authoritarian regimes. In this chapter, I argue that Liu's cyberspace bridges cyberpunk's political resistance and Egan's disembodied posthuman in order to denounce China's history of authoritarianism.

The end goal of this project is not just to mark the transitions of the use of cyberspace over time but to examine the influence of the cyberpunk movement over the past few decades. While critics have derided the cyberpunk movement and have assumed its failure, I hope to use this thesis project to examine science fiction works during and after the cyberpunk movement in order to construct an overarching narrative on the cyberpunk movement's influence in promoting discussion on cyberspace and posthumanism. Cyberspace as well as posthumanist narratives
have been published since the alleged end of the cyberpunk movement in 1995, and how
cyberspace as well as posthumanism in post-cyberpunk works have grown beyond the limitations
of the cyberpunk movement, developing narratives on the critique of anthropocentrism by calling
attention to the ever-expanding universe. It is my hope that this project will spark an increased
interest in these science fiction writers and thus start a renewed conversation on cyberspace and
the posthuman as technology continues to progress at an unbelievable rate.
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEMS OF CYBERPUNK’S CYBERSPACE

Cyberpunk as a sub-genre of science fiction began in the late 1970s. Writers like William Gibson and John Shirley wrote noir-inspired digital landscapes that were at odds with the previously utopian science fiction of the 1950s and 1960s. While the works of Isaac Asimov and Ursula Le Guin harken back to the idea of utopia, cyberpunk differs in its approach towards utopia, placing more weight on the gritty realism of the urban landscape. Engrained in the roots of cyberpunk is the reactionary spirit the neoliberal policies of corporate America. Indeed, as so many critics, Fredric Jameson included, have stated, cyberpunk rose in reaction to the “new abstractions of the computer and of globalization and finance capital from the Reagan-Thatcher era on” (Jameson 93). With the rise of the computer, cyberpunk imagined digital reality as an escape from the materialist values of neoliberal America through multinational corporations. The answer to these values was cyberspace. The presence of both cyberspace and multinational corporations divided reality into two halves: a material space where corporations have claimed material goods and a cyberspace where corporate influences have not claimed this new frontier. Cyberpunk depicts these two spaces, and the connection between these two spaces is the body. Cyberpunk imagines the body as able to be a part of these two spaces, and in showcasing each space, the teleological end of neoliberal regimes aims to govern all material space: a dark future filled with cold technology and distant corporations. While cyberpunk may have succeeded in

3 Perhaps most notably in cyberpunk is the encapsulation of utopia in cyberspace, Jameson comments. However, critics of cyberpunk note that cyberpunk never had a utopian look as it was inspired by “punk culture's anti-utopian 'no-future look’” (Sponsler 252).

4 These critics include Bruce Sterling, Peter Fitting, Nicola Nixon, and Karen Cadora.
constructing a dichotomy between cyberspace and material space, the portrayal of cyberspace in cyberpunk ultimately led to its failure to imagine an alternate space free from the neoliberal policies of the 1980s. Cyberpunk's portrayal of cyberspace and its dependence upon the body ultimately loops back to the materialistic ideals of neoliberal America.

This reactionary movement to the vast globalization and era of late-capitalism has already had its fair share of criticism. For the early writers of cyberpunk, cyberpunk has never been about social change or resistance to neoliberalism. For Joseph Christopher Schaub, cyberpunk examined the then-contemporary landscape of 1980’s America, and it extrapolated this culture to a distant future. The cyberpunk writers conceived of a gritty imagination of the future, and as Samuel R. Delaney notes, “Cyberpunk is that current SF work which is not middle-class, not comfortable with history, not tragic, not supportive, not maternal, not happy-go-lucky” (MR 33). In rejecting the norms of science fiction, cyberpunk extrapolated the neoliberal policies to an extreme telos of a darker future without the hope of utopia. In essence, the cyberpunk movement sought to unveil society's current direction: a future where the then-contemporary materialistic obsession of rising corporations has led to a dark reality where society has collapsed upon itself and a near-anarchic system takes its place. The differences between material space and cyberspace create the contrast that cyberpunk writers have highlighted over the years, marking a space where the faults of the neoliberal values of the 1980s become apparent to the reader.

Despite the emphasis on cyberspace as a place resisting neoliberalism, the rejection of cyberpunk for critics consisted of cyberpunk's failure for establishing a difference from the neoliberal values of the 1980s. Instead, cyberpunk perpetuated these notions through the

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5 Greg Bear and John Shirley reflect on the beginnings of the cyberpunk movement as an innovation on science fiction that commented on neoliberal policies and the changing public perception of the body.
continuation of the values that it criticizes. As an outspoken critic of the cyberpunk movement, Nicola Nixon, for instance, vehemently states, “For all its stylish allusions to popular culture—punk rock, to designer drugs, to cult cinema . . . cyberpunk fiction is, in the end, not radical at all” (231). For critics like Nixon, cyberpunk touted itself as an edgy critique of neoliberal materialism, but in the end, cyberpunk for a variety of reasons did not succeed in this goal. For feminist critics, cyberpunk presented a revolution for the male audience: “Cyberpunk can perhaps best be defined as a reinterpretation of human (and especially male) experience” (Sponsler 251). After all, the well-known cyberpunk authors of the first cyberpunk wave were male, and for feminist critics, the male author carried over, wittingly or unwittingly, his patriarchal values. Though, these same critics admit that the second wave of cyberpunk, which consisted primarily of female writers, assured some of their concerns.

The cyberpunk movement, however, did not last beyond the 1980s. By the middle of the 1990s, critics like Neil Easterbrook and Claire Sponsler claimed that “cyberpunk is dead” (Easterbrook 378) and that “cyberpunk as a movement is essentially over” (Sponsler 251). Sponsler continues her essay with the cyberpunk movement's influence on science fiction narratives: “At one extreme, cyberpunk has begun to function as an excluded 'Other' against which many writers shape their fiction . . . At the other extreme stand writers . . . who persist in finding the themes and images of cyberpunk vital imaginative terrain” (251). The cyberpunk movement may have continued with these two extremes, but the essence of the cyberpunk movement in its resistance to materialist regimes was no longer in critical discourse on the subject. The first wave of the cyberpunk movement and its resistance to the cultural landscape of

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6 William Gibson, John Shirley, and Neal Stephenson, among others, notably made cyberpunk infamous for their portrayals of a collapsed society as a result of the totality of Capital.
7 Laura J. Mixon and Pat Cadigan have made significant contributions to the cyberpunk movement during its second wave.
the 1980s was left forgotten by its original writers as Gibson, Sterling, and Shirley, among others, went to write mainstream science fiction. In response to the overwhelming disregard of the cyberpunk movement, including its second wave of feminist cyberpunk, Karen Cadora can only question why the movement “becomes obsolete at the moment when women writers begin to explore the connections between race, gender, sexuality, and cyberspace?” (371). This question is, in part, key to the subject of cyberpunk studies, and I want to broaden this question as to why cyberspace maintains its popularity in science fiction narratives.

The cyberpunk movement is no longer in the spotlight in science fiction criticism, yet the tropes that the cyberpunk movement has inspired in mainstream science fiction continue to this day. On the topic of why cyberpunk maintained its popularity in the 1980s, John Shirley writes at the Cyberpunk Forum/Symposium at the University of Southern Mississippi: “It examines the human consequences of our new relationship to technology, with media, with our reality; it explores the good and the bad, and the places where they can't be distinguished” (MR 58). The cyberpunk project's delineation between cyberspace and material space has been the topic of critical discussion. In fact, Scott Bukatman has an entire section of his book, Terminal Identities, dedicated to the subject in which he states that cyberspace is the ultimate product of the sub-genre, a “narrative space, and one therefore explicitly defined as a site of action and circulation” (121). Cyberspace is a simulacrum, a representation of material space. Cyberspace is a reflection of material space, but in cyberpunk, this reflection is allegedly untainted by the materialistic views of neoliberal politics. Instead, cyberspace allegedly is a free space where the lack of materiality provides freedom from the dystopian future of neoliberal policies.
While critics may have analyzed and continued discussion on cyberspace through one interpretative lens, this chapter seeks to look at the criticism of cyberspace within the cyberpunk genre, ultimately arguing that cyberpunk's treatment of cyberspace is the cause for its failures in critiquing late capitalism. To argue for this claim, I will use two works that are archetypal to the cyberpunk sub-genre: William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*. These two works construct cyberspace in a way that, *prima facie*, seem to denounce neoliberal or capitalist values, but despite these attempts, both of these works do not suggest that this resistance against neoliberalism succeeds. While the resolution of each respective work seems to force a reading of cyberspace as a space of freedom from material capital, the resolution, when closely analyzed, limits and condescends cyberspace, placing cyberspace as subject to material space. Despite each work's iteration of cyberspace as a space of resistance to materialism, cyberspace maintains a strong connection to material space because the body connects the two spaces. To begin this discussion, I would like first briefly to summarize *Neuromancer* and then go into a short overview of past criticism on the work. After this overview, I will then proceed with an analysis on the work followed by the same treatment for *Ghost in the Shell* along with the film's answer to *Neuromancer*'s claims.

*Neuromancer* begins with the protagonist, Case, who had once been a talented computer hacker. After getting caught stealing from his employer, Case's central nervous system was damaged, affecting his ability to access cyberspace. In his desire to find a cure, Case attempts to break into a secure area, but the efforts leave him in a precarious position. He obtains help from Molly, a street-samurai, and she rescues Case from the hired thugs who are sent after him. Later, Armitage, a shadowy ex-military figure, offers Case a cure in exchange for his services, but the
cure also comes with a poison: Case must complete Armitage's tasks in order to remove the poison. In the process, Case joins up with an AI, Wintermute, who is trying to find another AI, Neuromancer. In order to find Neuromancer, Case must go through a series of tasks that results in the death of Armitage and the fusing of Neuromancer and Wintermute. Case is generously paid for his role, and he continues his hacking work at the novel's epilogue.

_Neuromancer_, the archetypal novel of the cyberpunk movement, reflects on the contemporary landscape of the 1980s, a time of neoliberal politics and technological innovation. The novel, however, presents not a utopian vision of this period but portrays a dystopian urban environment where society has been reduced to a seedy underground. The novel does not neatly divide the boundary between material space and cyberspace. For Bukatman, _Neuromancer_ presents cyberspace as “a construct occupied by the programs and data systems of the world” (151). Cyberspace is a mirror to the dystopian cities in _Neuromancer_, and its construction is an artificial space that “superimposes the experiential realities of physical, phenomenal, space” (152). This construction is crucial to understanding Gibson's vision of cyberspace. Cyberspace is a space for political commentary in the novel. Cyberspace in its artificiality explores a digital frontier that is removed from the gritty landscape of material space. Where material space has a disparate social structure with a seedy underground mingling with distant corporations, cyberspace has no such connotation. For Benjamin Fair, cyberspace “represents identity as postmodern” (Fair 92), and this interpretation of cyberspace has established itself as foundational to cyberspace studies. Fair continues with this discussion on the postmodern qualities of cyberspace, stating, “Technology and global capitalism influence our ontology by generating a

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8 Csicsery-Ronay goes so far as to state that it is “enough to make the whole movement seem original and gifted” (269).
world of images that have no original referent” (Fair 92). Cyberspace, then, presents a foil to the dystopian reality that Case and his cohorts reside. Cyberspace contains the images and representations of a world that does not exist. In short, a simplified understanding of cyberspace would conclude that Gibsonian cyberspace signals a desire for the freedom from the neoliberalism.

This discussion of cyberspace is key to analyzing *Neuromancer* if only because Gibsonian cyberspace presents itself as the space of freedom for Case as cyberspace is where he feels alive and unconfined by the limitations of material space. On this topic, *Neuromancer* establishes cyberspace, called the matrix in the novel, as foreign to the reader, and accessing cyberspace is an arduous process: “The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games . . . in early graphics programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks” (Gibson 51). Entering cyberspace necessitates a painful step, inserting a mechanical object to one's head. The price of freedom, then, is a physical one. Case, however, desires to enter the matrix despite the uncomfortable feeling associated with the matrix. He seeks the freedom that is outside of the hopeless reality in which he currently resides. Gibson goes on to describe cyberspace as “a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation” (Gibson 51). According to Gibson, cyberspace is a space for freedom. Rather than experience material space, billions of people would rather set forth into digital territory.

Case's situation differs from the other operators of the matrix. He was first shut out from the matrix, and through a course of events, he is given another chance to enter the matrix. His inability to enter the matrix was a reminder that he was confined: “For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall . . . The body was meat. Case fell into the
prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 6). The body is material, and Case's world revolves around material capital. By contrast, cyberspace offers freedom from material space. While Case's body is flesh and offers him little in material space, Case's mind is free to explore cyberspace. In this sense, the mind and body are distinct in Gibson's novel, and this distinction is laid out in terms of cyberspace and material space. The body does not enter cyberspace with the mind. Rather, entering cyberspace disconnects the mind from the body with a painful reminder: “The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color” (Gibson 56). The matrix is a “drastic simplification of the human sensorium” (Gibson 55), and Case only senses what goes on in cyberspace. Case can move, but his body does not move. He can see, feel, and smell, but these senses are not from his body's experience. In this sense, the body is completely removed from cyberspace, and cyberspace is truly free from the material world.

In removing the body from cyberspace, Gibson does not so much present a critical study on identity as it does present the implications of the mind-body distinction in two different planes of existence. The complication of Gibsonian cyberspace is that identity has not been at stake in the novel beyond Case's desire to leave his prison of flesh in order to explore the freedom cyberspace offers. While Case seeks to leave his prison of flesh, he can never completely escape his prison of flesh. After all, Case will always return to his body after leaving the matrix. Perhaps more importantly, the mind is cultivated in material space. The mind did not originate in the hallucination of cyberspace; instead, the mind enters the hallucination from material space. While the body and its necessary connection to material space does not enter cyberspace, the mind with its former connection to the body enters cyberspace. The former connection to the body cannot be discounted: Case's mind can only perceive the sensations in
cyberspace with his former body. With these connotations, Case can make sense of the images in
the matrix: “fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country,
transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid
of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of
America” (Gibson 52). The references in the matrix are quite clear. Cyberspace mirrors material
space, and in this mirroring, Case can point out and label the images and places in cyberspace.
Cyberspace is not devoid of the images of late capitalism of material space. This difference is
key in the scope of the novel. Cyberspace and material space are meant to be separate; after all,
cyberspace for Gibson is a digital frontier meant to contrast material space's bleak future of
neoliberal politics.

This observation must be considered in conjunction with the novel's final treatment of
cyberspace. Throughout the novel, Case is at ease with entering cyberspace, and he feels that he
belongs in cyberspace. Cyberspace is his natural habitat. Despite these feelings, Case reaches a
poignant moment in the novel where he comes to accept the body as a necessary component to
himself:

It was a place he'd known before; not everyone could take him there, and
somehow he always managed to forget it. Something he'd found and lost so many
times. It belonged, he knew – he remembered – as she pulled him down, to the
meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea
of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the
body, in its strong blind way, could ever read. (Gibson 239)
Cyberpunk, as a genre, has always had these revelatory moments which ground the protagonist in his situation. Curiously, rather than integrating himself into the matrix, Case realizes that the body is of greater importance than his mind. The body does not simulate the raw feelings that cyberspace reproduces as simulacrum. This moment occurs in material space, the same reality that materialism and neoliberal politics has reified and captured for its use. The protagonist, though, lets go of his obsession with cyberspace, and he embraces material space for all of its faults. Cyberspace, in this case, could not offer Case the raw complexities associated with the physical body. Case's body could not enter cyberspace, and the simulated feelings in cyberspace would always be a representation of what truly exists. In this transcending moment, the point is not that cyberspace has failed in its project to resist against material capital but that a person cannot so easily integrate into the system. Two factors will always bar the complete integration into Gibsonian cyberspace: the body and the mind.

Cyberspace remains as a utopian concept in the novel, but this utopia is an impossibility for Case. In short, Case can never truly belong in cyberspace. Cyberspace has the allure of freedom, and yet the novel suggests that ultimately, Case and other humans will never fully integrate into the matrix. Instead, the epilogue of the novel suggests that artificial intelligence and digital reproductions of human consciousness can exist solely in the matrix: “And one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data . . . But the third figure, close behind her, arm across her shoulders, was himself” (Gibson 270). Neuromancer, at the novel's epilogue, lives in cyberspace, and his companions are digital reproductions of Case and Case's ex-girlfriend. The novel leaves the space of cyberspace as an
open field, and digital entities can reside in this space. The novel, though, does not leave a message of hope for those who cannot enter that digital space. Cyberspace remains as a concept that cannot be reached for those who maintain their physical bodies. Case, who had his transcendental moment, realizes this same conclusion. His body could not be a part of cyberspace because physical sensations held him back. Case's mind could not reside in cyberspace either because the human “sensorium” that cyberspace projects would always be contextualized in terms of the human body. Material entities could not immigrate to the immaterial world in this novel.

Upon close inspection, then, Gibsonian cyberspace does not present the means of resisting against the neoliberal culture of the 1980s. Rather, Gibsonian cyberspace is a closed off space that will allow the material world to enter through the “neural jack,” but even when entering the system, the remnants of the material world stick with the operator. Case could not shake off the corporate influences when he first re-entered the matrix, and in this sense, cyberspace is a far-off utopia that seems impossible to grasp for the regular human. This impossibility marks the disappointing outcome of the first wave of the cyberpunk movement. Despite other such novels in this sub-genre, each novel follows a set routine, the routine that Gibson set up in his novel. By 1993, critics began to write that the cyberpunk movement is dead, and yet, in 1995, Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* would reinvigorate criticism revolving around the protagonist of the movie. I intend to discuss this work as it seemingly provides an avenue for resistance against the capitalist regime of the 1980s and 1990s through the complete separation of body and mind.
Mamoru Oshii's film, *Ghost in the Shell*, follows up on where *Neuromancer* ends, providing a further exploration into the concept of cyberspace. The film focuses on a full-body cyborg, Motoko Kusanagi, a member of an elite task force, Section Nine. While *Neuromancer* imagines a dystopian world, *Ghost in the Shell* envisions a world where the military-industrial complex has run rampant, and the government has established agencies with military-grade equipment in order to maintain control over the population. As a product of the military-industrial complex, Kusanagi struggles to determine her identity as a full-body cyborg and as a tool for the government. This struggle culminates in her team's mission to apprehend the notorious hacker, the Puppet Master. His skill in wiping memories and producing false memories raises questions for Kusanagi as she wonders about the fragility of her own identity. After a rogue android escapes from a military complex, the identity of the android is revealed to be the Puppet Master, an AI developed in cooperation with the American military. The Puppet Master resisted its creators' goals, and it wishes to be considered a living being, culminating in its desire to reproduce. The Puppet Master's chosen space for reproduction is the Net, Oshii's cyberspace. In order to reproduce, the Puppet Master specifically chooses Kusanagi as its partner due to her status as a full-body cyborg and her similarities to the Puppet Master. After his speech on reproduction on the Net, both the Puppet Master and Kusanagi are shot, and the film almost suggests that the merging does not occur. Kusanagi, however, implicitly accepts his offer to merge, and she evolves into a higher existence prior to her supposed death. Through shedding her physical body and entering the Net, Kusanagi no longer has ties to her previous body, and her consciousness exists on the Net. At the film's conclusion, Kusanagi is free to go where she pleases because “the net is limitless” (GitS). This conclusion is, *prima facie*, the triumph for
cyberpunk. The film is able to deliver the resistance against capitalist ideology that

*Neuromancer* and other texts had failed to accomplish.

Like *Neuromancer*, *Ghost in the Shell* has a focus on both the protagonist and
cyberspace. Unlike *Neuromancer*, however, Oshii's work approaches both differently in the eyes
of critics. *Ghost in the Shell* criticism places more emphasis on Kusanagi's body as the site of
contention with the influence of the military-industrial complex. Notably, Schaub finds the film
to portray the protagonist's body as a representation of the military-industrial complex: “[she]
succeeds in revealing the process of capitalist reification” (94). The protagonist, Motoko
Kusanagi, is a cyborg whose body is owned by the government and created by the military-
industrial complex, and as a result of her status, she is a product of the repletion of capitalist
ideologies and organizations. Even further than the theme of reification is the relation Kusanagi
has with others in the film: “[Kusanagi] can send her consciousness out into the virtual world of
the data network through a plug in the back of her neck; but others can enter her thoughts
through the same doorway, and minds as well as memories can be manipulated over the
network” (Bolton 734). Kusanagi is subject to others, and she lacks the power that others have
over her. With the introduction of the Puppet Master, the antagonist of the film, the Puppet
Master acts true to his name, taking control of Kusanagi's body and speaking through her body.
At the conclusion of the film, Kusanagi's purported transcendence allows her to leave “the
childhood of her cyborg subjectivity behind and [achieve] full subjectivity in the next stage of
evolution” (Orbaugh 447). Kusanagi who had once been subject to the military-industrial
complex regains her subjectivity in her alleged transcended existence on the Net. After her
transcendence, Kusanagi is no longer bound to any government entity, and she is free to do what
she wants with her own transcended existence. In short, there is marked difference with the interaction between the body and cyberspace in this film compared to Gibson's work as Kusanagi's body, which is a product of material space and of capitalism, enters the realm of cyberspace without the pain of the neural jack, the connection to material space. Cyberspace is still a space free from the influence of materialism, but *Ghost in the Shell* complicates cyberspace with the process of uploading one's consciousness to the Net as a means of escaping material space.

The role of cyberspace and the body has an added nuance in this film when compared to *Neuromancer*. Kusanagi is a product of the military-industrial complex. Her body and assembly were chosen for her, and the government took her agency away from her in designating her role as part of Section Nine. This point has been discussed at length in *Ghost in the Shell* criticism⁹:

Kusanagi's body has been subjected to the control of someone other than herself. In short, her subjectivity is not so much hers, but rather, she is subject to the military-industrial complex. She is a product, and her existence is a proclamation of the capitalistic control over material objects. So, the dichotomy between cyberspace and material space as a space of freedom from materialist control is once again mediated through the discussion of the body. The key difference is the phenomenon of the post-human element in this film. Kusanagi's body is entirely mechanical, and in the film, the only purely human part of her is the essence of humanity, her ghost. This unique difference answers the problems inherent in *Neuromancer*'s attempted resistance: her

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⁹ To summarize scholarship on *Ghost in the Shell*, critics have primarily focused upon two aspects of the film: the cyborg and, more recently, on Motoko Kusanagi's ascension to a higher plane of existence. Schaub and Orbaugh have gone into entire essays on the totality of Capital in *Ghost in the Shell*, arguing that Kusanagi, as a subject to the military-industrial complex, is a product and that she regains her own subjectivity through the loss of her body.
consciousness is not tied to the physical body. Instead, Kusanagi's consciousness is not grounded within any material concept, and her consciousness has always been immaterial.

Kusanagi, of course, cannot ignore that her consciousness has associated herself with her body, and Kusanagi is initially tied to her body. In this case, cyberspace is a space of freedom for Kusanagi who is tied to her body and thus her job: “We have the right to resign if we choose, provided we give the government back our cyborg shells and the memories they hold” (GitS). At this point in the film, which takes place during the infamous water scene, Kusanagi is tied to her body. She swims in the water despite the heaviness of her cyborg body, and yet she wishes to exercise the freedom and experience that a human body would give her. However, she cannot fully experience freedom without leaving the government: her body holds her memories and the body gives her the ability to traverse material space. Seemingly in response to Neuromancer's transcending moment, Kusanagi ponders the state of the body:

Maybe all full-body cyborg replacements like me start wondering this. That perhaps the real me died a while ago, and I'm a replicant made with a cyborg body and computer brain. Or maybe there never really was a real “me” to begin with . . .

Don't you believe in your own ghost?

And what if a computer brain could generate a ghost and harbor a soul? On what basis, then, do I believe in myself? (GitS)

Kusanagi suggests that the body is essential to the construction of her identity in opposition to Case's revelation of an irreplaceable body. Indeed, the body is a reminder of her subjected obedience to the government. She cannot willingly leave without leaving her body, and while she
seeks freedom, her freedom is limited due to her body. Even further, her questions reveal her skepticism about her own identity. Her body, a government-produced construction, could very well have easily constructed her ghost. These questions directly address her transcending moment in the film, and while the circumstances are different from Case's revelation, the end result is the questioning of the physical body as a space for resistance.

Instead, the film constructs cyberspace and the mind as the space for resisting capitalism and the military-industrial complex, but this space has limitations that inhibit the overall project of resistance. To begin, Kusanagi's identification with her body is tied with a multitude of factors including cyberspace. She continues her existential crisis: “That's not all, there's the expanse of the data net my cyber-brain can access. All of that goes into making me what I am, giving rise to a consciousness I call me, and simultaneously confining 'me' within set limits” (GitS). Similarly to Neuromancer, Ghost in the Shell imagines cyberspace to be an “expanse,” and the body has limits. Material capital has literally taken control of Kusanagi's body, and cyberspace offers a free space that Kusanagi can enter. Although Case could enter both, he ultimately remained tied to material space; for Kusanagi, her ghost can inhabit both. However, even the Net is not a purely digital space, the name of Oshii's cyberspace entails that the structure of the Net is a series of networks. The Puppet Master reveals this limitation as he retells his history: “As I wandered the various networks, I became self-aware, my programmers considered it a bug, and they forced me to enter a body so as to separate me from the Net” (GitS). This separation delineates the line between material space and the Net, and although this measure does not work as the Puppet Master was able to escape captivity, the Puppet Master could continue to connect to digital platforms including the Net remotely.
The Puppet Master's purpose in approaching Kusanagi reveals the film's own alleged transcending moment as a scene of resistance against the subjectivity of capitalism, but complications regarding Kusanagi's physical body belie the success of this resistance. Instead, like in *Neuromancer*, the Net and the presence of the physical body at the end of the film limit the film's claim to resistance. Despite receiving a new body and uploading her consciousness to the Net, Kusanagi remains ideologically tied to the system. Most notably is that the military-industrial complex is ever-present in this film, even within the Net. The limitations of the Net as a space of resistance are made clear throughout the film. The Puppet Master is unable to explore the entirety of the Net if the security locks on certain networks are too strong, for example, and he must continue on with a physical body to reach Kusanagi. But even more fundamentally, the film even starts out with a short description of the cultural paradigm of the Net: “In the near future, electrons and light flow freely, and corporate computer networks eclipse the stars” (GitS). The Net is just another construction of the military-industrial complex. Oshii's cyberspace has always-already been a part of material space. The birth place of the Net and its very construction have always been tuned for a corporate gain. In short, the Net and its unlimited networks have their origins from the capitalist system despite the film's claim that the Net resists the same system. Although Kusanagi reaches some form of freedom from the government in uploading her consciousness to the Net, this freedom arrives with some concessions.

Further complicating the film's resistance to the military-industrial complex is the paradox of continuing her existence in both a physical body and as a conscious presence on the Net. The film's climax celebrates the loss of Kusanagi's body and the returned subjectivity to Kusanagi as noted in Sharalyn Orbaugh's argument: she has a new existence on the Net that is
free from the complete interpellation of the government. The film, though, does not extract Kusanagi from the ideological relationship between her ghost and the social and political institutions that established the Net; instead, Kusanagi continues her ideological relationship with the government and the military-industrial complex through the Net. Kusanagi has only traded in her physical body in return for an existence that has always been a part of the corporations that hang in the shadows of the film, the Net. While *Neuromancer* leaves cyberspace as a possible utopia, the idea of utopia was never possible in *Ghost in the Shell*. Even further, Kusanagi despite her merging with the Puppet Master remains tied to her physical body at the film's conclusion, and the idea that Kusanagi is completely free from the physical world is an impossible one. She must always concurrently reside within her new physical body along with her presence in the Net. Her claims that the Net is limitless seem to contrast with her physical body that has many limitations. The paradoxical existence of having both a limitless consciousness and a limited body does not bode well for a claim to resist the capitalist foundation fully. The same issue with *Neuromancer* exists in this film. The body, while fully separated from the origins of the military-industrial complex, maintains a physical existence that cannot escape from the influence of the government's control over material space. Because of her dependence upon the physical body, Kusanagi can never fully escape the reified world in *Ghost in the Shell*. So, in continuing her existence as part of both material space and the Net, Kusanagi remains a part of the military-industrial complex.

Looking at these two particular works of the cyberpunk genre raises the question that previous critics had already asked: where is the resistance to the politics of neoliberalism or the resistance to capitalism? When these two works are mentioned in critical studies, *Ghost in the
Shell and especially Neuromancer, however, receive high praise for the call to success to resistance through the possibility of a space which escapes the totality of Capital. Upon closer inspection, these two works do not necessarily have the success that critics have imbued these works. The transcending moments of each work which seem to call cyberspace as a center of resistance against neoliberal forces or the military-industrial complex actually continue the neoliberal or capitalist narrative. Neuromancer continues the materialist narrative in cyberspace, and Ghost in the Shell perpetuates a near-hopeless narrative where capitalist reification has always-already held cyberspace as part of its control. While both works seem to suggest a message of the possibility for freedom within cyberspace, this message arrives with a corrupted cyberspace that cannot hold up to the promise of freedom from neoliberal regimes.

As cyberpunk founder Bruce Sterling notes, “'Cyberpunk,' before it acquired its handy label and its sinister rep, was a generous, open-handed effort, very street-level and anarchic” (Int). In short, cyberpunk rose up in an era where capitalism and mainstream science fiction just did not mesh with underground science fiction writers. In reaction to these factors, cyberpunk was born, a movement that condemned neoliberal values. Cyberpunk, in this case, has proven to not be the force for change or revolution that it intended. While the early cyberpunks may have resisted against the neoliberal or capitalist values of their time, the works they wrote did not affect any change. Even these lauded works of the cyberpunk genre could not succeed in this revolution against the material world. But perhaps the mantle of revolution or reaction against the late-capitalist mainstream never fell upon cyberpunk as Sterling ends his obituary on the state of cyberpunk, “the Nineties will not belong to the cyberpunks . . . All power, and the best of luck to the Nineties underground” (Int). While cyberpunk may have failed in its resistance and its
desire to once again bring utopia in a post-modern era, its achievements have left an impact and
the foundation for further forays towards its lofty quest. Instead, the 1990s brought forth a
further development on science fiction that celebrated the rapid development of technology at the
end of the Cold War era. With this development, the cyberpunk movement's tropes transitioned
from their place of origin to another emerging sub-genre in science fiction.
CHAPTER 2: INFORMATION AND THE POSTHUMAN IN A POST-CYBERPUNK CYBERSPACE

Around the rise of cyberpunk's popularity in 1984-1985, the editor of the Interzone magazine, David Pringle, challenged contributors to write “radical hard sf” (SF Encyclopedia: “Interzone”), a sub-genre of science fiction that would, in contrast to hard science fiction, be “a more realistic forecast and melding of the social and human impact of technological developments” (SF Encyclopedia: “Interzone”). Unlike the cyberpunk movement, which explored cyberspace and pursued resistance against neoliberalism, radical hard science fiction focuses on intertwining the realism of science in its narrative, undergoing a vastly different approach to writing science fiction. Writers of radical hard science fiction answered Pringle's challenge, and one such writer, Greg Egan, introduced a different iteration of cyberspace in his novel, Diaspora. His novel, published in 1997, engages with cyberspace and the future of human society that is vastly different than the vision of the cyberpunk movement before him. While William Gibson, Mamoru Oshii, or other writers and filmmakers of the cyberpunk movement engaged in a political rhetoric with their respective works, Egan's novel examines humanity's place on Earth and beyond. His work seeks to imagine a future where humanity has adapted to the future: living on the land and sea of Earth, living as cyborg beings, or living in cyberspace. Egan's work does not contain the resistance against the advanced capitalism of the cyberpunk

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10 Radical in this context is not necessarily political. Pringle is alluding to an extreme shift from the classical science fiction writers of the 1950s and 1960s.
11 Pringle's list of hard science fiction undoubtedly includes classical science fiction writers: Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Hal Clement, among others.
12 While Pringle's call was directed towards a primarily British audience, writers inside and outside the United Kingdom have answered his challenge, including, Michael Crichton, Andy Weir, and Neal Stephenson in his later works.
movement; instead, he engages in a posthuman narrative that questions the place of cyberspace in a post-cyberpunk novel.

Taking inspiration from the past cyberpunk movement, radical hard science fiction writers took cutting-edge technology, and they extrapolated this knowledge to its ultimate end, merging societal and technological developments for the purpose of telling a story “with as much attention paid to character and society as to spaceships and black holes” (Burnham 19). Greg Egan stands at the forefront of this movement, and rather than calling this movement post-cyberpunk, radical hard science fiction is a fitting label for his works. Of these works, *Diaspora* stands out in distancing itself from an “anthropocentric narcissism.” Instead of focusing on political rhetoric that is culturally situated in the 1980s or on Earth itself, *Diaspora* focuses on the societal implications of posthumanism as well as the technological innovations that complicate society. While criticism on *Diaspora* is surprisingly sparse, the topics that he explores concern the existence of the posthuman on Earth or in cyberspace; ultimately, the *Diaspora* and its effect in scattering the posthuman to the vast reaches of the universe decenters humanity and the posthuman from Earth. Indeed, Egan's cyberspace differs from the cyberspace of cyberpunk: his cyberspace consists of posthuman beings who live in an infinite digital space.

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14 Liu's essay, “Beyond Narcissism: What Science Fiction can Offer Literature” (2013), argues that mainstream literature is too focused upon the Earth and not enough on the vastness of space, an anthropocentric narcissism, and science fiction offers the possibility to look at human society and technology outside of the Earth.
15 Past criticism on *Diaspora* has primarily focused on the posthuman subject as represented in the novel, especially under the context of *Diaspora* as a post-cyberpunk novel. Notably for this thesis, I find Foster's chapter on the cyberpunk legacy in *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* (2005) to be a helpful, if basic, resource on the representation of posthumanity in the novel as an evolution of Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Raulerson (2013) delves into an excellent critique on the embodiment that the novel presents for the posthuman, drawing from N. Katherine Hayles' essay on the posthuman. His essay continues Hayles' and even Egan's skepticism towards the disembodied posthuman, yet he concludes with a hopeful look at the posthuman and digital space.
16 The Diaspora is the event when the posthuman beings of Egan's novel send clones of themselves to different areas of the galaxy in order to discover the underlying mechanics of the universe.
without the limitations of the body. This iteration of cyberspace, then, is concerned with the posthuman and where society in a purely digital space can proceed. In this chapter, I will argue that Egan's novel decenters the fundamental premise of humanity as necessarily requiring a physical body, and in the process, he overlays cyberspace onto the universe and stresses the importance of cyberspace as a posthuman space, a development on the cyberpunk movement's original vision of cyberspace as a political tool for resistance against the totality of Capital.

Before beginning my analysis of Diaspora, I would like to discuss briefly the differences between cyberpunk and radical hard science fiction in order to differentiate the two movements and thus highlight radical science fiction's extreme differences in language compared to past science fiction works. While both radical hard science fiction and cyberpunk deal with posthumanism and, in Egan's case, cyberspace, the approach to both of these topics greatly differ from each other. Cyberpunk's portrayal of humanity was layered with the neoliberalism that was reaching its peak in the 1980s. Because of this focus on neoliberalism, the cyberpunk movement attributed political agency to cyberspace, envisioning cyberspace as a site of resistance against neoliberalism. Radical hard science fiction, however, does not contain cyberpunk's political nuances. Instead, radical hard science fiction's language strives to “feel authentic to the experienced reader when the way things work in the story is scientifically plausible” (Hartwell 288). In this sense, radical hard science fiction can be technical in its language. Each scientific fiction in radical hard science is thoroughly explained in terms of the fiction's related field of science: biology, chemistry, or physics. In radical hard science fiction, cyberspace or posthumans living in cyberspace would be described, the mechanics of its possibility would ensure its plausibility as seen in the language of Egan's Diaspora, describing the birth of the posthuman in
cyberspace: “In Konishi, every home-born citizen was grown from a mind seed, a string of instruction codes like a digital genome. The first mind seeds had been translated from DNA nine centuries before, when the polis founders had invented the Shaper programming language to recreate the essential processes of neuroembryology in software” (1). Egan's technical writing works to convince the reader of its plausibility; in contrast, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* does not go into the mechanics of entering the matrix or the origins of artificial intelligence. On the contrary, his language is descriptive, slowly integrating the reader to the world of cyberpunk: “Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system” (Gibson 51). Of course, Gibson's focus on a political narrative does not detract from radical hard science fiction's narrative. The differences between these two texts, while not solely consisting in the language of the text, reveal the lengths that radical hard science fiction takes in order to construct a plausible future.

Given radical hard science fiction's difficult technical writing style, the content of radical hard science fiction is, unsurprisingly, just as complex. Indeed, Egan's novel imagines an incredible future where humanity has evolved into three distinct races: the citizens, the gleisners, and the fleshers. The citizens are a posthuman society composed of disembodied digital beings, former humans who had taken part in an event, the Introdus, leaving their physical bodies to reside in cyberspace. The Introdus had taken place 700 years earlier than the setting of the novel, and this event still rouses suspicion with the biological humans who had not taken part in the event. These biological humans, fleshers, have undergone genetic modifications in order to live in new environments that were once inhospitable to human life. Unlike the citizens who have
taken residence in servers called polises, fleshers still reside in the remains of the once
technologically advanced civilization of humanity. The third group, the gleisners, are artificial
intelligence robots who exist in space, tasked to travel the stars. These three groups form the
known living entities in Diaspora, and the novel focuses on the citizens, particularly the growth
and development of one citizen, Yatima, as 've\textsuperscript{17} explores the polis and, eventually, the outer
reaches of the universe. The novel, then, is split into two parts: the first half introduces these
three societies and the galaxy-wide cataclysm that results in the mass extinction of the fleshers,
the Lacerta event, and the second half tells the story of the polis citizens as they traverse the
universe in search of an answer for a problem with their understanding of the physical world, the
Diaspora. At the novel's end, Yatima is among the few citizens who realize that the mysterious
Transmuters, beings who are said to have shaped the material realm, have ascended into a
different dimension of reality.

In placing the importance of the polis citizens over the gleisners and the fleshers, the
novel also divides posthuman society from those with flesh, the fleshers, and those who live in
cyberspace, the citizens. The citizens of the polis are portrayed as images in cyberspace rather
than flesh: “And the orphan had viewed thousands of scenes of moving, talking citizens . . . The
gestalt images themselves mostly reminded it of icons it had seen before . . . Their form was
constrained not by physiology or physics, but only by the conventions of gestalt – the need to
proclaim, beneath all inflections and subtleties, one primary meaning: \textit{I am a citizen}” (15). The
core of each citizen is this icon, and these icons are representations of one's unique signature.
The concept of flesh is a novel one for the polis citizens, and as Yatima visits a flesher colony for

\textsuperscript{17} Rather than use “she” or “her,” Egan describes the citizens as using the gender/body neutral “ve” and “vis” to
indicate pronouns or possessives.
the first time in vis life, ve remarks about how unnatural the body, despite being a robotic one, feels: “The tags from vis knees reporting the texture of the ground became an irritating, monotonous stream, and the strange fixed shape forced upon vis icon grew even more annoying. . . After almost an hour, Inoshiro rose to vis feet and walked out of the enclave. Yatima followed ver, sick with relief”18 (72). The concept of the physical body is not engrained within Yatima. Because all polis citizens do not have physical bodies, the novelty of having a body feels unnatural to Yatima after an extended period of time as ve is “sick with relief” to leave the artificial body finally and return to the polis. The novel, then, is predicated upon the premise that the polis citizens do not need a body.

Rather than focus on the fleshers or the gleisners that remain tied to the physical body, the novel is framed around the polis citizens and their relation to cyberspace, and in constructing this relationship, the polis citizen does not need a physical body to be considered posthuman. The polis citizens, rather than having a physical body or a physical boundary, differentiate themselves from other citizens in their capacity as unique software that have each achieved self-awareness: “For the five-thousand-and-twenty-third time, the conceptory checked the architecture of the orphan's mind against the polis's definition of self-awareness . . . The citizen was free to reprogram [vis appearance]19 at will, but the polis would permit no other software to touch it” (30). As self-aware programs, the polis citizens are Egan's thought experiment on the limits of posthumanity. For N. Katherine Hayles,20 the posthuman requires a physical body:

“How, I asked myself, was it possible for someone of Moravec's obvious intelligence to believe

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18 The term “tag” refers to artificial sensory receptors.
19 This term refers to appearance in cyberspace rather than appearance in material space.
20 Because Hayles' book was published earlier than Egan's novel, her examination of this topic is inspired by Hans Moravec's *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Moravec's portrayal of the posthuman and Egan's posthuman as disembodied beings are similar enough for Hayles' criticism to also apply to Egan's portrayal of the posthuman.
that the mind could be separated from body? Even assuming such a separation was possible, how could anyone think that consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection to embodiment?” (1). Hayles' question is a valid one in the context of Egan's posthuman, and rephrasing her question to address Egan's approach, I would simply ask, how can Egan resolve the polis citizen's consciousness in cyberspace as to be a posthuman rather than a non-human entity? Egan's answer to this question is predicated upon the polis citizens retained connection to the feelings associated with the human body.

Despite the polis citizens' existence outside of material space, the polis citizen is not completely separated from material space. The divide between materiality and cyberspace is not so clean-cut, at least when certain events in the novel occur. Yatima and her fellow citizen, Inoshiro, have made the journey to Earth, visiting the fleshers of Atlanta. Indeed, the citizens of the polis are able to interact with the material sphere from which they had originated. The divide between materiality and cyberspace, a divide that was once considered completely separate at the start of the novel, has been breached, and the connection between the two societies, while innocuous to Yatima and Inoshiro, enables the flow of information from one society to another. The digital being can inhabit the material body, then, to interact with material space. This image is familiar: cyberpunk allowed the material body to take on the guise of a digital body to interact with material space. But where cyberpunk strove for a political argument, Egan's novel does not blatantly reveal its intentions. Rather, the message is more subtle with Egan's novel. The citizens of the digital world seek to interact with material space, and the overcoming of material space with the influence of the digital world raises the questions of the relationship between materiality and cyberspace. Egan's citizens of the polis may not have the materiality of a physical body, but
the citizens perceive of their digital space as if it were material space, as the as-of-yet unnamed Yatima notes “a square paved with smooth rhombuses of mineral blues and grays . . . A fountain sprayed liquid silver” (Egan 15). Is this description meant to benefit the reader who may not understand the presumably complicated digital space, or is this description an accurate depiction of what the citizens perceive in their everyday lives? If this description is for the benefit of the reader, then cyberspace must be framed with materiality in mind, and if the citizens perceive of the images in cyberspace as a visual description, then, once again, cyberspace must be considered with respect to physical shapes and phenomena. Despite having left material space, the citizens of the polis will never truly shed the engrained feelings of having a physical body.

The tension between the polis citizens and material space raises in the ontological question of the polis citizen's place in the universe as one who belongs to material space or to the polis. In this same sense, Yatima and Inoshiro enter the empty shells of a robotic body in order to explore the material world, taking advantage of the body and manifesting their embodiment. Despite their initial discomfort with having suddenly entering the physical world, Yatima even going so far as to note that “the physical world was one vast, tangled obstacle course of pointless, arbitrary restrictions” (Egan 55). The result of their excursion divides Yatima and Inoshiro as Inoshiro suggests that he would like to remain in the physical world: “I can't go back now. It'd be like … tearing off my skin” (Egan 71). While Inoshiro eventually concedes to Yatima's pleas, the hesitation he experiences goes back to the novel's question of the place of the posthuman in the vast universe. Material space offers a different experience than the freedom and infinite space of the polis. Of importance in Inoshiro's hesitation is his easy adoption of the physical characteristics of the body, primarily the skin. The novel concept of the skin, a defining
characteristic of the physical body, deeply contrasts with the foundations of the polis, digital space. The two cannot exist together, and there is a clash in the immaterial and the material for Inoshiro. The point of resistance that is consistently maintained throughout the novel, then, is with the interaction between the virtual being and materiality. Although Inoshiro ends up as an anomaly in the novel, the novel continues with the forced interaction between the citizens and materiality.

The destruction of humanity as a result of the Lacerta event collapses the tension of the posthuman and material space, resulting in the polis citizens reclaiming their materiality through expanding their reach over material space. Looking back at Gibson's or Oshii's works, Case or Kusanagi enter cyberspace, temporarily relinquishing their material bodies. The inverse of this action is found within Egan's novel. Yatima and Inoshiro are among the first of the polis citizens, but the Lacerta event forces the polises to clone themselves and to spread amongst the stars: the Diaspora. The polis is inextricably intertwined with the physical universe both physically and digitally: the Konishi polis “itself is buried two hundred meters beneath the Siberian Tundra,” (10) and the citizens within the polis perceive cyberspace in terms of materiality. Unlike the aforementioned cyberpunk works, however, the posthuman is able to interact with material space and claim material space for vis' quest to initially learn how the universe works: “Gabriel tells me there are plans in Carter-Zimmerman to follow the gleisners . . . Something like Lac G-1 might not happen so close to Earth again for billions of years, but until we know why it happened, we're only guessing” (127). In taking part of the Diaspora, the polis citizens are able to reclaim material space through cloning the polis and launching the polises to the distant reaches of the galaxy. The Diaspora enables the polis citizens to engage in material space more
closely as they shift their digital landscapes to mirror the material space that they are traversing:

“The Hull was just a plausible fiction, a synthetic scape melding the real sky with an imaginary spacecraft hundreds of meters long; thousands of times heavier than the polis” (160). Although the Hull and its shape of a spacecraft is only a fiction, cyberspace in the form of the cloned Carter-Zimmerman polis is traversing through material space. Through the Diaspora, the polis citizens can claim material space despite lacking materiality. The cloned polises act as their vessels for the Diaspora, and through the moving polis, the polis citizen can move the physical location of cyberspace.

The cloned polises' role in assisting the citizens reclaim material space indicates that the posthuman cannot reclaim material space without cyberspace. The polis citizens never considered the possibility of the Diaspora until Carter-Zimmerman's project in establishing wormholes as a means of travel failed:

There's already talk of cloning a thousand copies of Carter-Zimmerman and dispatching them all in different directions, to help us catch up with the gleisners.

If the wormholes had been instantly traversable they would have bound the whole galaxy together; we could have moved from star to star as easily as we jump from scape to scape. But now we're destined for fragmentation. (156)

Unlike the gleisners, the polis citizens could not have easily uploaded themselves into synthetic bodies and become physical beings. Prior to Carter-Zimmerman's failure, the polis citizens sought to research the possibility of wormholes. The option that followed Carter-Zimmerman's failure was to follow the gleisners using conventional rockets. Both options would include the polis, cyberspace. Just as flesh is necessary for the flesher, the polis is necessary for the citizen.
Conversely, the polis citizen cannot visualize cyberspace without the aid of a physical referent. Completely leaving behind the material realm is indeed impossible for the posthuman, but the posthuman necessarily needs embodiment in order to make sense of the material. The polis citizen is a hybrid being that depends upon both cyberspace and material space.

Egan's work, then, constructs a necessary connection between the polis citizens and material space through the Diaspora. Instead of confining themselves within cyberspace and its infinite world, the polis citizens close the distance between cyberspace and material space. Curiously, this distance is both close and far apart. After all, the polis exists as a server in the material realm, but the gap between the citizens and the fleshers or gleisners is vastly different. Of critical importance is that the polis citizens remain in cyberspace as they partake in the Diaspora, living in the virtual realm while they physically cross the stars. The distance that separates the conventions of materiality from cyberspace is a theme that continues throughout the novel and, in essence, the second half of the novel is the journey to cross the distance between cyberspace and materiality. This journey cannot be solved by inhabiting a physical body; rather, the journey requires the polis citizen to engage with the material realm. As the polis citizen goes in further distances from vis' origin, the polis citizen enters a closer relationship with materiality. The polis citizens become more acquainted with embodiment as Paolo, Orlando's son in cyberspace, recalls the infamous scene in *Ghost in the Shell*, floating in a pool albeit a digital pool, thinking, “I've crossed twenty-seven light-years in an instant. I'm orbiting the first planet ever found to hold alien life. And I've sacrificed nothing – left nothing I truly value behind. This is too good, too good” (Egan 183). Although traditional discourse on diaspora is definitely politicized, Paolo's thoughts are more introspective similarly to Kusanagi's ontological
musings in *Ghost in the Shell*. But in Paolo's own musing, Paolo takes vis time reliving the embodiment that vis ancestors had once held; despite going where no flesher had gone before, ve must relax in this pool and rethink vis origins. In an absolutely human moment, the posthuman crosses the distance between materiality and immateriality, resting in the boundary between the two spaces. The post-human lives in the liminal state between the two, and no other being in the novel can claim to do the same.

The end result of the Diaspora is the polis citizens' claiming of material space, and in this process, the polis citizen reaffirms their disembodied relationship to materiality. At the novel's end, the dynamics between cyberspace, materiality, and the posthuman culminate in the novel's addressing of the question of the Diaspora's purpose. Paolo and Yatima, the remaining citizens of the Carter-Zimmerman polis, discover the fate of the Transmuters, and the fate seems anti-climactic given that the novel was concerned with materiality and the posthuman necessarily engaging with materiality: "‘There was nothing more to do.' Paolo's gestalt seemed to hover between cosmic agony over the failure of their search and sheer exaltation at its completion" (Egan 319). The Transmuters are no longer in three dimensional space; they have ascended into a different dimension of reality. Despite the Diaspora's goals and the citizen's journey to resolve the questions raised in the novel, the Diaspora left little to show for the polis citizens' sacrifices. However, in the following scene, the result of Paolo and Yatima's journey is made clear in the form of a stylized image of a Transmuter:

It was a four-legged, four-armed creature, with one arm stretched high above its head. No fingers; perhaps this was a stylized, post-Introdus version of the ancestral form. The tip of one foot was in the sixth macrosphere. The highest
point of the Transmuter's raised arm was in the level just beneath them, reaching up. To the infinite number of levels above. To all the worlds it would never see, never touch, never understand. (Egan 319)

The dimensions of materiality, described as macrospheres, reveal a complexity that rivals cyberspace. This complexity reveals the parallel between cyberspace and material space: both are portrayed as an infinite space, with an “infinite number of levels.” The figure of the Transmuter, then, is the culmination of the novel's goals. The immaterial figure, formed from the various dimensions of the material world, is both part of materiality and it is also immaterial. The figure touches different dimensions and universes, and its existence is proof for the polis citizens of their control over material space. The image of the Transmuter portrays the relationship between materiality and the posthuman as one where materiality constantly influences the posthuman in the same way that Walter Benjamin's “Angelus Novus” serves as a reminder of the forces that transform humanity. Similarly, the image of the Transmuter views the complexities of material space. The Transmuter cannot act upon on all of the dimensions of materiality, and yet, it serves as a figure of triumph for both Yatima and Paolo.

Despite this triumph, the polis citizen can never leave the referent of the physical body. Throughout the novel, the polis citizen's cyberspace is a digital space where we can mimic physical actions like the act of falling or even the feeling of having a physical body: “They stood on the edge of the rock, feeling the dust swirl down around their feet . . . Blanca squeezed his hand and stepped forward, and the laws of the imaginary world sent them tumbling down” (156-157). The polis citizen continues to maintain a sense of embodiment in cyberspace despite the

21 In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin's ninth thesis imagines an angel of history who sees history as “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage,” (257) a symbol of the forces of history, time, and progress that constantly transforms humanity which humanity cannot stop. Likewise, the Transmuter is the symbol of the dimensions of reality that urges posthumanity to evolve.
lack of a physical body, and polis citizen's connection to materiality is manifested through the
polis. The polis acts as the liminal space for the polis citizen; indeed, the polis is dually
connected to material space and cyberspace: it is a physical entity of material space, and it
carries the lives of its cyberspace denizens. The Carter-Zimmerman polis was able to move and
extend the polis citizen's reach in material space. Through the movement of the polis and the
polis citizen's act of indulging in embodiment, the posthuman is not completely removed from
materiality. Instead, the posthuman continues to engage in materiality through the polis and in
cyberspace. The image of the Transmuter, this posthuman vitruvian man, presents the reality of
the posthuman situation: the polis citizen will “never see, never touch, never understand”
material space but will always interact with material space. At the novel's end, Yatima and Paolo
are given the opportunity to transcend to another dimension as the Transmuters had done, but
only Yatima remains on the original dimension, continuing the process of interacting with
material space: “That wasn't enough, though. There were still some discoveries we needed to
make for ourselves” (Egan 321). As humanity inevitably changes with the forces of history, time,
and progress, the polis citizen also changes with materiality. Yatima's continued quest for
discoveries in cyberspace will always have to come to terms with the looming presence of
materiality.

Egan's cyberspace, in comparison to the political nature of cyberspace in the cyberpunk
movement, forgoes the resistance to capital in favor of expanding upon the posthuman's relation
to cyberspace. Unlike Neuromancer or Ghost in the Shell, Diaspora fleshed out the posthuman,
going so far as to imagine the posthuman without one of the previously fundamental elements of
humanity: the body. The loss of the body, however, does not lead to the posthuman's loss of the
feeling of embodiment. Rather, the polis citizens simultaneously engage with embodiment within cyberspace and claim material space through the Diaspora. Ultimately, Egan's portrayal of cyberspace and the posthuman decenters science fiction's fixation on Earth, and as a result, posthumanity is also post-Earth. Despite this success in Egan's novel, radical hard science fiction gains only the most devoted science fiction fans due to the constraints of the complexity of its technical writing style and the difficulty of relating to its abstract characters. The arrival of Cixin Liu's novel, then, seeks to bridge the gap between radical hard science fiction's technical knowledge and the cyberpunk movement's political criticisms.
CHAPTER 3: CYBERSPACE, HISTORY, AND AUTHORITY

One of science fiction's most concerning criticisms since the introduction of hard science fiction has been the complex language describing technical events and scientific jargon. Indeed, certain passages from hard science fiction can be difficult or overwhelming due to the sheer amount of dense jargon. Neal Stephenson is one of many writers\(^\text{22}\) guilty of this criticism, and in the context of his recently published novel, *Seveneves*, one book review remarks that Stephenson's focus “on every single aspect of the [moon's] explosion and its aftermath starts as impressive, then becomes a bit overwhelming and then gets downright baffling as the reader wonders when the book is going to stop describing objects and start describing people” (Yu). To an extent, Egan's project in decentering humanity from the Earth has led science fiction works to dismiss human interaction and the nuances between a person and his environment. Perhaps, then, Egan's project was too successful as readers may miss that the themes buried within his novels are “about humanity as much as reality” (Evans), and yet, there is a certain draw with science fiction as works of science fiction continue to inspire ideas and provoke discussion on the technologies of the future. This view of science fiction, however, does not consider the Chinese readership's reception to science fiction. The history between Chinese science fiction and its reception in China is complicated,\(^\text{23}\) and at the center of this complication is the recent sudden

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\(^{22}\) Prime examples of this criticism include Carl Sagan's *Contact* (1985), Stephen Baxter's *Ring* (1996), and Greg Egan's *Diaspora* (1997).

\(^{23}\) This complication was born from the Chinese government's stance on science fiction, which has alternated from positive to negative over the past century which I will elaborate upon later in this chapter.
interest in Chinese science fiction works. Among these writers is Cixin Liu,\(^\text{24}\) nine-time winner of the Galaxy Award and winner of the prestigious Hugo Award for his most famous work, *The Three-Body Problem*. His novel is one of the few Chinese science fiction works\(^\text{25}\) that has reignited a passion for science fiction both in China and, solely for Liu's work, in the Western world. While generalizing *The Three-Body Problem* as the key work that has invigorated science fiction in China and the West is a drastic simplification, the fact remains that Liu's work is one of the only Chinese science fiction works that has enjoyed international acclaim, which then led to its translation by Ken Liu and publication in English in 2014, a mere six years after its original publication in Chinese. Perhaps this popularity can be attributed to the key elements of his text: *The Three-Body Problem*, which envisions a contemporary China facing the problems of a distant future, is a text that connects the histories of the East and the West with technologies of the future. In so doing, Liu incorporates past science fiction narratives into his text, including the distinction between material space and cyberspace in the genre of cyberpunk and Egan's project of the decentered human. In this chapter, I will argue that *The Three-Body Problem* bridges the cyberpunk movement and radical hard science fiction through the narration of a united history between the East and the West and overlays this global history onto cyberspace. In doing so, Liu's work returns to the cyberpunk genre and reinterprets cyberspace as a space of political resistance against authoritarian regimes, which ultimately leads to the decentering of humanity's relation to history.

I want to begin this analysis with a brief overview of Chinese science fiction and where Liu's novel situates its text in light of the history of Chinese science fiction. Chinese science

\(^{24}\) Standard Chinese appellation has the family name first then the given name.

\(^{25}\) Other Chinese science fiction writers that have helped shift the Chinese readership's attitude include Song Han and Jinkang Wang. Their novels are not yet translated into English.
fiction boasts a long, detailed history with roots which “can be traced back to the earliest Chinese literature” (Dingbo xi) in 500 B. C. E. The traditions of Chinese literature of fantastic narratives found themselves repeated in modern Chinese science fiction's earliest works in the early twentieth century “with the serialization of Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo [Tales of Moon Colonization] in Portrait Fiction” (Dingbo xv). As these works evolved from their mythological beginnings, Chinese science fiction became a political tool for the Chinese as early Chinese science fiction writers believed that “science fiction would help the spread of modern knowledge in China, emancipate people's minds and bring positive developments to a declining civilization that was being surpassed by the industrialized Western nations” (Song 15). Chinese science fiction enjoyed a brief period of popularity in its early development, and Chinese readers also enjoyed the Chinese translations of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and other Western writers of this time. Unfortunately, modern Chinese science fiction was disrupted by “repeated wars and revolutions in the first half of that century” (Song 16) as the Qing dynasty collapsed and warlords took control of different regions of China, only to be united under the People's Republic of China in 1949. Chinese science fiction at this time “tended to be limited to short stories aimed at young readers” (Yu 3) in order to reflect the Soviet theory of science fiction: where science fiction should play “a significant role in nurturing and educating youth and adolescents” (Dingbo xix). At the time of the anti-intellectual and violent Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese science fiction underwent another disruption in its publication as the genre “was regarded as something from corrupt Western culture that could lead people astray” (Song 16). The extent of

26 While Wu Dingbo traces the origin of modern Chinese science fiction to 1904, Han Song dates modern Chinese fiction a few years prior than 1904: “Chinese science fiction made its debut over one hundred years ago when Liang Qichao published his Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji (The Future of New China) in 1902” (15).

27 Zheng Wenguang's “From Earth to Mars” (1954), Yu Zhi's “The Missing Elder Brother” (1957), and Xiao Jianheng's “Pup Buke's Adventures” (1962) are examples of these works.
the Cultural Revolution cannot be understated. Prominent academics and scholars chose to end their lives instead of face the repercussions of being an academic in an anti-intellectual uprising. Writers like Zheng Wenguang were silenced, and publication of Chinese science fiction came to a sudden halt. Chinese science fiction resumed only after Deng Xiaoping's reforms of the Chinese government in the late 1970s. As a result of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, science fiction enjoyed a revival as the government grew interested in science and technology. With these reforms, Western science fiction was once again part of the growth of Chinese science fiction as the reforms further allowed the translation of foreign science fiction, such as “works by Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Ray Bradbury” (Yu 3), which were made available for the first time to a Chinese audience. Curiously, political rhetoric stopped the revitalized movement because the “writing began to be criticized for being pseudoscientific and anti-communist” (Yu 3). Yu points out one case study, a picture book based on Ye Yonglie's “Miracle on the Peak of the World's Highest Mountain,” and this picture book depicted dinosaurs returning to life, to the consternation of one paleontologist who “accused this story of deviating from scientific fact, of being anti-science in its espousal of pseudoscience” (4). In short, to portray these pseudoscientific scenarios was to rebel against the “only correct science” of Marxism. Similar criticisms pushed against the Chinese science fiction movement, and the movement would not begin again until after the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Science fiction narratives post-Tiananmen Square have included Liu's work and Han Song's *Red Star Over America* and *Red Ocean*, and these novels address themes of “insecurity

28 Ken Liu notes in *The Three-Body Problem* several academics who chose to end their lives: “Lao She, writer; Wu Han, historian; Zhao Jiuzhang, meteorologist and geophysicist” (12).
29 Deng Xiaoping's reforms also resulted in “a renewal of respect for both intellectuals and scientists” (Song 16).
30 *Red Star Over America* describes a world where the United States has collapsed, and the Chinese have taken over the world with an authoritarian fist. His novel *Red Ocean* is subdued in the political narrative and instead focuses on an environmental narrative: biologically engineered humans seek to live under water in order to
over China's meteoric economic growth coupled with an authoritarian leadership” (Sebag-Montefiore). In addition to these concerns with China's economic growth, China's increased global presence and the effects of globalization have had a marked effect on Chinese society as “China is struggling with a transformation from agricultural to industrial production, with a new divide between the rich and the poor” (Tidhar). As a result of these changes in society, the issues of globalization may soon be or have already been discussed in Chinese science fiction. Still, despite the Chinese readership's rapidly expanding interest in science fiction, the tension between China's government and the history of Chinese fiction has not quite dissolved. Han Song, in particular, is “unafraid to ruthlessly satirize” (Sebag-Montefiore) the Chinese government in his aforementioned works, but Liu's novel takes a different approach in addressing Chinese science fiction's history and the government as he focuses on a narrative that considers the history of intellectualism and its disruption by authoritarian regimes instead of critiquing the government through satire.

In order to situate Liu's novel in the history of Chinese science fiction, I will briefly summarize his novel with special attention to key political events. The novel begins with scenes from the Cultural Revolution, and as a result of the madness of the Cultural Revolution, Ye Wenjie, the daughter of a prominent physicist, witnesses her father's death at one of the countless struggle sessions held at a university.\(^3\)\(^1\) The novel then shifts to the present day and focuses on Wang Miao, a materials engineer. Similarly to Ye, he is escorted to a military installation where a council representing multiple international nations asks Wang is directed to investigate the cause of the deaths of several prominent scientists. The root of their mysterious suicides is the

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\(^3\)\(^1\) Struggle sessions were a form of public humiliation and torture used to force victims to admit to various crimes.
virtual reality game called *Three Body*, a game which requires the use of a physical suit and helmet to experience the game through sight and touch. Wang enters the *Three Body* game and realizes that it draws inspiration from Earth's human history. In his first session with the game, he finds himself in the historical equivalent of the Warring States Period, and curiously, the non-playable characters in the game are anachronistic: the first non-playable character he meets is King Wen of Zhou, a ruler from 1099 BC to 1050 BC. Unlike Earth's history, however, the *Three Body* game is dependent upon the Stable and Chaotic Eras. The Stable Era is a period of time when the game's environment and physics are the same as the Earth; the Chaotic Era differs from the Stable Era as the environment and the laws of physics become unpredictable. Wang realizes that the goal of the game is to solve the challenge of the alternating Chaotic and Stable Eras in order for the game's history to progress to the future. In essence, *Three Body* is Liu's version of cyberspace: “The seed of civilization remains. It will germinate and again progress through the unpredictable world of *Three Body*. We invite you to log on in the future” (109).

*Three Body* is a virtual reality game that resets itself with each session, and as Wang learns with subsequent forays into *Three Body*, the game contains three suns which seemingly influence the length and frequency of the Stable Era, and he and the other players attempt to predict these Eras mathematically, the so-called *Three Body* problem named after the three suns of *Three Body*. With each session, he contributes his knowledge of science and engineering so that the game's society can progress, and the game's history moves past the Warring States Period into later stages of human history. Figures from Western history are introduced like Aristotle, Galileo, and Einstein, and Wang correspondingly changes his in-game name to Copernicus, hoping to mirror

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32 See Lewis “Warring States Political History”: the Warring States Period (481 BC to 221 BC) was a chaotic era of Chinese history when different regions attempted to take control over the entirety of China. The era came to a conclusion when the Qin state conquered all of the other regions, marking the beginning of the Qin dynasty.
the famed scientist's achievements. Outside of the game, Wang investigates the mystery of the
game: he meets other people involved with the game in order to figure out the purpose of the
game. As he learns from Ye Wenjie and other players in the game, the *Three Body* game is
connected to aliens, and several factions, under the umbrella name the Earth-Trisolaris
Organization, arose in response to these aliens, the Trisolarans. Unfortunately, these aliens are
not friendly to humanity, and they seek to invade Earth. In subsequent sessions and offline
meetings with members of these factions, Wang d that the game was developed for the sole
purpose of recruiting people to the factions that arose: the Adventists who wish for humanity's
destruction, the Redemptionists who seek humanity's salvation, and the Survivors who are
willing to sellout other humans in order to survive the impending invasion. The *Three Body*
problem, as Wang finds out, has no solution, and the lack of a solution serves to motivate the
Trisolarans to invade Earth because of its stability in comparison to the Trisolaran world. As
Wang also discovers, Ye Wenjie did not escape the Cultural Revolution unscathed, and her
involvement with the game was much more than that of a regular player: she is one of the key
figures of the ETO, and she made first contact with the Trisolarans and asked for their help to
invade Earth and cleanse humanity. At the novel's end, the revelation that the Trisolarans had
constructed a near-instantaneous surveillance system on the Earth causes the Earth's leading
military figures to realize the futility of staving off the Trisolarans. Wang and his companions,
though, continue to resist the Trisolarans, waiting for a time for humanity to surpass their
oppressors.

Liu's novel centers around cyberspace in order to highlight the importance of history, and
Liu ties the novel's connection to the history of Chinese science fiction with the disruption of
progress within cyberspace. Indeed, the *Three Body* game mirrors the development of Chinese science fiction. Each of Wang's sessions is a single era of history, and like the development of Chinese science fiction, Liu's cyberspace is broken into different segments of renewal and ruin. Each session ends with a destructive event, and thankfully, there is a hope for renewal:

“Civilization Number 141 fell into ruin in flames. This civilization had advanced to the Eastern Han Period. The seed of civilization remains. It will again progress through the unpredictable world of *Three Body*. We invite you to log on in the future” (148-149). In *Three Body*, civilization must build itself from the beginning, and previous innovations are carried on to the next session. Liu borrows from the history of Chinese science fiction as he mirrors the developments and interruptions of Chinese science fiction in the world of *Three Body*. In the overall scheme of Liu's cyberspace, the disruption in progress and development is the symptom of a lack of technological progress. History does not follow the conventions of time, and history is, instead, dependent upon technological progress: “This civilization had advanced to the Middle Ages . . . In this civilization, Copernicus successfully revealed the basic structure of the universe. The civilization of *Three Body* will take its first leap. The game has now entered the second level” (188). Progression only occurred after the society in the game overcame the unconscious barrier that held society back: the lack of understanding of the universe. Only after the universe's structure was understood did civilization progress. However, while the cause for the disruptions in Chinese science fiction's recent history can be attributed to the Chinese government and subsequent lack of interest in science, Liu's cyberspace complicates the reason for these changes. The Earth-Trisolaris Organization and the Trisolarans are obvious figures of authority that
directly or indirectly influence *Three Body*, and their influence on the game, along with the narrative of fighting against the invasion, adds political agency to Liu's cyberspace.

Before analyzing the importance of history in Liu's novel, I want to examine how Liu's cyberspace shifts from the traditional mind-body distinction seen in Gibson and Egan's cyberspace so that the Chinese subject can be part of cyberspace and material space in Liu's politically charged cyberspace. Liu's iteration draws from Gibson's cyberspace, but unlike Gibson's version, the *Three Body* game interprets the history of two civilizations: Earth and the Trisolaran civilization. The *Three Body* game enables the player to change the course of Earth's history under the context of the Trisolaran history of civilizations as dependent upon the alternating Chaotic and Stable Eras. Liu's cyberspace further distinguishes itself from Gibson's cyberspace, which depended upon a physical injecting device, with a physical apparatus that Wang must wear: “In the lounge, he passed the pool tables and the exercise machines and found the V-suit next to a computer. He struggled into the haptic feedback suit, put on the panoramic viewing helmet, and turned on the computer” (94). In Liu's cyberspace, entering the *Three Body* game requires the use of a body suit, and Wang's mind and body are not separated from each other in a physical or digital sense. He does not experience disembodiment or extreme physical feelings beyond basic touch feelings while in the game: “The game's V-suit cannot simulate the feeling of diminished gravity” (221). While the events within the *Three Body* game are not affected by reality and vice versa, Wang and other users can share information about the *Three Body* game in their offline meetings. The divide between reality and cyberspace is not so distinct. While Egan's polis-dwelling citizens can easily enter material reality, the same cannot be said for physical beings. Instead, Liu's cyberspace is a retrospective step back towards Gibson's
cyberspace: a physical apparatus that connects the body to virtual reality. So, the Chinese subject can engage with both cyberspace and material space, and in doing so, the Chinese subject can be a part of the game's history which continues to revise with the help from the players. This revision along with the novel's reinterpreted history of Chinese science fiction points to a larger scheme involving the authoritarian regimes in China.

Liu's portrayal of history through cyberspace may mirror the history of Chinese science fiction in order to critique authoritarian regimes in China, but Liu's criticism of the authoritarian regimes indicts the authoritarian government for continuing the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, though, with different policies. In this condemnation, Liu portrays the cruelty of Chinese authoritarian figures towards characters who are unable to solve the *Three Body* problem. Within the game, authority figures punish failure with execution, and these authority figures have either a direct or indirect connection to China:

King Zhou waved his hands, and servants brought over a clay pot and set it down on the small stone table before Fu Xi. . . [Fu Xi] walked toward a large bronze cauldron suspended over a fire in the corner of the Great Hall. He climbed onto the edge of the cauldron and jumped in, stirring up a cloud of vapor. (103)

In a twisted mirroring of the Cultural Revolution, the authoritarian figures in the *Three Body* game order the execution of intellectuals. Fu Xi, despite his incorrect solution, has proposed a solution that, while mystical in nature, would have been contemporaneous with other intellectuals of the time period of the Warring States era. Even more symbolically, an authoritarian ruler of a historical Chinese dynasty orders the death of Fu Xi, a mythological progenitor of the human race. Indeed, while the race of the authoritarian figure changes from a
Chinese ruler to Pope Gregory in the Middle Ages, Wang sees the face of a Chinese ruler attempting to execute him: “‘Burn him,' the pope said, gently. The smile on his face was a little familiar to Wang: the smile of King Zhou of Shang” (186). In this scene, Wang, posing as Copernicus, proposes a scientific structure to the universe, and similarly to the Red Guards who murdered Ye Wenjie's father for his loyalty to science, the pope orders his execution. Despite this implicit connection to Chinese authoritarian figures, Liu's transition to Western history and its relation to China also leads to his broader criticism of globalization.

Like Gibson's *Neuromancer*, which explores cyberspace as a space in opposition to the totality of Capital, Liu's cyberspace resists all authoritarian regimes, and in this resistance, Liu also connects the authoritarian state to globalization. Both Western history and the authoritarian figures is a condemnation of both globalization and the Chinese government. As the history of the *Three Body* game proceeds to the Industrial Revolution, Liu's condemnation of the authoritarian figure juxtaposes the collapse of civilization with the coalition between the ruling Chinese figure Qin Shi Huang and the European scientists Isaac Newton and John von Neumann. In spite of Newton and Von Neumann's success and their integral innovations for the game's progression, Qin Shi Huang still decides to execute Von Neumann for the failure of solving the *Three Body* problem: “Everything on the surface of the *Three Body* world rose toward the sun. Wang looked around and saw Von Neumann and Qin Shi Huang. As he drifted, Von Neumann shouted at Qin Shi Huang, but there was no sound . . . Qin Shi Huang swung his long sword at Von Neumann” (222). While this scene is the only event of a coalition between a Chinese authoritarian figure and Western scientists as Wang's next session in *Three Body* does not have any Chinese authoritarian figures, the symbolism of this event condemns the coalition between
Qin Shi Huang and the Western innovators. In essence, the united history between the East and the West could not save civilization from destruction. This critique on authoritarian regimes from East to West continues outside of the game, developing Liu's project in connecting the events of the past to contemporary China.

In contextualizing the entirety of Chinese science fiction and the current issues in Chinese society in his novel, Liu criticizes the Chinese government's authoritarian regimes, but he also brings this criticism outside the realm of cyberspace in order to portray the consequences of these authoritarian regimes in material space. Similarly to the *Three Body* game's authoritarian rulers, the Trisolaran civilization is revealed to be an authoritarian society from the transcripts of the Adventist faction: “To permit the survival of the civilization as a whole, there is almost no respect for the individual. Someone who can no longer work is put to death. Trisolaran society exists under a state of extreme authoritarianism” (353). In the context of the heavy Cultural Revolution overtones in the novel as well as the Chinese history that is constantly being revised in the *Three Body* game, this description of the Trisolaran civilization also matches China's own state. The echoes of the Cultural Revolution continue to reverberate in the Trisolaran civilization, and in addition to the authority figures in the *Three Body* game, the history of the Cultural Revolution and its brutality is repeated in the Trisolaran civilization as the Princeps of the Trisolaran civilization punishes the crime of being associated with one Trisolaran responsible for sending a warning to Earth: “‘How many others bear some responsibility for this failure in the Trisolaran Space Monitoring System?’ 'My preliminary investigation shows about six thousand, accounting for all levels.' 'They are all guilty . . . Dehydrate all six thousand and burn them together in the square in the middle of the capital’” (355). In mirroring China's controversial
history with the Trisolaran leaders and with the previous methods of execution in the *Three Body* game, Liu constructs a narrative where the Trisolaran civilization is, in essence, the same as China's government. The issue of surveillance shocks the joint defense council at the novel's end, and it is a chilling reminder of the ever-looming presence of government surveillance: “In the eyes of the attendees, the world was no longer the same. They felt the gaze of omnipresent eyes. Under these eyes, there was nowhere to hide in the world. This feeling would follow them all their lives, and their descendants would not be able to escape it” (382). Given that the Earth had been under surveillance since Ye Wenjie's imprisonment, Liu connects the events of the Cultural Revolution and the authoritarian state's surveillance programs. Ye Wenjie's imprisonment and subsequent desire for a cleansed humanity directly led to the Trisolarans' interest in Earth, and this interest in turn started the Trisolarans' plans to invade Earth. In constructing this chain of events, Liu criticizes the history of the Chinese government and how this history repeats itself as shown in the *Three Body* game's cycle of the rise and fall of civilization and in the authoritarian regimes that mimic the Chinese government's authoritarian policies.

Despite the perpetuation of the authoritarian regimes in the repetition of history both in and outside of the *Three Body* game, Liu's cyberspace prescribes agency to its users as it forces the user to confront the issues of cyberspace and material space directly due to the lack of the mind-body distinction in cyberspace. Although the site of resistance is digital, the *Three Body* game necessarily requires the resistance to be brought forth to material space: “The ETO would establish contact, examine the player's sympathies, and finally recruit those who passed to be members of the ETO” (320). Unlike Gibson's, Oshii's, or Egan's cyberspace, Liu's cyberspace is a permeable space: the resistance is not confined within cyberspace as Gibson or Oshii's
portrayals of cyberspace would necessarily conclude. Instead, Liu's cyberspace uses the V-suit, a physical apparatus, to cultivate resistance in cyberspace. Egan's novel, however, differs in the portrayal of cyberspace. The mind and body are distinctly separate for Egan's posthuman character, and as such, the posthuman can only reclaim materiality through a material proxy, the polis. Liu's characters are human, and Wang can engage in the opposite of Egan's characters. Wang reclaims cyberspace through science, and in his explanation, he draws from radical hard science fiction's style of describing the plausibility of the three stars: “It's actually pretty simple. The reason why the sun's motion seems patternless is because our world has three suns. Under the influence of their mutually perturbing gravitational attraction, their movements are unpredictable – the *Three Body* problem” (184). Wang's rational explanation, although he is nearly executed for his ideas, lead to the rise of a new age in *Three Body*. He succeeds in claiming this era for his own progress, and while civilization still fails, he is able to confront the issues presented to him in *Three Body* and take this success to later sessions in the game. Indeed, Liu's cyberspace does not contain a mind-body distinction, and because of this difference, the V-suit necessarily stages Wang's body and mind to material space. Wang will always be cognizant that the actions he makes in cyberspace will not solely remain in cyberspace. Cyberspace and material space are no longer distinct from each other. Likewise, the issues in material space will be carried with him to cyberspace. Wang's mind cannot leave the concerns of material space as *Neuromancer*’s protagonist, Case, can so easily forget about material space. The information and experiences in the *Three-Body* game remain with the user even after leaving the game:

Wang took off the V-suit and panoramic viewing helmet. His shirt was soaked with sweat, as if he had just awoken from a nightmare. He left the Research
Center, got into his car, and drove to the address given to him by Ding Yi: the house of Yang Don's mother.

*Chaotic Era, Chaotic Era, Chaotic Era.*

The thought turned and turned in Wang's head. (111)

For Wang and other users, the revised history and images of the game cannot easily be dispelled. Following the creation of *Three Body*, the site of resistance in *Three Body* provides subjectivity to the user, the ability to have a choice to be a part of a resistance against human tyranny.

The *Three Body* game as a tool for the Earth-Trisolaris Organization, however, seems to undermine the project of cyberspace as a space of resistance to authoritarian regimes because the game ultimately leads to the Trisolaran invasion and therefore perpetuates the regimes it resists. Liu's cyberspace, though, differs from the criticisms that would be applied to the cyberpunk movement's cyberspace; on the contrary, Liu notes, “The main path of spreading Trisolaran culture to society was the *Three Body* game. The ETO invested enormous effort to develop this massive piece of software. . . Using a shell that drew elements from human society and history, the game explained the culture and history of Trisolaris” (319). Unlike Mamoru Oshii’s Net, which was built for corporate networks and always-already connected to material space, *Three Body* was developed for the purpose of spreading an anti-government message. At its heart, the space of *Three Body* constitutes a space for intellectuals, those members of society who were most affected by the Cultural Revolution's anti-intellectual rhetoric: “The initial goals were . . . to allow the tentacles of the ETO to spread from the highly educated intelligentsia to the lower social strata” (319). Doubtless, the context of the Cultural Revolution is at the heart of the ETO's recruitment agenda, especially with Ye Wenjie as one of the founding members of the ETO. The
*Three Body* game, then, serves to work as the space for which the ETO, an organization devoted to rebelling against humanity and its governments, can communicate and recruit freely without government interference. Despite the end result of the *Three Body* game as ultimately a tool for the Adventists and the Trisolarans, the *Three Body* game enables the user to be a part of material space and cyberspace, which in turn restores the user's subjectivity.

The restoration of the user's subjectivity and the role of cyberspace in this novel decenters the space of resistance from cyberspace to a universal space. Rather than remain in the control of authoritarian regimes, Liu's project shifts the site of resistance from solely cyberspace to a universal space as Wang's final session in *Three Body* looks to the skies for the site of tension between humanity and the Trisolarans: “Civilization 192 was a milestone in Trisolaran civilization. It finally proved that the three-body problem had no solution. It gave up the useless effort that had already lasted through 191 cycles and set the course for future civilizations. Thus, the goal of *Three Body* has changed. The new goal is: Head for the stars; find a new home” (241). Arguably, the message is not just for the Trisolarans but is also directed to humanity. Humanity must avoid repeating the history of authoritarian regimes. In order to accomplish this difficult task, Liu offers a shift from the original site of resistance in cyberspace to one that decenters humanity's place in history: “The bugs have not been eliminated. They still proudly live between the heavens and the earth, and their numbers have not diminished from the time before the appearance of the humans. The Trisolarans who deemed the humans bugs seemed to have forgotten one fact: The bugs have never been truly defeated” (388). His novel ends with a note of hope, but this hope cannot be found in cyberspace or on Earth. Instead, like the Trisolarans, humanity must look outside of history and seek a different home. In order to find
this home, humanity will have to develop or seek a different history without the vicious cycle of authoritarian regimes.

Liu's cyberspace reveals that the horrors of the Cultural Revolution will continue to repeat through the continued shifts of authoritarian regimes that occur in *Three Body*. The user is only aware of this truth when there is a nexus between the user's restored subjectivity and cyberspace's connection to history. In the process of restoring the user's subjectivity, the *Three Body* game removes the subject from his place in history. Since entering cyberspace, Wang witnessed impossibilities in the timeline of history, and at the junctions of the rise and fall of civilization, Wang also witnesses authoritarian rulers exercise their power. Liu's narrative of history ascribes political agency to cyberspace, and in doing so, he reinterprets cyberspace as the space of resistance against authoritarian regimes that threatens to continue to disrupt Chinese science fiction, intellectualism, and technological progress. In this narrative, he bridges the cyberpunk movement and radical hard science fiction to decenter the human subject from the comfort of Earth to the universe in order to call for an end to the authoritarian regimes in China and to find a better future for humanity outside of the vicious cycle of authoritarian history.
In her 2014 acceptance speech of the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, Ursula Le Guin warned, “I think hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine some real grounds for hope” (Le Guin). Earlier that same year on the topic of his English translation of *The Three Body Problem*, Cixin Liu wrote, “Science fiction is a literature of possibilities. The universe we live in is also one of countless possibilities . . . I wrote about the worst of all possible universes in *Three Body* out of hope that we can strive for the best of all possible Earths” (Liu). Cyberspace, as I have explored in its variety of incarnations in this thesis, has shifted from a space of resistance to material space; a space of reclamation of material space; and finally back to a space of resistance to authoritarian history. In all of these incarnations, cyberspace has envisioned the possibilities of the distant future. While the cyberpunk movement and its claims of resistance to the totality of Capital have had mixed results, its innovations in science fiction have not been forgotten: other writers expanded cyberspace to include much more than the original cyberpunk writers conceived. Indeed, William Gibson's and Mamoru Oshii’s contributions to science fiction inspired and continue to inspire entire movements in science fiction. Greg Egan's complex portrayal of the distant future reclaimed materiality for the posthuman through cyberspace, and Cixin Liu's possible world and
reinterpretation of history in cyberspace calls for resistance against authoritarian regimes, much like the cyberpunk movement from which Liu draws inspiration.

As I explain in the introduction of this thesis, cyberspace is a digital realm that is both alien and infinite with possibilities. Cyberspace is alien because the concept of cyberspace is difficult to comprehend. Imagining an infinite space grounded within a digital landscape is not a natural instinct, and yet readers continue to return to narratives containing cyberspace, enjoying each and every iteration of cyberspace. At the center of each iteration of cyberspace that I have looked at in this thesis, however, cyberspace has always been considered in relation to material space. Whether cyberspace is in total opposition or linked to material space, cyberspace will always have this connection to material space. More importantly, the changes in culture and in technology will be reflected in cyberspace. As issues of posthumanity or rapid increases in technology find themselves in contention in society, science fiction writers will find some way to relate societal or technological advances with cyberspace. Perhaps because today's world is currently experiencing economic and geopolitical tensions as a result of the rise and fall of different nations, cyberspace has surged in popularity. For some, cyberspace offers a comfortable space, separate from the unpredictable nature of reality. For others, cyberspace is an equally dangerous space as the mind-body distinction presents an unknown.

The mind-body distinction that I continue to allude to in this thesis is the idea that the mind and body are separate from each other, and the question is really a philosophical one. In the context of cyberspace, the mind-body distinction is the separation of the mind and the body when one enters cyberspace. Of the four texts I examined in this thesis, only Liu's cyberspace did not envision the mind-body distinction. In disregarding the mind-body distinction, Liu's cyberspace
has the potential to contain political agency because the experiences in cyberspace is connected
to the body. Wang can perform an event in cyberspace, and the event would affect him outside of
cyberspace, and conversely, events in material space could affect him in cyberspace: “Wang also
thought of the pendulum as a gigantic metal fist, swinging eternally against the unfeeling
universe, noiselessly shouting out Trisolaran civilization's indomitable battlecry. . . . As Wang
Miao's eyes blurred with tears” (241). Wang Miao can experience an alternate reality in
cyberspace, and his body will continue to act. William Gibson's, Mamoru Oshii's, and Greg
Egan's iterations of cyberspace have some form of disconnect between the body and the mind,
and as a result, none of their characters could have this same visceral reaction in cyberspace.

Because of the this concept of the mind-body distinction, cyberspace can be a challenge
to grasp intuitively, and for writers, cyberspace is a space of the future for humanity. Egan and
Liu envision cyberspace to decenter literature's fixation on anthropocentrism and the Earth. I
mention in chapter two that other writers, Arthur C. Clarke and Ray Bradbury, have done as
much, but their narratives which emerged in a different time period, did not include another
“final frontier,” cyberspace. The mind-body distinction, or lack thereof, enables both Egan and
Liu to imagine a space that decenters the cyberpunk movement's fixation on human problems.
Egan imagined a universe where cyberspace and material space united in one space, and Liu
depicted a relationship between Earth and cyberspace that revises history and humanity's place in
the universe. The writers discussed in this thesis expand upon the work of the cyberpunk
movement. The cyberpunk movement has not died as Easterbrook prematurely states in his
essay; rather, the cyberpunk movement lives on in the trope of cyberspace. Although cyberspace
no longer resists the totality of Capital, cyberspace represents a different kind of resistance: a
resistance to the focus on Earth itself. While this interpretation is at odds with the Marxist interpretation of these works, I do not intend to argue against Marxist criticism in this thesis. Instead, this thesis seeks to add one more interpretation of cyberspace. Jameson writes on the topic of utopia, “utopia as a form is not the representation of radical alternatives; it is rather simply the imperative to imagine them” (416). This thesis is not in contention with the Marxist argument, but rather, the goals of this thesis are complementary to that argument. The narratives discussed in this thesis continue the project of Clarke and Bradbury, but cyberspace, in conjunction with the vastness of material space, opens the possibility of heading to a better world, a world even beyond the order of human affairs with some “real grounds for hope.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY


