CYBORG TEXTUALITY / CYBORG SUBJECTIVITY: A TRANS-MEDIC RE-VISIONING OF ENLIGHTENMENT HUMANISM FOR THE CYBERNETIC ERA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis inquires into the relationship between aesthetics and politics, contributing to an ongoing field of inquiry in the relationship of cultural studies to social action. Specifically, this thesis examines and outlines a media-reflexive cyborg textuality in the works and texts analyzed. The author argues that cyborg textuality engenders cyborg subjectivity (a subject’s conscious medic engagement), which allows for an enhanced political viability of the subject. The author engages with and combines postmodern, feminist, and technoculture criticism in her inquiry. The author applies these bodies of theory to a trans medic analysis that moves across media reflexive and politically charged works in film, creative writing, and visual arts. The hope of the author is to show how one can continually arrive at a re-visioning of enlightenment humanism through a rigorous engagement with challenging texts such as the ones examined herein. Through such re-visioning she argues that more effective social action and implementation of human rights can emerge.
This work is dedicated to language and Dr. Lalla Iverson.

With gratitude to poetry and:

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Key Engines, Driving Concepts

This project engages with artistic productions that challenge and subvert normative grammars of articulation in order take up the challenge of re-visioning enlightenment humanism for the postmodern and cybernetic era. My argument builds upon a materialist assumption that modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and further technological developments are reflected in the political and aesthetic spheres. I call this project trans-med (which I will define below) because in the course of my investigation I examine productions from across various media.

My thesis polemically engages with Frederic Jameson’s allegation that, within the cultural conditions of postmodernism, the human subject and our corresponding artistic creations can no longer have a politically viable voice. According to Jameson, the material conditions, which include an increased spatial orientation, rather than a temporal/historical one, and the encroachment of capitalism into the private sphere, disallow subjective political articulation. I argue that his claim is based on a particular conception of the constitution of the human subject that is rooted in enlightenment humanism. In my inquiry, I engage subversive works of art with an emphasis on form. I examine the works at hand as an urgent challenge to re-examine and thus re-vision what we think of as humanism. Here, I favor the term re-vision to draw attention to the
visual and surface-oriented emphasis of postmodern aesthetics. In the course of this project, I aim to challenge the political hierarchies that are attached to older models of humanism. Re-visioning humanism according to the works that I examine can help to shift our perspective and allow us to perceive politically viability in the multiplicity of postmodern subjects.

I seek to interactively apply N. Katherine Hayles’ and Donna Haraway’s projects in the course of this inquiry. Building on their approaches, I develop my trans-medic inquiry based upon a primary engagement with the material and formal elements of artistic productions, and I use Haraway’s empowering figure of the cyborg to assist in re-visioning a politically viable postmodern subjectivity.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles reminds us that the rational, enlightenment model of humanism delineates a rigidly distinct and hierarchical relationship between subject and object: Objects have no status within classical humanism except by virtue of their subjection to the sovereign subject of the ideally rational human. Within this sovereign subject, the mind as the “seat of reason” sits at the top of the hierarchy. This radical abstraction of subjectivity allowed for the likes of Hans Moravec, cited by Hayles, to speculate on the mechanical reproduction of subjectivity. That is to say, Moravec and his cohort fantasized about programming a computer to be human for all intents and purposes because, according to enlightenment
humanism, the body was not believed to be of consequence in the constitution of subjectivity. Hayles takes the concept of materialism into a radical direction as her theoretical work aims to grant the objective realm the agency that it is due. Her work brings awareness to the role of the medium that carries and transmits a given message, be it a human body or a computer monitor.

The figure of the cyborg, combining both the human body and cybernetic technology came onto the scene of theoretical discourse as a potent political heuristic in Haraway’s A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. Haraway presents her cyborg figure as a combination of subject and object categories: the cyb- part of cyborg represents the object category (cybernetic) and the -org part represents the subject category (organic, organism).¹ When one thinks of the typically objectified female subject, the cyborg emerges as a fitting feminist political tactic. In Haraway’s account, the cyborg distills an empowered image of resilience, and demonstrates a way in which the abject and objectified marginal subject, such as the postmodern subject, can arrive at a viable political voice. In my usage of the term throughout this thesis, cyborg is best defined as “reflexive medic awareness.”

¹ I realize that in terms of Hayles’ argument against enlightenment humanism, the organic part of the human subject is excluded from the realm of subjectivity. The correspondence of “org” of cyborg to the subject category is thus merely for argumentative and representational (metonymic, perhaps) purposes, and thus not exact in terms of my foregoing definitional work.
The distinction between Modernism and Postmodernism helps to historicize my inquiry. The etymology of these terms points to a special relationship to time and history, as well as to a linear relationship between the two. However, in my current inquiry, I am careful to approach Modernism and Postmodernism as co-constructing aesthetic, philosophical and cultural discourses rather than distinct aesthetic and cultural periods. My approach emphasizes Modernism and Postmodernism as representative of political orientations and modes of perception. “Postmodernism” nevertheless contains the term “modernism.” I take this to indicate that a discourse on postmodernism necessarily inheres an engagement with modernism (the nature of which I will expand upon below). On a metaphorical level, I equate modernist discourse to the discourse of enlightenment humanism, resting on the illusion of pure rational subjectivity as the apex of a political pecking order, whereas postmodernism introduces confounding elements of material surfaces and objects into the fray of subjectivity, causing some schools of thought to declare the death of the subject as well as a vacuum of affect in postmodern artistic productions.

In my inquiry, I focus explicitly on the tension between subject and object categories in the constitution and cultural articulation of the postmodern subject, and I seek to understand how our cultural and material conditions of existence, particularly as influenced by cybernetic systems, can reveal and re-vision the conceptual
configuration of the politically viable human subject. I engage alleged material conditions of postmodernity (superficiality, spatiality, commodification, and so forth) and the concomitant critiques of postmodernity as applicable to exploring cybernetic-influenced culture, particularly insofar as digitization is a form of flattening, spatializing, commodifying, and so forth. What I refer to as “cyborg subjectivity” signifies the marginalized postmodern subject that is conscious of the material conditions of postmodernity, and interactively engages her/his material conditions to arrive at a viable political articulation. “Cyborg textuality” signifies the activity of texts, such as those that I will be analyzing here, that express and engender cyborg subjectivity.

My analysis traverses film, poetry, hypertext, and visual art, and for this reason I call it “trans-medīc.” The “trans” describes my discursive movement, traversing several media types. “Trans” also signifies the potential for transformation, which is a focal issue in my analysis, both in terms of the mutual action of the subject and the medium upon each other, and in terms of the subject’s capacity for transformation and evolution. While “medīc” effectively describes the adjectival function of “media” in the phrase trans-medīc, I chose it deliberately to suggest the healing of the artificial

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2 I would note here that the transformation and evolution of the subject that I am describing is on the conceptual and discursive level. I am not making a universalizing claim about the actual constitution of subjectivity, since in doing so I would risk perpetuating a monolithic formula of subjectivity, even if it would be of course radically different from the monolithic formula of subjectivity that I am refuting.
scission between the categories of subject and object—a scission that I argue has traumatized and continues to traumatize the human subject.

**Readers’ Roadmap**

The three analytical chapters of my thesis move through artistic productions produced in different media, each emerging out of a unique historical and political context. My analysis seeks to understand each set of works in terms of its relationship to its medium and context, and examines how each work’s aesthetic engages with and challenges the enlightenment concept of the politically viable human subject. A prominent unifying element that emerges from the examined works is that of the monstrous subject, which both constitutes a critique of enlightenment humanism and points to possibilities for a re-visioned and re-contextualized conception of the politically viable human subject.

My analysis begins at a moment of great cultural anxiety, flux and identity crisis: the interwar period in Weimar Germany. My first chapter analyzes two early horror films, one being Robert Weine’s 1920 production *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the second being an American avant-garde film directed by Charles Klein in 1928 *The Tell-Tale Heart*. While *Tell-Tale Heart* is diegetically based on Edgar Allan Poe’s
story by the same name, it shares many aesthetic features with Weine’s film. In my inquiry, I argue that these films both express and perpetuate Modernism’s cultural anxiety and identity crisis, which, in my analysis, takes the shape of a crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity. My critique aligns mass culture, women, and the filmic medium as agents of terror inasmuch as they represent threatening doubles for the patriarchal male subject. This chapter assumes the perspective and trauma of the patriarchal male subject. I further argue that the expressionist and avant-garde conventions that rupture the classical conventions of filmic and diegetic continuity engage with and implicate the films’ spectators in an immersive experience and visual perpetration of trauma. The tension between subject and object is richly portrayed on the visual and symbolic level in this chapter, and I position the two films as cyborg texts due to their liminal explorations of subjectivity through aesthetics of disruption. In this chapter, the concept of the cyborg is tied to an aura of terror and anxiety. I argue that this affective state is an important and necessary first step toward cyborg subjectivity, as defined above.

Chapter two shifts to the written medium and examines the work of two contemporary female poets: Lisa Robertson’s poem-book The Men and Shelley Jackson’s hypertext-poem Patchwork Girl. Both writers variously engage with the

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3 Director Charles Klein is actually a German ex-patriate, known in Germany as Karl Friedrich Klein. He is cited to have brought “a long European experience as a cameraman with such [German]
question of feminine writing in a male-dominated discourse, thus emerging from the opposite side of the trauma of the patriarchal subject explored in the previous chapter. My analysis explores Robertson’s and Jackson’s works as an instance of feminist texts that employ Bakhtinian dialogic discourse as a postmodern discursive tactic. Here, cyborg textuality is brought about by a gritty engagement with the implications of gender in discourse. These texts invite readers to dwell on the constructedness of grammar and composition rules as material surfaces to be engaged with and challenged. The cyborg subjectivity these texts foster thus paves the way for a revisioning of the concept of humanism as intertextual, heteroglossic, and heterarchical.

In chapter three I shift to the rhetoric of visual art, and analyze the large-scale, complex collaged works of Wangechi Mutu, a Kenyan-American female visual artist who has achieved great success in the contemporary art world. My analysis of Mutu’s works seeks to distill the work of my previous chapters, and to explore what I perceive to be a particularly powerful model of cyborg textuality. Mutu’s works engage race, cultural differences, and mythologies, in addition to the heuristic of gender and cyborg that weaves through the body of my work. Through their fusion of human, machine, and animal parts, Mutu’s figures embody and perform cyborg and post-human revisions of the subject. In the trajectory of my inquiry, Mutu’s works represent the

companies as Emelka and UFA” (54, HN) to his work on this film.
culmination of one possible outcome of the struggle—worked through in my previous chapters—to arrive at a politically viable postmodern articulation of the human subject, using gender as a structuring metaphor. Mutu’s works act in a similar fashion to the early horror films that I analyze in that they share an aesthetic of rupture, with a powerful visual impact that emotionally implicates the spectator. Additionally, all of the analyzed works from Mutu (and virtually all of her produced works) are female or uterine figures, thus engaging the problem of the female text in a male-dominated discourse, which I engage in chapter two. I read Mutu’s work—static visual images that convey several layers of meaning—as performative and embodied politically viable discourse. The material and physical are directly the source and location of the information that they transmit; and it is one of trauma and cyborg resilience.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

My literature review is divided into three sections. In the first section, “Modernism and Postmodernism,” I examine the approaches and heuristics of several important theorists of modernity and postmodernity, including Frederic Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, David Harvey, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, all of whom, I argue, make important contributions to these discursive fields. My inquiry engages with postmodernism as a discourse of misunderstood opportunity, when seen from the modernist perspective. Thus I seek to disengage postmodernism from the modernist discourse and perceptual mode. In order to re-vision the politically viable postmodern human subject, that the material and cultural shifts that engendered the discourse of postmodernism deserve a closer look on their own terms.

The second section, “Dialogic Discourse as Postmodern, Feminist, and Cyborg,” explores Bakhtinian dialogic discourse as a tactic that is particularly appropriate to working within the postmodern aesthetic and its apparent disjointedness and lack of center. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic discourse works against the notion of rigid, centralized hierarchies, and represents a heterarchical re-visioning of the political sphere. Because of its political valence, I argue that Bakhtinian dialogism is also readily adapted to feminist and cyborg heuristics, which are critical to my inquiry.
The final section is called “The Feminist Heuristic: Performativity and Embodiment are a Productive, Cyborg extension of Marxist Materialism.” In this section, I explore the works of Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and N. Katherine Hayles, as leading contemporary feminist theorists whose works my thesis most explicitly builds upon. I argue that their approaches to feminist theory are fundamentally materialist. As such, I argue that the particular combination of Marxist and feminist theorists that I explore combine into a powerful heuristic for the viable re- visioning of postmodern subjectivity. It is for this reason that I use the term “cyborg” in my title, and adopt it as my guiding conceptual heuristic. I see “cyborg” as a defiant response to criticisms of postmodernism. The figure of the cyborg distills the concepts that I explore: it performs and embodies a politicized dialogic discourse between subject and object categories in the constitution of the human subject; it embodies and animates the collaboration between subject and object that is so potentially fruitful for humanism.

**Modernism and Postmodernism**

**Frederic Jameson: The Problem of the Postmodern Subject**

While Frederic Jameson’s discussion of subjectivity in the postmodern moment, or “late capitalism,” is quite defeatist on the surface, his writing betrays an ultimately ambivalent attitude with respect to the political viability postmodern subject.
At the very beginning of his work, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he notes that the postmodern world is “a more fully human world than the older one.” This leads me to believe that, particularly as a thinker in the dialectical tradition of Marxism, Jameson likely intended for his work to contain such dialectical complexity. In my reading of Jameson’s work, I accept the material characteristics of postmodernity as he describes them (fragmentariness, flatness, and superficiality) and, putting aside his defeatist rhetoric, I engage these conditions as a starting point for the necessary re-visioning of the politically viable human subject in the postmodern context, which I argue that Jameson’s work surreptitiously calls for.

Jameson’s central critique of postmodern culture is that of its being “an age that has forgotten to think historically.” Jameson attributes this problem to an increasingly spatial and visual rather than temporal cultural orientation in postmodernity: According to Jameson, postmodern social reality is “a spatial system,” and it is something to be grasped synchronically rather than diachronically. The resulting postmodern subject is portrayed as one engulfed in an overwhelming, spatial present: Jameson compares the postmodern subject to an overwhelmed and overstimulated schizophrenic patient, for whom experience boils down to “the gloss and smoothness of material things.”

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4 ix, FJ
5 Ibid
6 349, FJ
7 27, FJ
his analysis of Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes*, Jameson declares “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, [as] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all […] postmodernisms.” What are we to make of such a culture—that is allegedly without time or depth, and how does it come about?

Jameson cites economic and material forces. He presents his readers with a colonization of psychic space by globalization and capitalism as a defining feature of the postmodern “cultural logic of late capitalism:” Jameson cites “a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become ‘cultural,’” leading to the disappearance of the autonomous private sphere as it was previously known.

According to Jameson, this leads to the “sheer” externalization of everything; leading to an inside-out culture where privacy and subjectivity are simply no longer available. The key missing feature for Jameson is that of “critical distance,” without which there can be no viable political articulation, according to the modernist mindset. That is to say, if the sovereign subject cannot retreat into a private space for rational reflection,

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8 9, FJ
9 48, FJ
10 “Sheer” and “critical distance” are used extensively, hence I do not have a specific page that I cite here.
there can be no politics. Literally, in Jameson’s argument, the postmodern subject is crowded out of a potentially intelligible political voice, and thus rendered politically impotent.

This aspect of Jameson’s discussion paints a picture of postmodern society as innocent, mute surfaces and impotent subjectivities distractedly drifting in space. This aspect of Jameson’s discussion idealizes, alienates and effectively others postmodern subjectivity and its cultural products and expressions, characterizing them as depthless, impotent, and innocent. This totalizing tendency effectively serves to objectify and marginalize postmodern subjectivity as a whole.

This totalizing portrayal is not productive toward an inquiry into the ontology of postmodern subjectivity. It is this lack that my thesis seeks to address. The objectification and marginalization of the postmodern subject in Jameson’s rhetoric leads me to adopt feminist discourse as a useful heuristic in re-visioning humanism to allow for a politically viable postmodern subject to exist, since feminism has long struggled with these same issues with regards to female subjects.

I mentioned earlier that there are instances where Jameson opens up the field for a re-visioning of the subject in a postmodern context, which imply a latent potential for viable political potency and agency for the postmodern subject. First, in contrast to
his foregoing denigrating description of pastiche as “random cannibalization of all the styles of the past,”¹¹ Jameson interjects,

In the most interesting of postmodernist works, however, one can detect a more positive conception of relationship, which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps be no longer called consciousness.¹² Despite his defeatist rhetoric in the last sentence, the call for an “imperative to achieve that new mutation,” remains expressed and articulated here. Again, he writes, with respect to postmodern architecture,

My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore—like many of the other cultural products I have evoked in the

¹¹ 18, FJ
¹² 31, FJ (emphasis mine)
preceding remarks—stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.\textsuperscript{13}

Jameson’s repetition of the words “imperative” and “mutation” in the two excerpts is striking. It is impossible to ignore Jameson’s thinly-veiled call for mutation and further development of the human subject, body (real or metaphorical), and perceptive capacities when he writes of “an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps be no longer called consciousness,” and then again of “an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.” Jameson here implies and acknowledges that the subject must and may undergo certain changes in the context of postmodernism, in order to properly function (i.e., with political agency) in this new cultural moment. By virtue of their necessity, I argue that these changes are possible despite Jameson’s use of the word “impossible,” which, by the way, loses its power throughout his text, as it is frequently used.\textsuperscript{14}

My thesis builds heavily upon Haraway’s work Cyborg Manifesto (which I will discuss at greater length below), which in part explicitly responds to Jameson and takes him up on his challenge of mutation; and which supports my argument’s development.

\textsuperscript{13} 39, FJ (emphasis mine)
of a materialist-to-performative theoretical trajectory in the quest for developing a theory of subjective agency that is appropriate to the postmodern moment of what may be called mass-marginalization.

**Andreas Huyssen: Marxist threads and the connection between Feminism and Postmodernism**

In his book *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Andreas Huyssen links aesthetic and cultural shifts to the historical and material phenomenon of industrialization, and emphasizes the impact of industrialization and modernization at the turn of the 20th century. In his account, the emergence of new technologies enabled and engendered the emergence of a mass culture, which wound up posing a significant threat to established “high culture,” and in some critical eyes developed into what is known as postmodernism.

The concept of mass culture is of critical importance to Huyssen’s discussion of modernism and postmodernism: it is mass culture against which modernism is reacting,15 while postmodernism is defined by its affinity with mass culture. In his discussion of mass culture and its material and political implications, Huyssen

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14 In addition, it is worth noting that in the second excerpt, “impossible” is prefaced by “perhaps,” and thus further softened.
15 In his account, modernist aesthetics exhibit a “paranoid view of mass culture and the masses.” (53, AH)
significantly introduces the rhetoric of gender difference, which he develops in a chapter entitled “Mass Culture as Woman.” 16 Huyssen engages with the issue of the turn-of-the-19th century rhetorical feminization of mass culture and subsequently posits that feminism is an important part of and influence on postmodernism. “Male fears of an engulfing femininity are here projected onto the metropolitan masses,” he writes, “who did indeed represent a threat to the rational bourgeois order.” 17

Huyssen makes a clear case linking feminism and feminist work to postmodern aesthetics: “the postmodern harbored the promise of a ‘post-white,’ ‘post-male,’ ‘post-humanist,’ ‘post-Puritan’ world.” 18 “However one answers the question of the extent to which women’s art and literature have affected the course of postmodernism,” he writes,

it seems clear that feminism’s radical questioning of patriarchal structures in society and in the various discourses of art, literature, science and philosophy must be one of the measures by which we gauge the specificity of contemporary culture as well as its distance from modernism and its mystique of mass culture as feminine.” 19

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16 In his chapter “Mass Culture as Woman,” Huyssen draws attention to the marginal status of mass culture by revealing its feminization, and discussing the challenges for female articulation within the constraints of modernist patriarchal discourse.

17 53, AH

18 194, AH
The connection that Huyssen makes between feminism and postmodern aesthetics is critical to my thesis. This premise shapes my gender heuristic-driven inquiry into re-visionsing enlightenment subjectivity to suit the “postmodern” cultural context.

In Marxist fashion, Huyssen’s work explores the aesthetic cultural phenomena of modernism and postmodernism through the lens of “crises,” or class struggles. However, he specifies that postmodernism departs from the “perpetual cycle of boom and bust, exhaustion and renewal, which has characterized the trajectory of modernist culture”: Postmodernism “rather represents a new type of crisis of that modernist culture itself.” 20 This statement additionally betrays the contentious distinction between modernism and postmodernism, which I do not claim to resolve. My first chapter engages Huyssen’s approach and explores the crisis of modernism as a crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity. This constitutes an important first step in my inquiry.

**David Harvey: Time, Space, Crisis of Representation and Social Life in Postmodernity**

David Harvey emphasizes the compression of space and time as a defining aspect of the postmodern moment in his work *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Another significant point that Harvey makes is that of the crisis of representation that

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19 64, AH (emphasis mine)
20 217, AH
postmodern culture encounters with regards to capital: “Since 1973, money has been
‘de-materialized’ in the sense that it no longer has a formal or tangible link to precious
metals,” Harvey notes. He argues that the increase of debt and financing contribute
to this crisis of material representation of capital and value: “The de-linking of the
financial system from active production and from any material monetary base calls into
question the reliability of the basic mechanism whereby value is supposed to be
represented.” Harvey argues that postmodern notions of the materiality of space and
time are impacted by this powerful crisis of material representation. He writes, “The
fact that postmodernist architecture regards itself as being about fiction rather than
function appears, in the light of the reputations of the financiers, property developers,
and speculators that organize construction, more than a little apt.” Incidentally, debt
and financing are functions of time, and future-oriented at that, making the socio-
cultural attitude likely more future-oriented, which presents an interesting support to
Jameson’s allegation that the postmodern “era” is unable to think historically. Similar
to Jameson, Harvey further argues that space crowds time and historicity out of the
picture in postmodernism.

Notwithstanding, social action is of great importance to Harvey. He writes, “It
is a fundamental axiom of my enquiry that time and space (or language, for that

\[21\] 297, DH
\[22\] Ibid
matter) cannot be understood independently of social action.” I am interested in forging links between Harvey’s insights into postmodern space and time to theories of performativity and embodiment, which I argue are outgrowths of materialist thought and theoretical practices, and which I argue enable a re-visioning the politically viable human subject in the postmodern moment. Harvey writes,

There is much to be learned from aesthetic theory about how different forms of spatialization inhibit or facilitate processes of social change. Conversely there is much to be learned from social theory concerning the flux and change with which aesthetic theory has to cope. By playing these two current of thought of against each other, we can, perhaps, better understand the ways in which political-economic change informs cultural practices. He follows up, saying: “If aesthetic judgment prioritizes space over time, then it follows that spatial practices and concepts can, under certain circumstances, become central to social action.” I find this latter statement to be quite fertile in terms of looking toward a theory of cyborg textuality and embodied, performative political articulations and subjectivities. Harvey’s comments on the relationship between social action and aesthetics, and the material and economic conditions of modernity

23 108, DH
24 224-225, DH
25 207, DH
support the premise of my trans-medic inquiry. Harvey’s above focus on materialism will show itself to inform my inquiry as I explore the issue of embodiment and embodied subjectivity that Hayles argues for.

Jean-Francois Lyotard: Linguistic Materialism, Performativity, and the Imagination

In The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Jean-Francois Lyotard presents postmodernism as a moment that has come about through the influence of certain material shifts and conditions. He addresses the challenge that knowledge and meaning face as a result of the shift from diachronic semiotics to pluralistic performativity rooted in the present tense and in a spatial orientation. Lyotard’s primary engagement occurs on the level of language and communication, thus his project re-visions the social bond of verbal communication in order to accommodate the challenges posed by the material and conceptual conditions of postmodernism. His resulting theory of performative language games inspired and informs my own re-visionsing project.  

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26 Ibid
27 “The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven in a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games obeying different rules.” (40, JfL)
Lyotard defines postmodernity as a cultural incredulity toward what he calls metanarratives. In his view, metanarratives are of the monolithic and totalizing ilk of modernism, which I also connect to the enlightenment conception of humanism. However, the refusal of broad, overarching narratives poses a problem for the postmodern subject with respect to contextualized communication. And the contextualized communication that metanarratives facilitate is critical to the social bond that is of so important to Lyotard’s inquiry. Drawing from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s language games, Lyotard’s develops a theory of agonistic speech acts. “To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall in the domain of a general agonistics; the observable social bond is composed of language ‘moves,’”28 writes Lyotard. In his view, postmodernism engenders an “atomization of the social into flexible networks of language games,”29 making for a subject that he describes thus:

A self does not amount to much […] each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before […] a person is always located at ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may

28 10, Jfl
29 17, Jfl
be, or better, one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass.\textsuperscript{30}

This leads Lyotard to articulate a theory of the postmodern subject’s agency as based on the performative utterance. In this way, Lyotard constructively reacts to a potentially disorienting cultural saturation and apparent lack of historicity (cited above by Jameson): According to its linguistic definition, the performative utterance perpetually projects its \textit{own} context. In Lyotard’s discussion, the performative utterance actively and non-hierarchically recuperates historical specificity in the self-contained postmodern moment.

Lyotard’s description of the work of performative speech acts and language games alludes to the flexible, adaptive attributes of mutation and collage that Jameson touches on. The primary engine that Lyotard’s performative speech acts rely on is imagination: “This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination,” he writes.\textsuperscript{31} He expands this concept saying, “what extra performativity depends on in the final analysis is ‘imagination,’ which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game,” thus locating imagination as paramount to the “successful” postmodern subject.\textsuperscript{32} As I see it, this is a very appropriate way to re-

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{30} 15, JfL  
\textsuperscript{31} 51, JfL  
\textsuperscript{32} 52, JfL  

He further adds that the \textit{petit recit}, or little narrative, is the quintessential form of imaginative invention (60, JfL)
vision the mode in which political agency comes about in the postmodern moment, and
the imagination is a powerful foil to the modernist-enlightenment engine of
rationality.\textsuperscript{33}

As an empowering, politicized mode of articulation for the marginalized
postmodern subjectivity, the principle of performativity as defined by Lyotard stands
to be a viable a tool for historically marginal subjectivities, such as women and queers,
and is accordingly developed in the writings of Butler and Haraway.

\textbf{Dialogic Discourse as Postmodern, Feminist, and Cyborg}

\textbf{Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogic Discourse and the Viable}

\textbf{Postmodern Subject}

Neither a theorist of postmodernity nor of gender, Mikhail Bakhtin might
appear as an anomaly in my literature review. However, his metalinguistic\textsuperscript{34} theory of
dialogic discourse and heteroglossia is of vital importance to both above fields of
inquiry, and plays a critical applied role in my trans-medic analytical project.
Bakhtin’s theories of language and discourse are highly political in nature, and
specifically enact re-visions of hierarchically driven social structures.

\textsuperscript{33} I must remind my readers here that I am not implying that certain modernist works such as
James Joyce’s and Gertrude Stein’s are devoid of imagination. My use of “modernism” is strictly in the
political and conceptual mode of that postmodern theorists are responding to and/or nostalgic for.

\textsuperscript{34} “Metalinguistics” is actually a term that Bakhtin coined, and it indicates the capacity of his
work as a re-vision of structuralist linguistics, which he found fundamentally lacking.
Dialogic discourse fundamentally animates language and discourse, imbuing it with a sense of autonomous agency that is not permitted or possible in the hierarchical system of traditional structuralist linguistics, and the enlightenment-based modernist theoretical assumptions that inform structuralist linguistics. Bakhtin’s theory shares with Lyotard’s re-visioning of discourse in that both posit an animated rather than static concept of (the material surface of) language, and render discourse and language as an active entity. In both the performative and dialogic renderings, discourse becomes a social entity, and thus constitutes a transgression of that critical boundary between the spheres of subject and object, which enlightenment humanism held to be rigidly and hierarchically separate.

For Bakhtin, communication plays a similarly important role as in Lyotard’s work: “To be means to communicate,” exemplifies his stance.\textsuperscript{35} Dialogue as a primary engine of existence directs existence outside of the self into a relational dependence, and is thus commensurate with the postmodern conception of subjectivity as de-centered: Bakhtin writes, “neither individuals nor any other social entities are locked within their boundaries. They are extraterritorial, partially ‘located outside’ themselves.”\textsuperscript{36} “Truth,” he adds, “is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born \textit{between people} collectively searching for truth, in the

\textsuperscript{35} 50, MB
\textsuperscript{36} 50, MB
process of their dialogic interaction.”37 Thus, Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism establishes a potent foundation for re-visioning an exo-hierarchical (heterarchical) model of humanism and thus of social relations.

Pertaining to the subtext of transformation in my trans-medc inquiry, Bakhtin specifies that dialogic discourse “involves the constant redefinition of its participants, develops and creates numerous potentials ‘in’ each of them ‘separately’ and between them ‘interactively’ and ‘dialogically.’”38 Dialogic discourse thus implies a cyborg textuality and engenders cyborg subjectivity: constantly aware of and interacting with conceptual and material contexts, adjusting and adapting, mutating itself accordingly. This aspect of dialogic discourse results in a multiplicity of genres and threads of discursive voices simultaneously working within language; a phenomenon that Bakhtin has called heteroglossia.39 “Language, Bakhtin reiterates, is always languages.”40 Further, within any given literary text, one finds an internally dialogic heteroglossia, resulting in what Bakhtin scholars Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson have called microdialogism.41

37 60, MB
38 52, MB
39 Heteroglossia literally means multiple-voicedness: “Hetero” indicates multiplicity, while “glossia” derives from the Russian word for voice, “gloss.”
40 140, MB
41 Morson and Emerson cite “a ‘microdialogue’ in that word” contained in the utterance of dialogized heteroglossia. (138, MB)
Julia Kristeva and Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari: Dialogism as Material and Politicized Cyborg Discourse

Julia Kristeva introduces the term “intertextuality” to describe Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic discourse: “Bakhtinian dialogism,” she writes, “identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality.” So described, the concept of intertextuality conveys a view of discourse as distinctly cognizant. Kristeva further describes intertextuality as a signifying practice that performs “the establishment and countervailing of a sign system within a social framework,” and makes “the subject undergo an unsettling, questionable process.” According to Kristeva, intertextual work “coincides with times of abrupt changes, renewal, or revolution in society.” Her discussion reveals intertextuality as a cyborg textuality, engendering cyborg subjectivity, and thus acting as an agent and harbinger of political change.

Kristeva significantly comments that Bakhtinian dialogism moves us toward conceptualizing discourse as a material surface. According to her, Bakhtinian dialogism enables one to view the ‘literary word’ as an intersection of textual

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42 68, JK
43 As a semiotician, Kristeva speaks in terms of systems of signs and signifying practices.
44 18, JK
This makes Bakhtin’s work all the more relevant and applicable to my inquiry, since the alleged postmodern condition is so saturated with material surfaces, and it is from engaging such surfaces that the works I analyze seek to re-vision a politically viable humanism.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari further develop a materialist and dialogic understanding of discourse that is useful to my inquiry. Their work literalizes the metaphor of “becoming” to conceptualize the unique and unrepeatable product of dialogic discourse, where both the former and current contexts of a dialogic unit (from which it is “deterritorialized” and then “reterritorialized”) are irrefutably and perpetually transformed through their dialogic interactivity. Deleuze and Guattari favor spatializing over historicizing rhetoric, which is appropriate to the parameters of my postmodern and cyborg inquiry: “Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exits,” says Deleuze. He explains further:

To become is never to imitate, nor to “do like”, nor to conform to a model [...] the question “what are you becoming?” is particularly stupid. For as someone becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself. Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns. Nuptials are

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45 65, JK 46 2, D
always against nature […] the opposite of a couple […] no longer binary machines.  

This description recalls embodiment, mutation, and adaptation, which are all relevant to my concept of cyborg textuality and subjectivity, and particularly in the reference of nuptials that are “against nature.” Further, Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which define the process of becoming, inform my inquiry in terms of my trans-medic analysis: with and through each analytical case-study, the potential re-visions of humanism adapt and evolve.

In a short piece entitled Rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari appropriate the term from the vegetable kingdom to describe an engine of cyborg connectivities: “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.”\(^48\) An illustration that Deleuze and Guattari use to clarify their concepts of rhizomatic conjunction and becoming is that of the interaction of a wasp and an orchid where the orchid resembles a wasp and the wasp is drawn to “mate” with it, and in so doing is an essential part of the orchid’s reproductive cycle. According to them, this particular interaction is “a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and

\(^{47}\) Ibid  
\(^{48}\) 7, DG
the reterritorialization of the other. This example is perfectly suited to my intentions, as the interactive fusion between subject and object here is clearly necessary and productive.

Another key term for Deleuze and Guattari is that of “style,” which is closely aligned with their concept of becoming, and explicitly builds upon Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossic discourse as a variety of styles of discourse. Deleuze comments, “Style gives writing an external end – which goes beyond what is written,” which indicates an external intention in the writing, and thus writing that has subjectivity with political agency. Style drives the politics of a given text, which frequently reflects of the structure [hierarchical or heterarchical, temporal (linear) or spatial (nonlinear)] of the text, framing the creative writer’s work. Dialogic style carries inherent political implications and an impetus for social change in and by its discursive practice.

**Dialogic Style as Feminist**

In an essay called *Style and Power*, Josephine Donovan calls attention to the fact that Bakhtin was “largely ignorant of women’s literature,” and does not address women or gender in his analyses of the novel, or in his discussion of dialogue, which are “problems inherent in a feminist use of Bakhtin.” Donovan argues that “because there are so few works that conceive style in political terms, and because of the

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49 10, DG

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specificity of his insights, certain of Bakhtin’s ideas should prove useful to feminist critics who are constructing women’s literary history.”

As demonstrated above, Bakhtinian theory of dialogic discourse sets a precedent for a nonhierarchical approach to language and ideology. Dialogic discourse is easily adapted to address the problem of the female subject that is marginalized by dominant patriarchal discourse by providing a discursive space for marginal voices to forge their identities and express themselves.

In their book *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*, Dale Bauer and Susan McKinstry compile a selection essays that reveal and discuss various applications of dialogic discourse in the community of feminist thinkers and writers. Bauer and McKinstry argue that Bakhtinian dialogism is a vital component of practical and effective feminist discourse. To them, dialogism empowers the feminist movement as a strategy and tactic that gives the movement a potent trajectory toward viable political articulation. They envision feminist dialogics as “cultural resistance.” In the afterword to Bauer and McKinstry’s volume, Patricia Yaeger suggests, “The ‘dialogic

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50 6, D
51 85, FBD
52 1, FBD
imagination’ describes some of the most radical — and necessary — moments within feminist thinking.\textsuperscript{53}

The Feminist Heuristic: Performativity and Embodiment are a Productive, Cyborg Extension of Marxist Materialism

Judith Butler: Performativity and Excluded Subjects; Moving

Toward Embodiment

Judith Butler’s approach to identity politics is dialectical, and she holds that the discursive act of exclusion is one that paradoxically paves the way for the potent and disruptive agency of the excluded subject. In \textit{Bodies that Matter}, she argues that in the formation of the normatively sexed subject, “identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge. This is a repudiation which creates the valence of ‘abjection’ and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre.”\textsuperscript{54} Thus, she locates \textit{dis}identification as a primary “critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility;” a struggle with which my re-visioning trans-medie inquiry is intimately aligned.\textsuperscript{55} Performativity in the hands of the normally unintelligible subject can be a powerful way in which to foster such

\textsuperscript{53} 242, FBD
\textsuperscript{54} 3, BtM
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid
disruptive and critically important disidentification. Below, I will discuss the concept of dis- or anti-identification as a cyborg heuristic.

Starting with her work in *Gender Trouble*, Butler has brought the principle of performativity to central importance in feminism and queer studies. Approaching the marginalized subjectivity (in this context, female and/or queer) as unintelligible to the normative cultural grammar, Butler offers the *awareness of the performative constitution of intelligible, normative gender as a socio-discursive material construction*, as a cyborg textual heuristic that the normally *unintelligibly-gendered subject* can employ to claim intelligibility.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler defines the way in which she uses the term “performativity” in the following way: “the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names,” which is closer to the definition that Lyotard’s concept of performativity builds upon, “but, rather, as that *reiterative power of discourse* to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains.”56 Butler’s concept of performativity is intimately liked with the discursive constitution of a materialized phenomenon through repetition. In this way, performativity becomes aligned with materialism through the embodied phenomenon of performance.

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56 2, BtM (emphasis mine)
Donna Haraway: Embodied Political Subjectivities: Cyborg

Humanism

Donna Haraway is primarily concerned with creatively performing a viable identity politics for feminism that does not totalize its subject and allows for pluralistic multiplicity. This struggle, which is endemic to identity politics, is critical to the project of re-visioning of a politically viable postmodern subject. As I mentioned in my discussion of Jameson’s work, from the perspective of the modernist, the postmodern subject appears abject, objectified and marginalized by the overwhelming spatial conditions of postmodernity.

Haraway’s work in A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century directly assumes Frederic Jameson’s previously cited challenge of the “impossible” re-visioning of the subject necessary in order to arrive at a politically viable postmodern subject. Since my discussion has established that the feminist and postmodern subject face comparable political challenges, Haraway’s work is equally productive in both a feminist and a postmodern inquiry.

It is impossible to ignore the parallel between the above-cited bind of identity politics and the bind of the subject when confronted with discourse: experience and narrative discourse are conceptually incommensurate, much like the categories of
subject and object. In her manifesto, Haraway offers a “myth” of the cyborg as a performative metaphor or “ironic dream” to confront this key issue. Haraway ironically engages the rhetoric of narration, by calling her manifesto a “myth,” which is the classic cultural metanarrative. Similar to Butler’s concept and political heuristic of disidentification, Haraway posits the cyborg as an anti-identification heuristic:

“Perhaps,” she writes, “we can learn from our [cyborg] fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos,” with the implication that identification with ‘Man’ or ‘Western logos’ precludes the possibility of articulation for subjects marginalized by patriarchal society. Significantly, Haraway writes that the cyborg is “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.” Through this statement, she is positioning the cyborg as a both of the realm of experience and the realm of narration—both of the realm of the subject and the realm of the object. The cyborg is a creature of deliberate paradox, “wary of holism, but needy for connection,” embodying the sticky impasse of collective cohesion versus discursive objectification that any social agenda struggles with.

Haraway further combines Lyotardian performativity, namely his engine of the imagination, and the material conditions of postmodernity into the mythic figure of the

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57 It is important to note here that this text of Haraway’s was written prior to Butler’s Bodies That Matter.
58 173, CM (emphasis mine)
59 149, CM
60 152, CM
cyborg: “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality,” she writes. Thus, the material realities of cultural saturation, the colonization of private spaces by globalized capitalism, the externalization and evacuation of subjectivity, and the fragmentation and surfaceality of cultural products and expressions, come together in the hybridized, disjointed, and monstrous hypostatized language game of Haraway’s cyborg. The cyborg represents and embodies an awareness and performance of the always-already performative conditions of the postmodern “Real.” As such, “cyborg subjectivity” is indispensable to a cogent inquiry into the ontology of viable postmodern subjectivity. “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self,” writes Haraway, “This is a self feminists must code.” Ultimately, Haraway’s cyborg myth is a concrete performative political vehicle, “about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”

An embodied performance of the coexistence of subject and object in a single, cognizing body, the cyborg figure embodies the “medic” aspect of my trans-medical inquiry: a resilient witness of prior trauma. Haraway’s cyborg reveals an ontology of

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61 150, CM
62 A phrase coined by N. Katherine Hayles in *Flickering Subjectivities: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis in Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl.* (I have the exact citation in Chapter 2)
63 163, CM
64 154, CM
the politically viable postmodern subject that is enabled, rather than stymied, by the material realities of postmodernity.

**N. Katherine Hayles: Embodied Subjectivity, Radical Materialism, and the Conceptual Reality of the Posthuman**

N. Katherine Hayles’ work further distills the principles of materialism and performativity, and she explicitly calls for a revision of humanism in the postmodern context relying on the heuristic of embodiment. Embodiment is a critical concept for feminist theory that is equally important to my inquiry: The human body occupies a liminal position, as the physical and objective challenge to the notion of humanism as pure rational subjectivity. In our cultural history, the female figure has been cathected as The embodied subject, commensurate with her status as a second-class, intermediate, objectified subject. The concept of embodiment, and especially of embodied cognition, that N. Katherine Hayles develops crystallizes the challenge that cyborg textuality poses to the status quo of humanism. As she puts it,

> Embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it. This realization, with all its exfoliating implications, is so broad in its effects and so
deep in its consequences that it is transforming the liberal subject, regarded as
the model of the human since the Enlightenment, into the posthuman.65

Hayles’ posthuman vision calls for a re-evaluation of what is involved in the
construction of a socio-political subject, with an eye on the embodied, material
phenomenology of experience.

In *The Condition of Virtuality*, Hayles argues for materialism in a general
atmosphere that is not concerned with concrete matter: that of cybernetic culture
enthusiasts and computer technology developers in the early ‘90s where many were
taken with celebrating the liberating disembodiment that was apparently finally
available via cybernetic technology, fulfilling the enlightenment ideal of the human
subject. Hayles reminds her readers of the indispensable importance of a concrete
medium:

Only when technological infrastructures have developed sufficiently to make
rapid message transmission possible does information come into its own [...].

From this we can draw an obvious but nonetheless important conclusion: *The
efficacy of information depends on a highly articulated material base.*66

Her materialist message has implications beyond the immediate context of the
developing cyberculture, and she develops these in her later work *How We Became*

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65 xiv, PH
66 71, CV
Posthuman, taking aim at humanism with the same materialist convictions. In terms of my thesis, Hayles’ approach is indispensable my inquiry into the vital and politically productive interaction between the postmodern subject and the material conditions of postmodernity.

Hayles emphasizes embodiment as a key concept that is lacking in the enlightenment-era vision of the human subject, which saturates our cultural consciousness through to today. She points out that a disembodied model of the human subject formed the basis of “the liberal subject, regarded as the model of the human since the Enlightenment,” and cannot be separated from the rigidly hierarchical characteristics of that era. Engaging the interactive environment of cybernetic systems (and thereby taking cue from this particular material reality, as it were), Hayles combines interactivity and embodiment to formulate a different, distributed ontology of the cognizant human subject, radically extending cognitive capacity to the entire embodied being. Her work posits a dynamic and interactive relationship between embodiment and the ontology of human cognition, an allegation with deep political implications: “Subjectivity is […] distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it,” she writes. Hayles

\[\text{\textsuperscript{67}xiv, PH}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{68}291, PH}\]
outlines an ecological perception of selfhood and subjectivity, where body parts and objects in the environment interact with the mind in the process of cognition, arriving at a theory of distributed cognition and distributed subjectivity as her vision for the posthuman subject. Further, Hayles writes, “embodiment replaces a body seen as a support system for the mind, and a dynamic partnership between humans and machines replaces the liberal humanist subject’s manifest destiny to dominate and control nature.” In this instance, she re-engages with cybernetic culture as a “dynamic partnership between humans and machines,” rhetorically abolishing any type of hierarchy, not only between body and mind, but also between body and technology or material objects. Hayles’ materialist theory of embodiment moves to encompass technologies that are daily relied on for incredibly important cognitive and cognizing functions, beginning with proprioception. In so doing, Hayles opens the door for machines and objects to have agency and participate in subjectivity, thus aligning her work with Haraway’s cyborg manifesto. My medium-specific and trans-medic analysis seeks to admit the political agency of texts and bodies operating interactively and independently of the despotic control, dictation or subjection by a privileged subject, as a critical step towards re-visioning the politically viable postmodern subjectivity.

69 288, PH
Chapter 3. Early Horror Film and Modernism’s Crisis of Patriarchal Male Subjectivity

Masculinity has become an increasingly important object of study in feminist and gender studies, as critics are coming to understand that gender essentializing in either direction only serves to re-instate (albeit inverted) the very power structures that they seek to surmount. An approach that is not wary of gender essentializing will not succeed in developing innovative tactics to achieve political viability, and in the end does not serve to produce a re-visioned knowledge of humanism. My project is not so much concerned with dramatizing agonistics of gendered subjects as it is with transcending such categories, which are, as Butler argues, themselves cultural constructions. As such, it is all the more critical to my inquiry that I begin my analysis with an exploration of modernism’s crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity.

Early horror film serves as a highly appropriate lens through which to explore what I posit as the “first phase” of the trans-medic trajectory that my inquiry outlines of the relationship between the categories of “subject” and “object;” from separate, terrified and terrifying, to playfully engaged, to productively cyborg. This chapter examines early horror films *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Robert Weine, Germany, 1919). 

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It may be helpful to understand the trajectory that I am outlining here by thinking of Hegel’s Master-Slave dialectic, where Unhappy Consciousness is a crucial step in he Geist’s evolution toward consciousness.
1920) and The Tell-Tale Heart (Charles Klein, USA, 1928). My analysis engages with the films in comprehensive depth, examining their historical and political context, material context and medium, looking at the aesthetic conventions and diegetic themes of both films, and finally at their effect on and engagement of the spectator.

**Conceptual Context**

As I mention in my Literature Review, in *After the Great Divide*, Huysen posits a “crisis of modernism” around the turn of the twentieth century, which he characterizes as a cultural “anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture.” In the chapter *Mass Culture as Woman*, Huysen introduces how the discourse of gender antagonism becomes associated with this cultural crisis: “Male fears of an engulfing femininity are here projected onto the metropolitan masses, who did indeed represent a threat to the rational bourgeois order.” Here, high-modernist aesthetics and the enlightenment ideal of the human are aligned with the male, white, and reason-dominated, hierarchical model of human subjectivity. This model also posits the human subject as exceedingly segregated from the objective world, as I have discussed above. I examine the “crisis of modernity” cited by Huysen as a crisis of male subjectivity, insofar as masculinity is associated

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71 While lesser-known today *The Tell-Tale Heart*, “received instant recognition as an opus of unusual character and craftsmanship,” hailed in 1928 as “perhaps the most finished production of its kind” to date, in August 1928’s *Close Up*. (HN, 53)

72 AH, vii
with power and agency, and is ostensibly representative of traditional patriarchal culture. As I mention earlier, while I explore this crisis of masculinity and make use of feminist theory, gender functions purely as a heuristic, and is not meant to indicate that I am taking up the cause of either “men” or “women,” but any and both, insofar as they are useful toward my trans-medic inquiry of re-visioning humanism for the postmodern and cybernetic era. Likewise, the exploration of modernist aesthetics that I undertake in this chapter does not detract from my exploration of postmodernism. Rather, it acknowledges and explores the complex inter-relationship between the concepts, discourses and eras that go by the name of “modern” or “postmodern.”

This chapter explores the intersection of the emergence of the above films and the interwar cultural identity crisis as experienced and expressed by Weimar Germany. I view the expressionist aesthetic that emerges from this particular historical and cultural context as both the expression of, and an agent of, the anxiety of the crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity. The aspects of expressionist aesthetics that are epitomized in The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari comprise a primary point of textual and aesthetic departure. While technically a part of the school of early American Avant-Garde The Tell-Tale Heart, borrows heavily from Caligari’s expressionist aesthetic both visually and diegetically. Because of this relationship, and because of the

73 AH, 55
materially self-reflexive aspects of the avant-garde aesthetic, *Tell-Tale Heart* is the ideal lens through which to explore the aesthetic and diegetic features in *Caligari* for the purposes of my materialistically driven trans-medical analysis.\(^\text{74}\)

**Synopsis of Films**

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari tells the story of an asylum director who is so obsessed with power that, when a somnambulist comes into his care, he assumes the persona of Caligari, a hypnotist from medieval times with whom he had long been fascinated, who would direct a somnambulist to commit murders. The story is told from the perspective of Francis, whose best friend Alan is murdered by Cesare the somnambulist. After Alan’s death, preceded by the town clerk’s death, a petty murderer is arrested for the attempted murder of another woman, and falsely blamed for the other two deaths. However, after the subsequent (unsuccessful) kidnapping of his fiancée by Cesare, Francis discovers Caligari’s ruse, and Caligari is then seen being put into a straightjacket. The potentially subversive political message of the film (as against totalitarian power) is contained, as there is an additional diegetic frame that was placed around this story (which was the original screenplay) as it was produced into the film: with this additional narrative frame, Francis is presented in the first scene

\(^{74}\) To be really kitschy, I could say that for the purposes of my thesis, *Tell-Tale Heart* effectively functions as a “tell-tale heart” of the German expressionist aesthetic as portrayed in Weine’s *Caligari*. 

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as a patient in the asylum, himself, and the story is thus cast as a filmic diegesis of the story that the mad Francis relates to another patient in the asylum. Because of this diegetic frame, the veracity of the story that Francis relates is thrown into question: it is cast as a politically harmless foray into a madman’s paranoid fantasies. However, due to the power of the visual diegesis of Francis’ story, the overall effect of the film is highly ambivalent in spite of the diegetic frame of the film.

*Tell-Tale Heart* is a filmic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s gruesome short story bearing the same name. The story is also narrated from an alleged madman’s point of view, who disputes his categorization as mad, and challenges the reader/viewer to do the same. The story is about the “madman”’s murder of an old man, based on the deep discomfort that the old man’s gaze (“eye”) created for the madman. After he commits the murder, he “buries” the old man under some floorboards. When police investigators arrive the following day in response to the report of a terrible scream in the night, they are convinced of his innocence. However, as he is talking to and entertaining the investigators, he is overcome by guilt and by what is portrayed as an aural hallucination of the old man’s beating heart, and confesses the murder, revealing he body of the old man beneath the floorboards.
Modernity: Threatening Doubles of Technology, Women, and “The Masses”

In the interwar period, socio-cultural shifts due to war and modernization led to the perceived and real incursion of women and lower classes (“the masses”) into cultural spheres previously exclusive to the privileged white male is terrifyingly destabilizing to the patriarchal male subject’s sense of sovereignty. At the same time, western culture saw an increased presence and role of technology and machinery in day-to-day life. This re-shaped daily life as one that involved greater interaction with technology and machines, including the mechanization of labor that was previously seen to be the exclusive sphere of the laboring human subject. The above-mentioned masses and women, both being classes of subjectivity that were subjected to objectifying discourse due to their lower status in the hierarchy, thus also contribute to the cultural sense of reckoning with an objective sphere that was gaining agency and autonomy. By association, the masses and technology were feminized in the cultural psyche. What this conceptual product of modernization amounted to could be called a proliferation of potentially threatening, and subconsciously feminized, “doubles” (from the objective category) for the bourgeois male subject. In Huyssen’s account, modernist aesthetics reflect this cultural power struggle, exhibiting a “paranoid view of mass culture and the masses.”\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{75} 53, AH
The Filmic Medium

In the forthcoming discussion of the filmic medium and the cultural implications of early film I focus on the threatening and murderous implications. This is not to imply that this is the only way to interpret the medium. My particular reading is in terms of the theme of the overarching topic of my chapter, thus examining a traumatic and agonistic relationship between subject and object categories in the cultural psyche and in the conception of the human subject.

On a symbolic level, the development of the moving image introduces the visual “double” of reality, which constitutes its own type of cultural disruption, and adds a visual layer to the above-cited agents of terror. The film’s literal “capture” of a true-to-life moving image of what is in front of its lens results in an unsettling and never-before-seen doubling of reality as facsimile of itself, which has lasting repercussions on the cultural psyche. According to Miriam Hansen, in its earliest years in Germany, silent cinema served primarily as the public sphere of the lower classes and women. In her account, early silent cinema poses an explicit threat to the traditional patriarchal order of things. As if being associated with women wasn’t enough, the filmic medium was linked with the figure of the degenerate woman: “The image of the prostitute was actually used as an epithet for the theatre as a whole,”

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76 In an essay entitled Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?
writes Hansen, “Intellectuals fascinated by the whiff of otherness that emanated from the movies hardly ever failed to mention the presence of prostitutes in the audience.” 77

Hansen cites an early critic’s description of the cinema screen as a “white eye, fixating the mass with a monotonous gaze.” 78 This notion of such a blank and indiscriminating gaze is also linked with the figure of the prostitute, who is ostensibly there for any and everyone’s gaze and consumption via intimate fantasy or intimate act. The cyborg gaze of the screen here already begins to subvert gender roles, as it is rhetorically described as the eye that fixates the mass with a monotonous gaze, and so agency is located in the technology. The above description of the screen also brings to mind the gaze of one who is mad or dead, both being additional manifestations of terrifying doubles of “reality.”

Film thus arrived onto the cultural playing field as both a fascinating and terrifyingly destabilizing force. Lest, in the course of this materialist analysis, we forget: a major cultural function of film is to tell immersive stories through the moving images that are projected on the screen. In the case of early horror film, it is thus evident that film has the capacity to function as a both an agent of and a diegetic playing field for modernism’s crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity. Early horror film

77 174, MH
78 175, MH
thus embodies the rational bourgeois “nightmare of being devoured by mass culture” (AH, 53) in a complex and dialectical way.

Arguing that associations of threatening doubles to the patriarchal male subject, including the woman, mass culture, and madness, are immanent to the filmic medium, my analysis will be engaging the films at hand in both diegetic and extra-diegetic capacities, insofar as the former expresses, while the latter perpetuates, the terror of modernism’s crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity. *Tell-Tale Heart* will play a critical role in my examination of the spectator’s relationship to and awareness of the filmic medium in terms of a material entity. This is because the avant-garde conventions exhibited by Klein’s film emphasize diegetic rupture, increasing the spectator’s awareness of the materiality of the filmic medium, as well as of her or himself as spectator.

**The Expressionist Aesthetic**

A product of interwar Weimar Germany, the expressionist aesthetic emerges from a particularly charged historical moment and context, characterized by both unstable politics and prolific creative output. According to Siegfried Kracauer, the Weimar era was marked by “hunger, disorder, unemployment, and the first signs of inflation.”  

Arguably as a response to these conditions, the expressionist aesthetic

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79 43, SK
turns inward, emphasizing the psychological world. As Lotte Eisner writes, the
difficult facts of life, including “factories, houses, illness, prostitutes, screams, hunger”
do not exist in expressionist works: “only the interior vision they provoke exists.”\textsuperscript{80}
Out of this psychological sublimation of “the real,” the expressionist aesthetic
ultimately produces an uncanny doubling of reality, adding another layer to the
threatening and destabilizing doubles that modernization and the filmic medium
already convey.

A part of this uncanny doubling or, rather, its foresight, is the totalitarianism
that I inherent in the expressionist aesthetic. Eisner writes of the expressionist subject,
“reality is created by him and the ‘world-image’ exists solely in him.” Thus, while “on
the one hand Expressionism represents an extreme form of subjectivism; on the other
hand [it is the] assertion of an absolute totalitarian self creating the universe.”\textsuperscript{81}
Combined with its dramatization of the modern patriarchal male subject’s terror of
being engulfed and overcome by its other, expressionism here sets up a tense power
dialectic, where the subject experiences the two sides of the totalitarian coin: both total
and euphoric power, and utter powerlessness and abjection. Cited by Huyssen, T.S.
Eliot writes “Totalitarianism appeals to the desire to return to the womb.”\textsuperscript{82} In the

\textsuperscript{80} 10, LE
\textsuperscript{81} 11-12, LE
\textsuperscript{82} 58, AH
context of our inquiry, the return to the womb is commensurate with the threat of being overcome and thus (re-) engulfed by the figure of the woman and/or mass culture.

Eisner further cites an anthropomorphic inversion that occurs in expressionism: Personification is amplified; [metaphoric rhetoric] expands and embraces people and objects in similar terms. […] On the one hand the poet becomes “a field fissured with thirst;” on the other hand the “voracious” mouths of windows or the “avid” darts of a shadow pierce “shivering” walls, while the “cruel” leaves of “implacable” doors slash the “moaning” flanks of “despairing” houses.83

This convention of the aesthetic contributes to a sense of confusion as to the status of “reality.” This rhetorical convention is translated into the scenography of Caligari. According to expressionist artist Hermann Warm, who designed the set of Caligari along with Walter Rohrig and Walter Reimann, “Films must be drawings brought to life.”84 “In accordance with [Warm’s] beliefs, the canvases and draperies of Caligari abounded in complexes of jagged, sharp-pointed forms strongly reminiscent of gothic patterns.”85 The coming-to-life of drawn sets translates into the anthropomorphism of objects, which constitutes a serious challenge to any referent of conventional reality.

Conversely, the actors and characters themselves frequently look as though they were

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83 23, LE (emphasis mine)
84 68, SK
drawn into the set. The result is a disorienting, dizzying collapse of reality into its
double, echoing the threat to modernist patriarchal male subjectivity by the engulfing
“other” of mass culture.

An excerpt from Foucault’s Preface to Transgression serves to further
contextualize the expressionist aesthetic of Caligari within discourse of madness and
transgression as Foucault theorizes them. Foucault describes the language of madness
thus:

Essentially the product of fissures, abrupt descents, and broken contours, this
misshapen and craglike language describes a circle; it refers to itself and is
folded back on a questioning of its limits.86

One easily imagines that Foucault is describing the expressionist aesthetic manifest in
the set and visuals of Caligari. Foucault’s work implicates madness and transgression
with each other, and his project seeks to reveal the agency and political productivity of
madness, which he argues has been marginalized in our cultural history due to the
incommensurability of madness, and the discourse of madness and the enlightenment
project and the discourse of reason. In the above citation, the language’s “questioning
of its limits” in this excerpt refers to Foucault’s greater project of theorizing
transgression, which he argues operates by committing violence to the limit or

85 Ibid, Figs. 1a and 2a
boundary. In my inquiry align the project of transgression with the avant-garde aesthetic at work in *Tell-Tale Heart*, as it ruptures conventions of continuity, effectively questioning the limits of the filmic medium. Transgression opens up the space for repressed and subjugated content to become manifest against conventional social and aesthetic structures, much like the ruptures of continuity in the avant-garde *Tell-Tale Heart* reveal the subtler elements of its expressionist predecessor *Caligari*.

**Diegesis: Ambivalent Portrayals of Madness**

As if the presence of the theme of madness were not enough in *Caligari* and *Tell-Tale Heart*, both films portray madness in a challenging and ambivalent way. In *Caligari*, the spectator is intentionally disoriented as to who the real madman is: Francis, or the director of the asylum. Near the end of the film, in the asylum, Francis significantly utters a challenge: “You all think I’m insane! – it isn’t true – it’s the director who’s insane!!” in an intertitle that lingers significantly long on the screen, as he struggles to attack the director of the asylum. With the intertitle and the profilmic event thus contradicting each other, the spectator is left disoriented and uncertain of whom the real madman is. As Siegfried Kracauer comments, in *Caligari*, we see “the normal as a madhouse.”

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86 80, MF
87 74, SK
In *Tell-Tale Heart*, while the question of who is mad is presented as fairly unambiguous, the madman explicitly challenges the spectator to question whether he is truly mad. The textual prelude to the film challenges the spectator to examine what they perceive to be madness, and thus implicates her/him in the diegetic event. The first screen shot (not an intertitle in the strict sense of the word because the text is scrolling over an image of fractured glass that gradually fades in a lap dissolve to an image of the direct gaze of the old man—I will be analyzing the disruptive use of text and direct gaze below), which is not a part of the source text of Poe’s story, reads “This is a story, as related by an insane man, and presented thusly, as the events recorded themselves in his distorted mind.” (This constitutes a direct commentary on the diegetic frame of *Caligari*, which begins with Francis in the asylum, relating his story to another occupant.) Immediately, however, the definition and perception of madness are challenged.88 “but why will you say that I am mad?” appears on the, in the “voice” of the “madman.” Here, the madman addresses himself to the spectator, as does Francis implicitly in *Caligari*. However, *Tell-Tale Heart* takes the uncomfortable engagement and implication of the spectator a step farther than *Caligari*. The madman continues, “Hearken! and observe how calmly- how healthily I can tell the whole

88 The following textual excerpts do correspond with the text of Poe’s story, though the movie does not make use of the text in its entirety, picking and choosing as appropriate.
Here, the spectator is called upon to be an investigator, to make an evaluation of the madman based on what s/he is about to see and observe. Additionally, the viewer is here invited to turn an inquisitive eye to “how” the story is told, which I argue widens her/his frame of focus to include the filmic medium.

**Diegesis: Death, Murder, and Parricide**

The threat of parricide inherent in the medium of film central to Huyssen and Hansen’s projects also figures as a significant undercurrent in the expressionist aesthetic: In her analysis of German Expressionism, Eisner discusses “apocalyptic adolescents,” naming generational conflict and tension as a unifying engine of the aesthetic. The antagonistic drive of parricide reflects a dialectical inversion of the cultural anxiety of high culture being engulfed by mass culture. S.S. Prawer describes Werner Krauss’ character as representative of the father figure in *Caligari*: “Krauss’s director is an evil father-figure for Cesare and Francis, and appears linked to older traditions, older generations, through his assumption of the personality of the original Caligari.” While violent death is portrayed in *Caligari*, the latent threat of parricide is never manifested. In a bewildering ending to the film, Francis is subdued and silenced when he is attempting to attack Werner Krauss’ director of the asylum, who represents the evil and despotic father figure on multiple levels in the film.

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89 (emphasis mine)
90 196, SP
While in Caligari, Francis is pre-empted from “killing the father,” figurative parricide becomes the central diegetic event of Tell-Tale Heart. In fact, the old man is portrayed with an air of death about him from the moment he is introduced: “I think it was his eye!” says the madman, explaining his motive for murdering the old man, “Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture- a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold, and so, by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.”91 The gaze of the old man, not unlike the gaze of a prostitute or of a cinematic screen, is portrayed with a dialectical relationship to death: While to the madman, he appears to be both a terrifying agent of death, he is actually the target of murder in the diegesis. I argue that the madman sees, projected in the old patriarch’s eyes, his own death and the old man’s death as well as the overarching threat of death of patriarchal male subjectivity, which constitutes the crisis of modernism in Huysssen’s account. The gaze of the old man’s eye recalls the description of the gaze of the cinematic screen, cited above by Hansen, and is thus imbued with the agents of terror and threat that lie in the filmic medium, and by association, the threatening

91 Fig. 3a
doubles of woman and mass culture. In this way, I argue that the old man’s gaze in fact casts both the old man and the madman as already dead.\textsuperscript{92}

In the murder scene of the patriarch in \textit{Tell-Tale Heart}, there is a lot of important play with light, the gaze, montage, the use of text, and feminized imagery. When the madman first opens his lantern to a mere slit in the dark room where the old man is sleeping, the image of the slit constitutes a visual allusion to female genitalia, and casts the sliver of light upon the eye of the old man. The symbolic layers to the gaze of the old man’s eye discussed above make this encounter powerful and terrifying. The ensuing rapid series of montages, extreme close-up shots, and text burned into the film (spelling out the word “KILL,” which appears frenetically overlaid on extreme close-up shots and montages of the murderer’s and the victim’s eyes) visually convey the madman’s climactic possession by the death drive ambiguously represented in the old man’s gaze, and prompting the madman’s downward spiral into committing the act that ultimately seals his own fate in a terrifying dramatization of the ultimate loss of power and agency of the masculine subject, overwhelmed by the “doubles” of madness, femininity, and mass culture.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{92} Above, the madman says “He had the eye of a vulture- a pale blue eye with a film over it.” The detail of the film over the eye, while likely not intended to refer to the filmic medium in its original context in the short story, adds an interesting layer to my discussion of his gaze.

\textsuperscript{93} Figs. 4a-6a
Adding a layer of dialogic complexity between the two films, it is arguable that the image of the madman approaching and strangling the old man parallels the image from *Caligari* of Cesare approaching Francis’ fiancée, as if to strangle her. This gesture in *Caligari* is not consummated, as the girl is kidnapped but ultimately left unharmed. Klein’s avant-garde version draws out and completes the repressed acts of both parricide and attack on the woman, transgressing and collapsing boundaries of logic by superimposing the attack on femininity and the father figure into one scene of carnage.94 Finally, the “burial” of the old man beneath the floorboards visually describes a re-engulfment of masculinity by femininity, with the patriarch appearing to be re-embedded into a small, womb-like space.95 This visually completes and realizes the terror of re-engulfment of masculinity by femininity as a symbol of mass culture.

There is an additional visual dialogue between the two films that is hard to ignore, occurring after the madman has buried the old man in the floor, which speaks to the madman’s ultimate self-castration through the act of murder: as he sits (apparently content) on the floor of the room, the image bears uncanny parallels to the image of the petty murderer in *Caligari*, as he sits in his prison cell.96 The jagged play of shadows surrounding both figures serves to visually reinforce their utter lack of

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94 Notably, bare-hands strangling is an ultimate manifestation of raw and primitive masculinity, also readable as an act of sexual domination.
95 Fig. 7a
96 Figs. 8a-9a
power and agency as well as the imminent threat of engulfment by the dark, jagged shadows, which stand in for the threatening other or “double.” The parricide in *Tell-Tale Heart* thus also conveys the totalitarian dialectic at work in expressionist aesthetics: the subject acting aggressively attacks the perceived threat, exhibiting power and agency; only to be demonstrably compromised and implicated into the murder as his own victim, threatening to be overcome by its threatening double.

**Text as Diegetic Rupture**

There are diegetic ruptures that occur in *Caligari*, and are magnified in *Tell-Tale Heart*, bringing greater awareness to the filmic medium during the spectator’s experience. The animation of text, and the superimposition of this text onto the image projected on the screen is one very powerful instance of such diegetic rupture. Normally in silent film, intertitles are kept completely separate from the images on screen, and are shown in between images, hence the name “inter-title.” The incursion of text into the space of the image and visual diegesis constitutes a transgression of filmic conventions of the period. The boundary between text and image is collapsed, drawing attention to the materiality of the screen as a flat surface to be written on, and thus interfering life-likeness of the image on the screen. Also, this transgression draws attention to the fact that the character on screen is literally boxed in by the space of the
screen, and powerless in the face of the intertitles, which dictate his speech.\footnote{While there is no room for this discussion in this paper, one could read \textit{Tell-Tale Heart’s} use of the burned text as a response to the advent of sound in film.}

Suspension of disbelief is ruptured, and the spectator becomes well aware, if only in that moment, that s/he is a “spectator” of a “film,” disrupting the illusion. \textit{Caligari} has this diegetic rupture occur in one important scene, at the moment when Werner Krauss’ character becomes literally and figuratively possessed by the figure of Caligari: the words “Du Muss Caligari Werden,” pop up on the screen all around Werner Krauss’ character, and he reaches for them, following them, stumbling about the screen in a state of torpor.\footnote{Fig. 10a}

\textit{Tell-Tale Heart} seizes onto this kind of rupture, and makes it into a critical visual element of its film. There is far more superimposition of text in the later film, beginning with the scrolling textual prelude, and most notably when the madman is overcome by murderous drive and intention: The word “KILL,” visibly burned into the film, frenetically dances across the screen, overlaid on the murderer’s eyes, the victim’s eyes, and kaleidoscopic montages of eyes.\footnote{Figs. 4a-6a} This repeated imposition of text onto the screen effectively emphasizes the theme of the crisis of patriarchal male subjectivity, as each time text is laid over the image of a filmic subject, his agency is being visually assaulted, and literally written over.

\footnote{Fig. 10a}
Direct Gaze as a Disruption of Cinematic Space

Similar in action to the above case of text on the visual image, the direct gaze of a filmic character onto the audience constitutes a clear disruption of the fantastic cinematic space. When a spectator is confronted and engaged by a direct gaze from a filmic character, the locus of power is destabilized: it is no longer clear who is watching whom and who is the object of whose gaze, confounding the rigid separation of subject and object categories. Thus engaged, the spectator crosses over from passive spectatorship to an unsettling interactive implication and engagement with the profilmic event, and concomitantly with the filmic medium.

On a couple of fleeting occasions in Caligari, the spectator is privy to a disturbing, complicitous direct gaze from the part of Werner Krauss’ Caligari. In Tell-Tale Heart the direct gaze, and that of the old man in particular, is a central driving conceit of disruption. In the case of the old man’s gaze in Tell-Tale Heart, the spectator, who, is thus also implicated in the old man’s gaze, is implicated in the encompassing death sentence of his gaze, which I have elaborated above.

Further Visual Implication of the Spectator in Tell-Tale Heart

To follow through on the madman’s invitation at the opening of the film for the spectator to play the role of the investigator in the case of his madness, two investigators of the law, or private “eyes,” arrive towards the end of the film. I argue
that the two investigators are allegorical for the two eyes of the spectator, through which the spectator is supposed to perform her or his own task of investigation. In a notable inversion, after the investigators finish questioning the madman, they are shown on the screen in the space of the spectator, with their backs to the camera, as the madman entertains them. The uncanny double of the pair of investigators, who move and speak in synch, in a robotic fashion, also signify the double, dialectical representations of power and agency in the film. In this capacity, they comprise a cyborg subject that is composed of both the spectator and the filmic subject, and, concomitantly, of the filmic medium.

The final scene of the film delivers a powerful visual to this end: The two dark, looming silhouettes of the investigators frame this scene, appearing as though about to engulf the image on the screen. Meanwhile, the madman is collapsed on the (now opened-up) floor by the body of the old man in an almost pieta-like pose, appearing to grieve the death of the patriarch, and so the death of patriarchal masculine subjectivity, and his own defeat. With their backs to the camera, the investigators are most explicitly in the spectator-position as the film closes. They could conceivably be the shadows of those audience members sitting in front of the spectator in the theatre. An uncanny feeling of guilt comes over the viewer, ashamed at witnessing this apparently private and poignant scene of mourning. Aligned with the shadows of the investigators
that appear as though they are about to engulf the scene of the hapless male subjectivity, the spectator is ultimately cast as the guilty one, complicit with the masses and the woman, while also dialectically in the position of the victimized masculine subjectivity as the dupe of the filmic double of reality and madness.

**Toward Re-Visioning Humanism**

The foregoing comparison of the two films is instructive in studying and expanding the inquiry into the contentious relationship between subject and object that is culturally experienced during modernization. Early horror films are designed to produce a powerful emotional response of fear, terror, and disorientation in spectators. When a spectator is in a state of terror, s/he is vulnerable and impressionable, making the early horror medium apt for stimulating cultural paradigm shifts, or at least for exploring where paradigm shifts are culturally latent.

Both films produce confusion and disorientation, and the aesthetically apparent subject-object confusion, where the sets look animate, is a powerful clue to the disruptive agency of the medium itself, even prior to the diegetic ruptures that I have examined. The diegetic ruptures that I discuss above constitute the cyborg textuality of the films: they draw the spectator’s attention to the filmic medium engaging the

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100 Fig. 11a
spectator as complicit to the diegesis, and sow the seeds of what I argue to be a re-
visioning of the politically viable human subject through cyborg subjectivity.

However, the filmic medium, especially in this time period, where movies were
frequently an event that the spectator attended (rather than *administrated* as we do
today, in our own homes), and was thus held captive to the spectacle for its duration.
In this viewing context, there is still a degree of Foucaultian biopower at work, which
is not an ideal condition for re-visioning humanism in a mode that forges new ways to
achieve political agency.
Chapter 4. Feminist Dialogism as Performative Cyborg Textuality

This chapter uses the lens of feminism to approach the challenge of re-visioning humanism in order to allow the postmodern subject political viability. Specifically, this chapter explores feminist textual tactics that emerge out of a struggle for the marginalized female subject to articulate herself as an autonomous political subject, when the available discourse is suffused with patriarchal assumptions that preclude such an existence for women. The challenges faced by the female subject within patriarchal discourse are not unlike those of the postmodern subject, who is rhetorically precluded from political agency due to the incommensurability of the material conditions of postmodernity and the enlightenment model of the politically viable human subject. Both causes require a cogent re-visioning of the conceptual orientation of the politically viable human subject. Since so much work in this respect has been done in feminism, it is an invaluable resource to my inquiry.

In this chapter, my trans-medic inquiry engages with transgressive and dialogic textual practices in two works by contemporary female poets, LR’s The Men and SJ’s Patchwork Girl.¹⁰¹ These works serve as my point of entry into the other side of the crisis examined in the previous chapter—the traumatic agent in the current chapter is

¹⁰¹ Rather than using their last names, “Robertson” and “Jackson,” I have chosen to use their initials when I refer to them in this chapter, having cited their full names in the introduction. It is too painful and ironic to have to encounter their last names over and over again in this chapter, so suffused are these surnames with the predominance patriarchal discourse, since they happen to evolve from
that of the pre-existing marginalization of women by patriarchal discourse, rather than the previous chapter’s crisis of patriarchal masculinity due to the forces of modernization. My analysis will explore the tactics through which LR and SJ distinctly and politically situate themselves and their texts as viable in spite of the patriarchal underpinnings of language. Primarily, I will look at their use of the principles of dialogic discourse as set forth by Bakhtin, principles of performativity as set forth by both Lyotard and Butler, and LR and SJ’s engagement with discourse as a material surface, which implicates the feminist heuristic of embodiment and embodied discourse, which I relate to the concepts of cyborg textuality and subjectivity as politically productive models.

Thus, using feminist rhetoric and discourse as a tool, this chapter seeks to explore another facet of the fraught relationship between subject and object in the constitution of politically viable subjectivity. This chapter envisions a more visibly productive relationship that emerges out of the practices analyzed and discussed herein, than my previous chapter.

names that indicate them to be *sous* rather than daughters of their whomever their *father* would have been. Call my choice performative and self-reflexive embodiment of my argument.
Rhetorical and Discursive Marginalization of Woman

This section functions to contextualize and historicize my adoption of feminist discourse as a heuristic for this chapter.

The woman historically occupies a marginalized place, both in society and language. Take, for example, the note in my previous footnote regarding my choice to use LR and SJ rather than “Robertson” or “Jackson”; the overwhelmingly dominant “default” recourse to masculine pronouns and signifiers when generalizing the human race or individual: “mankind,” “the race of man,” “he,” “his,” and so forth. Virginia Woolf discusses the woman as a textual object: woman is “the most discussed animal in the universe,” and this discursive objectification creates for woman a fabricated and fictive identity, writes Woolf. Simone De Beauvoir also sees the male objectification of woman as a cushion of fiction in order to facilitate dealing with reality: Historically, woman has not only been a “slave” but an “idol,” and that she is “venerated and feared.” “Thanks to [woman],” she writes, “there is a means for escaping that implacable dialectic of master and slave which has its source in the reciprocity that exists between free beings,” noting the woman’s exclusion from the category of like, and free, beings. Lyn Hejinian points to the power that lies in

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102 28, VW  
103 77-78, SdB  
104 114, SdB
discursive description, showing the impact of woman being “the most discussed animal in the universe,” in her essay, *Person and Description*:

Description, whether it is intentional or the result of ambient ideology, bounds a person’s life, whether narrowly or broadly. In another sense it likewise bounds a person, and this is a central (perhaps the classic) issue for feminism, which recognizes that traditionally women are often described but, until recently, they have very seldom been the describers. This is, of course, most clearly evident in painting, where there have been so many painted women and so few women painters.

Being an object of description without the authority to describe, a woman may feel herself to be bounded by her own appearance, a representation of her apparent person, not certain whether she is she or only a quotation. She may feel herself to have been defined from without while remaining indefinite in or as herself.105

As such, when a woman writes, it is arguable that her style must dialogize patriarchal discourse in order to reveal her voice as a woman, and speak without being objectified or dismissed.

Hejinian’s account of the situation points out the effect of a flattening of woman’s identity, as it is reduced to external surfaces, “defined from without” and
“bound by her own appearance;” or to textual surfaces, rendering woman uncertain “whether she is she or only a quotation.” It goes without saying that these are in line with the challenges that the postmodern subject faces as well, as Jameson describes it as rhetorically and spatially overwhelmed, and thus crowded out of the ability to take the “critical distance” necessary for viable political articulation. Theories of performativity, dialogism, and Haraway’s example of cyborg embodiment are thus instructive towards the goal of my inquiry—they do not seek to create space in order to achieve “critical distance.” Rather, these theories and tactics emerge out of and engage such material and conceptual “limitations” to arrive at new modes of viable political subjectivity.

Medic / Description of Texts Analyzed

SJ’s *Patchwork Girl* is a hybrid work that I interpret as part novel, part-poetry, produced in the hypertext medium. The transgressive, dialogic and cyborg work of *Patchwork Girl* occurs on a larger scale than in *The Men: Patchwork Girl* has multiple discursive layers, and thus her work is more concretely intertextual, and plays with conventions of text and how a text is put together, and the novel in particular. SJ’s *Patchwork Girl* includes citations from a variety of sources, recontextualized and dialogized in her hypertext work, including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which is the

105 206-7, LoI
primary text that SJ builds out of (the patchwork girl is SJ’s combination of Frank L. Baum’s book by the same name and Frankenstein’s monster’s never-materialized patchwork-monster wife); an imaginary diary belonging to Mary Shelley; and a variety of sections, or “chapters.”

A spatial entity, the story reads like a map of variously disjoint and connected windows of text; experienced through the spatial, surface interface of the computer screen. The “home” page of the story shows twelve windows, arranged in a nonlinear, map-like web. Aside from an introduction “her” and a title page “title page,” the map divides the narration into five main sections: “hercut,” “hercut2,” “hercut3,” “hercut4,” and “phrenology.” Each section leads to another window, also shown in the initial map, and these corresponding sections are respectively called “crazy quilt,” which contains an associative “quilt” of quotations that both comment on and narrate the story; “journal,” the imagined diary of Mary Shelley; “story,” the “main” quasi-linear narrative section; “graveyard,” which describes the origins and stories of the people whose body parts make up the patchwork girl; and “body of text,” which functions as a meta-discussion on the writing, reading, and being of the hypertext. The narrative “I” occurs in different voices, including the patchwork girl, Mary Shelley as conceived by SJ, and the personification of the text itself (which could also be

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106 Other cited sources include Frank L. Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, a hypertext handbook, work from Helene Cixous, and Deleuze and Guattari’s *One Thousand Plateaus*. 

71
construed as the voice of the patchwork girl, since the title bears her name. SJ’s voice weaves in and out of the “phrenology/body of text” section.

In addition to the complex intertextual composition of the text in terms of sections and voices, the fact that SJ has constructed her text in the hypertext medium adds a powerful and more concrete layer to the cyborg textuality of her work. As a hypertext, the work is concretized and spatialized. It is compressed into cybernetic code, and then flattened on the computer screen, and then each hypertextual text-box is a virtual surface of its own. The program that SJ used offers several view options, which each show the rhizomatic map of the hypertext story in a different way, depending on the reader’s preference. In addition, SJ incorporates drawings of the patchwork girl’s body into the work, with different parts of her body as hypertext buttons, contributing to the visual and spatial attributes of the work. The body drawings and the “hercut” appellation of the sections additionally address the objectification and fragmentation that women and their bodies are subjected to in the cultural rhetoric and gaze.

LR’s *The Men* is a short volume of poetry that that I characterize as of the school of language poetry. Language poetry is poetry that engages, plays with, and disrupts the surfaces of language and grammar. Language poetry is always-already

107 Fig. 1b

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cyborg in its awareness of and interaction with the linguistic medium. The linguistic medium is always before the reader of language poetry, since a primary convention of such poetry is non-normative use of language and grammar, in order to achieve an effect that conceptually reaches beyond and in between conventions of speech and writing. I argue that such poetry disrupts the hierarchical division between human subject and text, as it requires its reader to interactively engage with the language in the text, and more explicitly participate in the creation of meaning: it engenders a slower and less linear reading style and requires active, associative interpretation on the part of the reader. I argue that language poets reveal a practice of creative discourse that adapts to the cultural challenge of postmodernism, and helps to forge a re-visioned conception of the politically viable subjectivity. LR’s work places great emphasis on the phrase “the men,” repeating and recontextualizing it throughout.

In an essay entitled *Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis*, Hayles emphasizes SJ’s choice and use of the hypertext storyboard medium and form as central to the work. Hayles points out that the hypertext medium requires interaction with an intelligent computer to be experienced: “when we read electronic hypertexts, we do so in environments that include the computer as an active cognizer performing sophisticated acts of
interpretation and representation.” Because of the resulting “distributed cognitive environment,” Hayles writes, “electronic hypertexts initiate and demand cyborg reading practices.” Adding a dimension of performativity, Hayles adds, “To be positioned as a cyborg is inevitably in some sense to become a cyborg, so electronic hypertexts, regardless of their content, tend toward cyborg subjectivity.”

In the “phrenology/body of text” section of the hypertext, a text-window entitled “Bodies Too” offers a description of a hybrid, cyborg mode of existence, reading and writing:

[…] We are inevitably annexed to other bodies: human bodies, and bodies of knowledge. We are coupled to constructions of meaning; we are legible, partially; we are cooperative with meanings, but irreducible to any one. The form is not absolutely malleable to the intentions of the author; what may be thought is contingent on the means of expression.

This text-window engages with the challenge of the always-already marginalized subjectivity in the face of the material conditions of language and culture, conveying a hybridized compromise of expression and embodiment, nonetheless irreducible to any

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108 12, FC
109 13, FC
110 Ibid—this is where I first encountered the phrase “cyborg subjectivity,” and then I took it and ran with it for the purposes of my thesis. I am grateful/indebted to NKH for this.
111 Bodies Too, SJ (Since there are no page numbers, I cite by using the name of the text-box in SJ’s work)
one meaning. Elsewhere in the “phrenology/body of text” section, the reader encounters the text-window “She,” which performatively articulates a persistence of autonomous subjectivity amid the patchworked space and time of the material conditions of the elusive Lacanian “Real”:

To be linked to the chain of existence and events, yes, but bound by it? No. I forge my own links, I am building my own monstrous chain, and as time goes on, perhaps it will begin to resemble, rather, a web.112

Here the reader finds the material conditions of postmodernity as described by Jameson being harnessed toward a subjective articulation of history and politics. Relying on a patchworked interface of surfaces and texts to achieve articulation, SJ’s project performs and engenders postmodern subjectivity as a cyborg subjectivity: the disjoint, externalized, hybrid and mediated superficial space of the hypertext performs the inarticulable re-visioned and resilient subjectivity as it operates interactively with its material and psychic context.

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112 She, SJ
Dialogic, Performative, and Cyborg Rhetorical Tactics in Feminist Discourse

As Bakhtin puts it, “dialogic relations presuppose a language, but they do not reside within the system of a language. They are impossible among elements of a language.” With this in mind, feminist dialogic practices arguably strive not only to engage but also transcend patriarchal discourse. In an essay entitled *Irigarayan Dialogism: Play and Powerplay*, Gail Schwab speaks of women’s writing as “a textual strategy.” She cites Bauer, from his *Feminist Dialogics*, describing the feminist struggle for expression and setting forth the challenge to dialogize, refashion and rearticulate patriarchal discourse: “Because we all internalize the authoritative voice of patriarchy, we must struggle to refashion inherited social discourses into words which rearticulate intentions other than normative or disciplinary ones.” Diane Herndl, in her essay *The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic*, writes, “A central question for feminist criticism has been what happens to language if it is used ‘other-wise.’” Positing the place of woman as the place of the silenced other, Herndl presents female discourse as a subversive dialogism, which projects “a usurped language.” Herndl does not seek to forge “a truly ‘feminine’ language,” which she posits as an impossibility: “using language at all means to work within a system whose terms are

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113 117, MB  
114 65, FBD  
115 67, FBD  
116 10, FBD  

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masculine,” she writes. In Radical Writing, Peter Hitchcock reiterates the subversive mode of dialogism that shows up in feminist discourse: Analyzing Yaeger’s work, Hitchcock cites plagiarism, ventriloquism and appropriation as modes that show “how women’s writing can ‘plagiarize’ patriarchal discourse without being reducible to it.” The above discussion elaborates on the discursive foreclosure of female subjectivity, and foregrounds dialogism as an effective feminist mode of textual assertion and subversion.

As I discuss in my Literature Review, Butler offers the concept of performativity as a tactic of disidentification and self-asserting articulation, also productively enhancing awareness of the way in which normativity is constructed through reiterative performance. I argue that both dialogism and performativity allow for cyborg texts and thus cyborg subjectivities (aware of and medic-ally engaged) to emerge. Haraway’s conceptualization of the cyborg heuristic for feminist activism informs this argument, and grounds it in a more literally materialist plane of bodies, surfaces, and technology.

In my analysis, I trace dialogic, performative and cyborg practices through both LR and SJ’s texts. I argue that these practices shape and become a distinctive style in

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117 Ibid
118 17, FBD
119 98, FBD
each case, which both embodies and performs a politically viable articulation by and through the text. As such, it is critical to my inquiry to delve into and analyze these same practices and styles.

I argue that LR and SJ’s works generate unprecedented junctures in language and text, making patriarchal discourse unnatural, and (literally) monstrous to itself. SJ’s work describes the creation and life of an actual monster, after which her work is titled (the patchwork girl), thus alluding to the entire work as a monstrosity and a monster; while LR arguably makes a monster of her text through her subversion of grammatical rules and conventions. In the text of her work, SJ acknowledges monstrosity on the level of grammar in language, as generated by LR’s work:

“We have guidelines as to which arrangements are acceptable, are valid words, legible sentences, and which are typographical or grammatical errors:

“monsters.”

This quote casts non-normative use of discourse and language as monstrous, too. As I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter, embodied (textually or visually) monstrosity is commensurate with cyborg textuality, and the materialized embodiment also signifies the marginalized subject’s resilience.

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120 Bodies Too, SJ
Lisa Roberston- “The Men”

The concept of the men is elastic.

-Lisa Robertson

LR’s work is best described as both an inquiry into the status of humanism as well as a challenge to the status quo of humanism, and the gender hierarchy in particular. The most striking aspect of LR’s work in The Men is her engagement of the phrase “the men,” which she repeats over and over throughout, perpetually recontextualizing it. In this way LR hyperbolizes this repetition-and-recontextualization convention of language poetry, heightening the dialogic aspect of her work. Through its repetition of “the men,” LR’s work also parodically literalizes Herndl’s above-cited comment that “using language at all means to work within a system whose terms are masculine.” The tactic of subversive repetition is advocated in Butler’s tactic of performativity, especially insofar as it engenders disidentification, which I argue LR’s work does: repetition of “the men” renders the phrase abstract and malleable. At the same time as LR’s work parodies and emulates the “real” status of the phrase and concept of “the men” as all-important and central to discourse and life, her textual practice traumatically decontextualizes and recontextualizes it in a radically defamiliarizing way, thus bringing about the reader’s inevitable disidentification with the normative meaning and implications of “the men.”
A few pages into her text, as if responding to the anticipated question regarding the meaning of “men,” LR writes:

What we refer to as men is any
Communication we begin to perpetrate\textsuperscript{123}

LR clearly aligns “men” here with discourse, dialogue, and communication. LR employs a complicit “we,” engaging the reader, and her use of “perpetrate,” speaks to a subversive (even criminal) appropriation of discursive agency. Her inclusion of “begin to” indicates that her text and work is an opening and an invitation for readers to take and use further.

From the beginning, the reader of \textit{The Men} is met with a deliberately disorienting repetition of the word “men,” as LR opens her work with the following passage:

Men deft men mental men of loving men all men
Vile men virtuous men same men from which men
Sweet and men of mercy men such making men said
Has each man that sees it

\textsuperscript{121} 49, LR
\textsuperscript{122} 17, FBD
\textsuperscript{123} 11, LR
Cry as men to the men sensate
Conceptual recognition the men
Is about timeliness men is about
Previous palpability from which
The problematic politics adorable
And humble especially
Young men of sheepish privilege becoming
Sweet new style

In just twelve lines, the word “men” appears seventeen times, and “man” appears once. This passage performatively conveys the female voice as it strives to situate itself in language by negotiating with the ever-present “men,” which figures as the monologic hierarchy to be overcome in the work of a woman writing inside of a patriarchal discourse. The dialogic aspect of LR’s repetition of “the men” (or “men,” and “man,” as it were, in this instance) opens up potentialities of multiple trajectories of meaning as her practice of repetition recontextualizes the word “men” at every instance in her text. At the same time she exhibits a rigorous focus on and engagement with “the men,” and the variety of this phrase’s context-based meanings, implications, and applications.

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124 9, LR
In the above passage, “men” is first presented in conjunction with a stream of highly varied and frequently incommensurate descriptives: “deft,” “mental,” “loving,” “Vile,” “virtuous.” Then LR moves to “same men from which men / Sweet and men of mercy men such making men said,” moving from the term as passively described to one that begins to exhibit agency and trajectory. “Cry as men to the men” even posits an interactivity between two instances of the term “men.” “Conceptual recognition the men / Is about timeliness men is about / Previous palpability” moves to a more explanatory tone, aiding the reader in “conceptual recognition;” in understanding what is at stake conceptually in “the men;” which LR here indicates as having to do with “timeliness” and “Previous palpability,” thus aligning “men” with historicity and memory. Thus far, LR’s text diegetically dwells on the project of re-visioning humanism. I argue that the last several lines of the above-cited opening passage LR’s text moves to a more explicit assertion of her own political and subjective project:

[...] from which

The problematic politics adorable

And humble especially

Young men of sheepish privilege becoming

Sweet new style\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid
“problematic politics” implies criticism of patriarchal and hierarchal humanism, and “Young men of sheepish privilege becoming / Sweet new style” rhetorically outlines the function of LR’s project in this work: her work seeks to convert the old model of humanism, represented by “Young men of sheepish privilege” to a re-visioned humanism, here portrayed as her “Sweet new style.” Incidentally “becoming” is the first active verb of the work, becoming, as I discuss in my Literature Review, represents a productive emergent re-visioned phenomenon, via dialogism.

Within the above-discussed passage, I would like to also point out the microdialogisms at work; the interactions of the words with and amongst each other, as this is a powerful presence in LR’s work, and performs her “sweet new style” throughout. In the first line, adjectives “problematic” and “adorable,” situated on either side of “politics,” create a tension: their conventional meanings within patriarchal discourse are such that it is unnatural to place them together describing the same word. The same happens in the third line with “sheepish privilege”: the conventional associations of both words make it an unexpected phrase to encounter, causing the reader to puzzle over tone and meaning. LR exhibits a resulting tone of defiance and irony (both dialogic tones, in that they involve an ambi-valent engagement with and repudiation of their subject) from the tense interplay of
meanings. This effect is counterbalanced by the benign implications of words such as “adorable,” “humble,” and “sweet,” when these are taken on their own.

The resulting impression on the reader from this first passage is a multi-faceted reflective prism of meanings around the signifier of “men,” which leaves the reader face to face with “men” as so over-repeated, that it becomes simultaneously meaningless and pregnant with a potentiality of many different meanings. “Men” as an addressive dialogic unit becomes like an empty signifier that the reader strives to fill and imbue with meaning gathered from every recontextualization. “The Men” itself thus becomes cyborg in its resulting elasticity, due to which it includes both subjective and objective categories. One of the objective categories the “the men” becomes aligned with is its material status as a phrase consisting of two words. In a playful example, LR foregrounds this material existence of “the men”:

The
Men are enjambed.¹²⁶

Literally enjambed, “the men” is split between two lines of poetry.

In a particularly powerful moment, LR’s text not only exhibits the conceptual/concrete synthesis of “the men,” but extends the blurring of such boundaries, and brings body parts in and uses them interchangeably with discourse:

This is where I speak from the juicy mouth of a man.¹²⁷
Followed by, your name is a syllable on my face and I speak it from your own juice.\textsuperscript{128} 

The last of which is addressed to “the men.” Both examples portray LR as appropriating and usurping patriarchal discourse in order to speak: First, concretely conflating discourse and the physical body (just as her repeated usage of “the men” ultimately does to “the men”), LR portrays herself physically “speaking from the juicy mouth of a man.” “Juicy mouth of a man” comes to represent patriarchal discourse, which has been previously signified by “the men.” LR uses the body part of the mouth as both metaphor and metonymy; a fairly non-normative linguistic turn. LR disrupts the semiotic paradigm by bringing in a body part in this context, causing the reader to pause, and turn her/his awareness to the medium. In the second instance, “your name is a syllable on my face,” material words and body parts are again collided. “Your name” signifies the entity and the word “man,” which is indeed a syllable on the face of the word “woman,” which LR conflates with her own physical and embodied face. This fluidity between the human body and the material word/discourse/language speaks to the figure of the cyborg insofar as organic and inorganic matter becomes fused and collaboratively productive.

\textsuperscript{126} 17, LR  
\textsuperscript{127} 30, LR  
\textsuperscript{128} 31, LR
An additional reason for the impact of the first excerpt above is in its capacity of what Kristeva might describe as semiotically intertextual. Semiotic intertextuality refers to “the establishment and countervailing of a sign system within a social framework,” which has “the subject undergo an unsettling, questionable process,” as Kristeva puts it.\footnote{129} This entails at least two unrelated sign systems. Suddenly the poet is speaking of that which she is in the midst of doing/writing, causing the discourses of commentary and creativity collide in a dialogized heteroglossia. In the second excerpt, there is an additional level of power and semiotic play: By positing man as a syllable on her face, LR dialogically marks herself (woman) with man’s name, thus subordinating “man” to “woman” in defining “man” as a mere semiotic mark (arguably, this is one overarching effect of LR’s repetition of “the men”). “Juice” (here approximating “discourse,” “language,” or “speech”) is dialogized with “juicy” in the previous example, as the substance and content of “the juicy mouth of a man.” In an additional playful turn, thus, she is speaking man’s name back at him, addressing him from his “own juice.”

In light of this analysis, LR’s comment

[...] this

Immaculate equal

\footnote{129} 18, JK
Grows as I speak\textsuperscript{130}
gains layers of embodied signification as well. The implication is that her discourse is an “immaculate equal” to that of patriarchy or “the men.” A more cyborg and embodied reading adds the notion that LR’s work or text signifies and becomes an immaculate equal to herself. Both readings are valuable to our inquiry; the first speaking to the quest for a viable political articulation for marginal voices, the second speaking to the dialectic of materialism and embodiment in relation to dialogic and performative rhetorical tactics—an important thread in my inquiry. LR’s choice of the word “immaculate” is deliberate in its own dialogized and sedimented meanings: in the context of her utterance, it brings a strong assertiveness to her voice; at the same time it alludes to her heritage as a woman, referring to Mary’s “immaculate conception” of Jesus. Since Mary allegedly conceived without the seed of man, and LR appropriates the “juice” (or discourse) of man in order to conceive and create her work, this line really serves to underscore the agency that LR exhibits in her work, which in turn speaks to a style that stands to model a viable mode of re-visioned humanism.

\textsuperscript{130} 26, LR
Shelley Jackson- “Patchwork Girl”

SJ’s title for her work *Patchwork Girl* immediately refers to a traditionally feminine project of patchworking, linked to domesticity, mending, and creative sewing. Thus, I argue that SJ’s work dialogizes patriarchal discourse by making transgressive use of a traditionally female practice, transposing it into a textual practice.

SJ’s subversive dialogism occurs on the level of text, where she performs, by a patchwork of plagiarisms drawn from multiple texts, arriving at a concretized inter-textual project. SJ’s rupture and re-arrangement of pieces of text is parallel to LR’s rupture and re-arrangement of grammatical units, working on the larger scale, with the organizational norms of a text as her point of entry, rather than the norms of grammar and language use.

*Patchwork Girl* constitutes a dialogic, performative and embodied inquiry into the question of the situation of woman in patriarchal discourse. As indicated by the title, the primary heuristic and metaphor that literally stitches SJ’s inquiry together is that of dialogic patchwork. If we assume the postmodern subject to be an impotent fragmentation and dispersion of previously sovereign modernist subjectivity, SJ’s project of patchwork suture that constitutes and creates the subject of her text as well
as her text effectively addresses the challenge of re-visioning politically viable
subjectivity in the postmodern context, from the vantage of a feminist textual inquiry.

The following citation illustrates the analogy between patchwork and SJ’s
textual style: “I had made her writing deep into the night by candlelight, until the tiny
black letters blurred into stitches and I began to feel that I was sewing a great quilt.”131
The patchwork done by Mary Shelley, sewing together the patchwork girl of SJ’s
story, leads to the scarring that comes to signify the subjective aspect the patchwork
girl, the significance of which I will go into more depth shortly.

SJ translates the concept of suture, sewing, quilting as a metaphor for her
dialogic writing process and style into the typographic image of the dotted line:132 “The
dotted line is the best line,” she (or the personified text) writes, because “it is a
potential line, an indication of the way out of two dimensions [into a space where]
pages [can] become tunnels or towers.”133 This describes the life, depth,
expansiveness, and direction that dialogic discourse brings to a text. The “two
dimensions” could be read to signify the binary of rationality and subjectivity; of the
categories of subject and object inherent in heteronormative patriarchal discourse,
which dialogic discourse offers a cyborg route out of. The dotted line as a rhetorical

131 Written, SJ
132 Incidentally, the dotted line visually resembles both scarring and sewing, and even writing,
if one squints.
133 Dotted Line, SJ
style is a collection of discrete dialogical utterances standing in contiguity and contextualizing each other all while leaving a space of potentiality and unfinalizability in between each other. SJ further describes the dotted line as demonstrating a dialectical simultaneity of severance and connectivity.\textsuperscript{134} “It indicates a difference without cleaving apart for good what it distinguishes. / It is a permeable membrane [through which] what is separate can be brought together without ripping apart what is already joined.”\textsuperscript{135} This characterization points to a fluid and integrative approach underlying SJ’s style, consistent with the implications of the title, 	extit{Patchwork Girl}. Aligned with Herndl’s description of feminine language as “marked by process and change, by absence and shifting, by multivoicedness,”\textsuperscript{136} SJ’s dotted line metaphor and heuristic contains both absence and multivoicedness in the multiple dots, or dialogic utterances, and the spaces in between them, which are both necessary in order to compose the dotted line. The ultimate advantage of the dotted line for SJ is as follows: “a dotted line demonstrates: even what is discontinuous and in pieces can blaze a trail.”\textsuperscript{137} Thus, through the attributes of the dotted line—a potent visual rendering of dialogic discourse as a living, adaptable textuality—SJ puts forward an empowering and guiding heuristic for the re-visioning of politically viable subjectivity to allow for

\textsuperscript{134}…much like the action of sewing, where the needle must first pierce the pieces of skin or fabric in order for the thread to join them together.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid
\textsuperscript{136} 10, FBD
\textsuperscript{137} Dotted Line, SJ
the articulation of postmodern and/or female, or otherwise marginalized subjects. The use of the term “blaze” in “blaze a trail” also implies something completely new; an entry into uncharted territory, which speaks also to the mutations of mind and body that a re-visioning of humanism entails. In this capacity, the dotted line, as an embodiment of subversive feminist dialogic discourse is a style of constant becoming, to use the term as Deleuze does.

SJ’s (and Mary Shelley’s, before her) monster, a living creature composed of patchworked pieces of different bodies, is a concrete embodiment of the becoming-style of dialogic discourse: the coming-together and active dialogic interaction of different dialogic utterances (a word, a text, an identity) brings forth a new and unique dialogic being, which Deleuze and Guattari call style. In one of SJ’s possible opening passages,\textsuperscript{138} she presents us with the monster delivering a description of herself:

I am tall, and broad-shouldered enough that many take me for a man, others think me a transsexual (another feat of cut and stitch) and examine my jaw and hands for outsized bones, my throat for the tell-tale Adam’s Apple. My black hair falls down my back but does not make me girlish. Women and men alike

\textsuperscript{138} Because of the way SJ’s text is set up as a hypertext, there are several possible places to start the narrative.
mistake my gender and both are drawn to me. [...] They may be sure that I will lead them for a chase. I am never settled. [...] ¹³⁹

This particular passage has multiple levels of dialogue: First, it is addressive in tone, spoken in the first person. Second, the monster is speaking of how others perceive her and react to her, which indicates a relational, dialogic existence of how she is perceived. Patriarchal discourse does sanction a category for the monstrous being that is the patchwork girl, so those who perceive her imbue her with meanings (particularly with respect to gender) according to their paradigm: “many take me for a man, others think me a transsexual.” This is a reflection on how dialogic texts are apprehended by the world, and why their politics can be so multiple and open-ended. The fact that both men and women are drawn to her is a testament to the inclusivity and appeal of dialogic texts, since they are designed to engage and interact with. The open-ended gender identity occurs as a result of heteroglossia that is the monster’s body—composed of multiple and competing dialogic units (of flesh), all interacting and living. The patchwork girl’s taunt “I will lead them for a chase. I am never settled,” shifts the focus to the textual and hypertextual entity of Patchwork Girl: the nonlinearity and disjointedness of the hypertextual text engages the reader in an interactive pursuit of narrative and meaning, and purposely leaves the text open-ended.

¹³⁹ I am, SJ
The scars that hold SJ’s monster together most closely represent the dialogic site of becoming of resilient and cyborg critical creativity. The scars are the single thing on the monster’s body that is truly and exclusively personal her, without a history prior to the patchwork girl. The following dialogue between Mary Shelley and “her” monster elucidate the importance of the scars:

“[…] your scars not only mark a cut, they also commemorate a joining.”

“More than that,” she said. “Scar tissue does more than flaunt its strength by chronicling the assaults it has withstood. Scar tissue is new growth. And it is tougher than skin innocent of the blade.” […]140

Signifying a cut, a joining, and finally new growth, the scars of *Patchwork Girl* embody the productivity of dialogic creativity. Further, SJ writes, from the voice of the monster, “my real skeleton is made of scars […] I am most myself in the gaps between my parts.”141 Thus, the patchwork girl’s subjective skeleton as scars and gaps affirms the site of dialogic creativity as the place of identity-creation her case, which parallels the case of the woman operating in patriarchal discourse.

The concrete example of the scars provides us with a demonstration of the process of transformative becoming as deterritorialization and reterritorialization, per Deleuze and Guattari, where both the “prior” and “current” context (in this case the

140 Cut, SJ (emphasis mine)
141 Dispersed, SJ
body parts being separate and then joined) are transformed by the stitching. When body parts pulled from different grave sites are joined by patchwork and then *healed* by a scar, a completely new (and medic) entity emerges in and as scar tissue as the two different body parts are joined and healed together.
Chapter 5. The Work of Wangechi Mutu and Embodied Performativity as Resilient Cyborg Re-Visioning

Suffering is the objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is to be objectively conveyed.

-Theodor W. Adorno\textsuperscript{142}

In this chapter, I explore the medium of visual art, taking the figural collage works by Wangechi Mutu as my case study. In my analysis of Mutu’s artistic productions, the question of race comes to join the question of gender, as Mutu is a Kenyan native living in the U.S., and her works visually confront cultural assumptions about black women, including hypersexualization and objectification. The epigraph to this chapter refers to the challenge of subjective articulation when discourse is by its nature generalizing and thus objectifying—this is the quintessential problem that enlightenment humanism’s separation of subject and object perpetuates: if the subject cannot reconcile itself with the objective category, trauma inevitably ensues, as the subject constantly finds itself in situations where s/he is objectified, generalized, diagnosed, and so forth. This challenge informs the entire project of my thesis, but I bring it up here in the context of Mutu’s works to argue that her works reflect a different attitude toward the objective sphere, regarding it as medic rather than traumatic.

\textsuperscript{142} As cited by Paul Smith in Discerning the Subject.
As fixed images, Mutu’s works allow me to take my trans-medic inquiry directly into the realm of embodied performativity, as a heuristic through which to explore viable modes of political articulation for the postmodern subject. I examine the medium and composition of Mutu’s works as lenses through which to study her social critiques, visions, and visual projections of subjectivity, which shed light on current trajectories toward re-visioning politically viable subjectivity. I make the case that, while Mutu does not work in a cybernetic medium per se, as a contemporary artist working in a culture that is rhetorically and materially saturated with cybernetics, her works are reflective of the material and conceptual impacts of cybernetic culture on the rhetorical portrayal and understanding of the composition of politically viable human subjectivity. “We live in a moment of collage, of splicing, of entering one another’s space, of coexistence, and of forced coexistence,” she says, testifying to the inescapable influence of cybernetics and globalized culture on her work.143 As quoted in my literature review, Harvey writes, “If aesthetic judgment prioritizes space over time, then it follows that spatial practices and concepts can, under certain circumstances, become central to social action.”144 Aligned with this statement, my inquiry engages the spatial practices in Mutu’s works in order to glean potential trajectories for re-visioning subjectivity that is capable of viable social action.

143 VF
144 207, DH
Mutu’s works, which she makes on and with a variety media, are nevertheless consistent in their eclectic and cyborgian collage compositions: Despite the unlikely and unexpected materials and combinations, all her works yield in a figural representation of a woman’s face or full figure (with the exception of one work, “Tumors,” which I analyze). This aspect of her work makes it a particularly useful lens for exploring the possible re-visions of subjectivity, based on material conditions of postmodernity as well as appropriating objectifying or otherwise oppressive discourses into their bodies in a resilient fashion.

As such, this chapter engages embodiment as a medium, and as itself a cyborg textuality. In this way, I argue that performativity and materialism are joined in and through embodiment. Our inquiry thus far should have demonstrated that a re-visioning of humanism is required in the postmodern era, and my approach to this challenge employs Marxist and feminist theories to better understand how the politically viable human subject presently looks, and how it might look in the future.
The Case for Embodiment

The body is a central symbolic resource for cultural work.

-Anne Balsamo

If a history of bodies can be written that would not reduce all culture to this imposition of the law upon the body, then perhaps a truly specific account of bodies will be forthcoming, and desire will be understood in the context of the interrelationship between historically specific bodies.

-Judith Butler

As cited in my literature review, Hayles’ emphasis on the critical importance of embodiment is central to my inquiry. My work builds upon Hayles’ assertions, seeking to develop a mode of performing and reading the discourse and articulation of and by the body. Hayles’ posthuman vision, as discussed in my literature review, calls for a re-evaluation of what is involved in the construction of a socio-political subject, with an eye to the embodied, material phenomenology of experience. If one considers the embodied basis for discrimination, which is most evident in issues of gender, race, and physical deformity or disability, the virtual spaces that are afforded by information and cybernetic technologies present a compelling case for greater equality and democracy for the visibly marginal subject through disembodiment. However, Hayles insists on the political pitfalls of a disembodied (categorically separatist) approach to
theories of subjectivity, pointing out that a disembodied model of the human subject is actually the basis of “the liberal subject, regarded as the model of the human since the Enlightenment,” and cannot be separated from the rigidly hierarchical characteristics of that era.\textsuperscript{147} I argue that Mutu’s works show a way in which visibly marginalized subjects (an African woman in America, for example) can indeed achieve political viability through embodied performativity.

Bill Nichols and Donna Haraway engage embodiment as an important heuristic in their theoretical inquiries, each of them manifesting and exploring the interpenetration of subject and object through a material base. Their works seek to gain a fuller understanding of the human subject engaged with its current cybernetic context, and reflect a common vision of a more heterarchical and distributed, democratic political configuration.

Nichols begins his analysis with the embodied figure of the computer: “more than an object,” he writes, “it is also an icon and a metaphor that suggests new ways of thinking about ourselves and our environment, new ways of constructing images of what it means to be human and to live in a humanoid environment.”\textsuperscript{148} Thus, an icon, a metaphor, and a heuristic; more than the sum of its material parts, the computer

\textsuperscript{145} 11, AB  
\textsuperscript{146} 238, SoD  
\textsuperscript{147} xiv, PH
serves as an embodied material representation of cybernetic systems, which engender a complex interactivity of the categories of subject and object. Particularly in the case of varying degrees of artificial intelligence made possible by computers, a phenomenon that embodies the problematic and traumatic boundary between object and subject, objects appear to gain the ability to speak and interact with humans, crossing over into the category of the subject.

Nichols locates an “explosive potential” in the influence of cybernetic systems on human subjectivity and politics, which would allow “for the promotion of collectivity and affinity, for interconnectedness, systemic networking and shared decision-making.”

Nichols argues that the cyborg experience of “interactive simulations and simulated interactions” in virtual spaces, enabled by cybernetics, offer potentially liberating reconfigurations of modes of apprehending reality. Following Walter Benjamin’s example, Nichols outlines a cultural paradigm shift driven by cybernetic systems, arriving at a dynamic and heterarchical phenomenology of

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148 121, BN
149 122, BN
150 I would like to take a moment here to note that in Bill Nichols’ article, The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems, which explicitly draws upon Walter Benjamin’s The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Nichols cites Benjamin’s discussion of montage as a new cultural phenomenon, enabled by photography and videography, that offers a new way of looking at things, specifically in terms of empowering the working class into envisioning a different (and better) political configuration. Nichols offers his argument about the interactivity of cybernetic systems as potentially politically empowering, citing the similar work/political potential of montage and interactive cyborg
experienced reality, ultimately affecting the subject’s very experience of her/himself in the social fabric.

In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway directly engages the embodied figure of the cyborg. She introduces the cyborg as a socio-political tool and heuristic, and brings it to the level of a new foundational mythology: “My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”\(^{151}\) As a critical essay that seeks to arrive at an effective mode of political articulation for feminists, Haraway’s manifesto engages with the fundamental challenge of integrating a vast diversity of subjective specificity of experience among women around the world into a politically viable and articulable discourse of feminist politics, which has a history of being chronically exclusive and overly generalizing. She describes the cyborg as “wary of holism, but needy for connection,” conveying the sticky, inter-related issues of collective cohesion versus discursive objectification that need to be reckoned with in any social agenda.\(^{152}\)

The incommensurability of experience and discourse parallels this challenge. The two seemingly incommensurate categories correspond respectively to Adorno’s “suffering” subject’s (from the epigraph to this chapter) most subjective experience,

\[^{151}\ 155, \text{DH}\]
and the inevitable objective expression of the subject’s most subjective experience through discourse. In Adorno’s articulation of this quandary, the transgression of the objective sphere into the subjective is a source of trauma and suffering for the subject. The moment of articulation is the primary liminal challenge central to both social action and simple discursive expression. As historiographer Hayden White points out, the narrative form has been the cultural staple (cross-cultural, as White argues) form used to transmit and preserve experiences and experienced reality for all of recorded history. Narrative as a “moment of articulation,” however, dwells in the liminal space between fiction and reality, necessarily compromising the authenticity of experienced reality. Interactive culture fostered by interactive technology (cybernetics) and virtual spaces, arguably offers a more viable, sustainable and recordable, interactivity that could result in a more authentic realism. This kind of realism necessarily entails cyborg collaboration, between human and machine. As such, Haraway’s cyborg attempts to bridge the incommensurability between experience and expression, or narration, through an interactivity that is performatively embodied.

Haraway embraces and acknowledges the traumatic aspect of objectification (which is dramatically heightened for visibly marginal subjectivities, of marginal race or gender). Her work advocates the explicit performance of this transgressed and

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152 152, DH

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transgressible boundary as a medium for political articulation via the figure of the cyborg. To this end, Haraway describes the cyborg as a creature of post-traumatic regeneration, citing the example of the salamander to illustrate this aspect of the ontology of the cyborg being:

For salamanders, regeneration after injury, such as the loss of a limb, involves regrowth of structure and restoration of function with the constant possibility of twinning or other odd topographical productions at the site of former injury. The regrown limb can be monstrous, duplicated, potent. We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration.153

The cyborg heuristic thus also signifies regenerative resilience, advocating a pragmatic expansion of one’s body of experience and one’s embodied experience—of one’s body as self—to its surrounding environment, and its surrounding technologies in particular. Here, the cyborg is an embodied representation of an innovative political approach, with a vision of greater understanding of the authenticity of the multiplicity of experienced reality.

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153 181, DH

103
Reading Performative Embodiment in Mutu

Mutu’s unsettling and intensely beautiful visual works reveal bodies and embodiment to be of primary concern. Mutu cites choreographers Pina Bausch and Bill T. Jones among her inspirations: “They’re people who use the body as a language [...] Nonverbal, visual means of communicating ideas I care about.” She also nods to scientists, environmentalists, and feminist activists among her influences.\textsuperscript{154,155} Grounded in collage and photomontage,\textsuperscript{156} Mutu’s technique exhibits a cyborg sensibility in its recombinant and monstrous process and results: She composes her humanoid figures out of eclectic and unlikely combinations, including disparate body parts of different scales, and machine and animal parts. Her chosen collage materials “are taken from sources such as fashion magazines, anthropology and botany texts, pornography, and books on African arts, crafts, and traditions.”\textsuperscript{157} A prominent theme in her work, especially appropriate to my trans-medical inquiry, is that of medicine and

\textsuperscript{154} GH
\textsuperscript{155} NB: If you could look through the pictures I have selected at this point it would help guide the reading at this point.
\textsuperscript{156} Collage and photomontage are techniques used by high modernist artists such as Hannah Hoch. As such, I take a moment here to re-emphasize that my use of the terms “modern” and “postmodern” is not centered around a temporal and periodizing, but rather a conceptual and political orientation. Albeit politics and historical context are interconnected, and this is also a central support of my argument; the rhetoric of “modern” and “postmodern” eras is inherently problematic in the very semiotics and etymology of the terms, which in and of themselves inhere a particular orientation to time and history. As I mention earlier as well, the terms “modern” and “postmodern” are co-constituting, and thus also dialectically present within each other.

\textsuperscript{157} VF
pathology, “including pictures of prosthetics, transplant operations, plastic surgery, and amputations,” with a particular series of works done on archaic found medical images of uterine pathologies. Mutu freely embellishes and decorates her works with paint, ink, drawing and other materials including packing tape, fur, pearls, fabric, and glitter, ultimately producing in each work a cohesive and powerful, striking figure.\footnote{Ibid}

Herself a visibly marginalized subject, as a woman and immigrant African American, Mutu’s works stem from and engage with issues of visible marginalization, trauma, and mutant resilience in the figures that she creates. Feminism, Africa, resistance to hierarchy, objectification and pathologization are all strong political themes in her work. Two current categories of her work include full-body figures composed on Mylar and a series of faces/heads composed on pages from an old, found medical textbook, specifically concerning uterine pathologies. Both material bases for her creations hold important formal significance.

\footnote{A fairly obvious comparison and influence cited by critics for Mutu’s work comes from the work of German Dadaist figurative feminist collage artist Hannah Hoch. Others have also compared Mutu’s striking and expressive figures to Egon Schiele’s more “realistic” expressionist human nudes, testifying to a tense generic liminality between figurative and collage that Mutu’s works embody—cyborg in their cyborgness. (PGG, SSF)}
Set 1: Uterine Pathologies

Mutu builds this set of works around found textbook drawings of cross-sections of ailing uteruses. Mutu’s choice of material base of the medical textbook pages concerning uterine pathologies is significant on multiple levels, beginning with the uterus being a defining element of the visibly marginal subject of the woman. By choosing this base for her work, Mutu plays with and challenges the question of visible marginalization, since uterine pathologies are normally externally invisible, forcing this frequently unnoticed pathology into the externally visible field. By creating her works on top of these texts that distinctly pathologize the uterus, central to femininity, and imply a hierarchical and standardized approach to medicine and women, Mutu performs and embodies subversive dialogic textuality.

In a politically charged gesture, Mutu integrates collaged figures of African-American females’ faces, including the occasional other body part, into images of unhealthy and deformed uteruses, variously afflicted with tumors, catarrhs, fibroids, and infections. By placing figures of the faces of African American females (visibly marginalized) and uterine pathologies (invisible pathologies) together, these works play with issues of visible trauma, challenging the viewer to consider the largely invisible socially inflicted traumas on the visibly marginalized African American
woman. Additionally, the anthropomorphic impact imbues the images with ambivalence: they are both monstrous, and terrifying in their potential agency; at the same time, these anthropomorphized uteruses-become-embellished and ambiguously beautiful female faces allude to currency of the image of the female face as a beautiful and/or erotic object to be gazed upon. This ambivalence is central to the potential articulative power of Mutu’s works.

In this series, Mutu’s visual practice also recuperates the power and dignity of African-American women while manifestly expressing their socio-culturally inflicted trauma. The defiant, provocative, and vibrantly enticing appearance and energy of the physiognomies that Mutu produces in these pieces additionally produces a far-reaching challenge to cultural, social, and rhetorical assumptions that trauma and pathology necessarily constitute some kind of defect or limitation. This aspect of Mutu’s work is particularly aligned with Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, where she describes the cyborg as a figure that embraces and draws potency from trauma and imperfections.

**Set 2: Works on Mylar**

Mutu’s use of Mylar as a surface for her full-body figures addresses the theme of resilience in her work. An incredibly resilient industrial polyester film, Mylar is commercially used for electromagnetic and extreme temperature insulation, in

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160 Figs. 1c-3c
spacecrafts and audio equipment, and for archival purposes, among others. Noted for its high tensile strength and longevity, Mylar is valued for its chemical and dimensional stability as well as its optical transparency, its gas, and aroma barrier properties. Thus, the particular choice of Mylar as a medium for her works speaks of a deep and thoroughgoing resilience both in and of her works. An added aesthetic effect of using the Mylar is the mottled and morphic effects that Mutu achieves with the ink and acrylic, when painted on the nonporous Mylar surface. These have a visual effect of mutant and mottled “exoskeletal” skins that communicate a cyborgian mutant resilience and healing-over, as discussed in detail by Tracy Murinik:

Mutu has over the years conjured and assembled her own futuristic army of cyborg women. These “warrior girls”, as she calls them, are hybrid, mutated/mutating, strong adaptive beings who in a single breath appear to both confirm and dispel any or all stereotypes that they infer and (literally) embody. […] They are carefully designed futuristic organisms, women that have evolved in every way required to preserve and protect themselves, physically, sexually, culturally.

[…] each potential weakness […] is integrated into a show of strength and revision. Mutu’s creations may bare the scarred evidence of their victim selves,
but they seem to declare that they can beat anything at its own game, like an
antidote.\textsuperscript{161}

Painted and composed on Mylar, Mutu’s figural works multiply convey a defiant
presence that is “here to stay,” permanently preserved by and on this incredible
material base. Her work on Mylar entitled “You tried so hard to make us away”\textsuperscript{162}
explicitly expresses this kind of attitude, both in its title and in its representation,
showing a humanoid female on a humanoid steed, with many “spores” of
representation in the air/on the Mylar around the figure, speaking to a mutant and
pathologic resilience. Notably, these “spores” include what looks to be one woman’s
leg and arm apiece, with the leg frequently wearing a red pump, and the two
appendages are joined by what appears to be a dark tuft or mass of hair, which could
be signifying pubic hair. These “spores” are subversively performative of
hypersexualized femininity in a way that Butler would have advocated. In an excerpt
from \textit{Feminists Theorize the Political}, where Butler positions performativity as
rhetorical deconstruction, she writes:

> To deconstruct the concept of matter or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse
either term. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them,
to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the

\textsuperscript{161}\textit{TM}
\textsuperscript{162}\textit{Fig. 4c}
contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power.\textsuperscript{163}

In the spores of above-described work, in the cutout body parts that compose some of these spores, and that are ubiquitous throughout Mutu’s works, and also arguably in the collectivity that makes up her artistic works, I argue that she deconstructs, reiterates, embodies and performs the hypersexualization, othering, and objectification of women in a subversive way. The units of performativity are de- and re-territorialized in Deleuzian recontextualizations, and the signifiers of abjection are medic-ally transformed into subversively re-appropriated units of political articulation.

In an untitled work\textsuperscript{164} done in ink, acrylic, photocollage and contact paper on Mylar, we encounter a defiant, bionic female figure, her body adorned in mottled color and painted “exoskeletal armor,” her skirt reminiscent of a traditional African grass skirt, and mechanical wheels embedded in her body and protruding into a futuristic, alien-looking headdress. On a second look, the figure also appears to be wearing medieval armor.\textsuperscript{165} The most unsettling thing about this woman is her bionic arms, which are composed of motorcycle wheel images and other machine-looking parts,

\textsuperscript{163} 17, FTP (emphasis mine)
\textsuperscript{164} Fig. 5c
\textsuperscript{165} This second look speaks to the multiple potential readings that Mutu’s works foster, since my partner’s first reaction was that the figure looked like Shiva, or some sort of Indian god/dess, and the eyes on he figure are particularly reminiscent of Egyptian art.
both ending in a sharp, dangerous-looking point. Despite the apparent trauma of having lost her forearms and hands, the motorcycle wheels and metal parts that appear in their place look unsettlingly natural on her figure. The sharp prostheses in place of the figure’s hands, reminiscent of insect legs or crab claws, (bird-like posture) also demonstrate a combative, powerful and dangerous cyborg regeneration.

She appears frozen in a powerful, defiant pose, as if in the midst of a dance, with her face turned upwards, her tongue pointing at the sky, one arm pointing upwards, and the other to the earth. The figure’s sharp tongue and arms pointing are highly expressive, indicating an incisive and embodied nonverbal communication and potency. By not giving this piece a title, Mutu has left it to articulate itself in its embodied performativity, with a legible message of sharpness, resilience, and survival. In a 2006 interview, Mutu explains the performative embodied narratives of her figures: “All of their history is written upon their bodies and in their hair. It’s very clear where they’ve been. Some of them are missing parts, or have gained a new a part, be it an animal part or a machine part, as they’ve gone along.”

Mutu has given the above-discussed bionic untitled figure a luminous glow, setting her off with a halo of light against a darker background, giving her a surreal and goddess-like air (Mutu actually refers to her figures as goddesses). The end result

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166 Mutu uses motorcycle parts and wheels frequently in her figures, quite possibly representing freedom, independence and mobility, modernity, and machinic intelligence.
impression of her figure is otherworldly, mobile, in motion, and dangerous. Grotesquely entrancing, defiant and beautiful, bearing scars, and embracing them as potent ornaments and artifacts, “These are images of triumph and transgression,” says Mutu, “They’re very contemporary even though they have archaic artifacts attached to them too and a vision of what can happen if we survive.”

In a work entitled “She’s Egungun Again” we are met with a dazzlingly festive and decked-out figure, with multicolored feathers and fur, though there is a sinister air of disease about her; like beautiful decay, signified by a fluorescent and fluffy bacterial or viral spore, in addition to what appear to be splatters of blood on the background of the painting. In “She’s Engungun Again,” we find body parts—female legs in particular—collaged all over the body in different arrangements, actually making up the face and then even making a tail for the figure. Thus, in this work, again there is a performative embodiment of deconstruction and reappropriation of culturally oppressive fixations regarding female bodies. This unusual collage technique is also found in her uterine works, as well as in “Naughty Fruits of my Evil

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167 GT
168 Ibid
169 Fig. 6c
170 David Hatcher also attributes to this image the shape of Africa, and an allusion to the AIDS epidemic. (PGG)
Labors.”\textsuperscript{171} The shifting of scale and composition speaks of the cellular level, as her emphasis on pathology and cancer in particular seems to convey, with multiplication and mutation as central conceits. There is an element of the mutant cell gone haywire in this visual repetition of legs, perhaps a social commentary articulating that the fetishization of legs, for instance, has gotten out of hand.

In “Tumors”\textsuperscript{172} from her tumor series, we encounter a spherical mass, reminiscent of a cell under a microscope, with tendrils coming off of it as if it were a pathogenic microbe. The sphere is also enmeshed with body parts (again, mostly women’s legs) and machine and animal parts in a chaotic and apocalyptic fashion. One cannot be sure whether this is a post-apocalyptic image, or whether this is the initial atom, awaiting the big bang of the beginning of the universe. The ambivalence of the image is also marked by the ambivalent cultural valence of the female body parts in their new contexts. Marked by resilience, Mutu’s works certainly reflect this regenerative aspect of cyborg performance.

Art critic David Hatcher argues, “she invests heavily in an aesthetic play that neither disowns nor can be stripped down to pure political truths.” Hatcher holds that Mutu’s works do not presume to outline a goal-oriented political agenda—a prominent feature of the works of her Dadaist predecessors. Rather, Hatcher locates the strongest

\textsuperscript{171} Fig. 7c
\textsuperscript{172} Fig. 8c
point of her works in their melancholic quality, speaking to “her capacity to phrase their evocations of contemporary suffering and trauma so beautifully.”

Hatcher’s reading seems to stand apart from that of other critics in his de-emphasizing of the political in favor of the aesthetic achievement. By virtue of their ambiguity, and the power of their aesthetic appeal, Mutu’s politics stand to be just as, if not more, powerful than if they were explicit. “I see these goddesses as critiques that are very much embedded in the problematic itself. So some of them have issues that we haven’t broken through, but they're also sincere about that and still strong.”

She does not claim to speak for or even be able to verbally articulate all of that which lies in the bodies of her figures.

**Implications for a Re-Visioned Humanism**

Hayles writes, “I view the present moment as a critical juncture when interventions might be made to keep disembodiment from being rewritten, once again, into prevailing concepts of subjectivity.”

She adds, “Of course, this is not necessarily what the posthuman will mean—only what it can mean if certain strands among its complex seriations are highlighted and combined to create a vision of the

\[173\]
PGG

\[174\]
GT

\[175\]
5, PH

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human that sees the posthuman as leverage to avoid reinscribing and thus repeating some mistakes of the past.\footnote{288, PH 177 LH}

Through figural and visual performance and being, Wangeci Mutu’s works carry in them the kind of politics of a new humanism of embodied, cyborg witnessing, enacting distributed cognition by \textit{themselves} interacting dynamically with their viewers, challenging the viewers to a radically different perception of themselves and those around them—of what is human. The striking figures embed themselves into one’s consciousness, hauntingly affecting one’s views of the constitution of the human figure, and thus the human subject, and thereby humanism. As Hejinian puts it in her work \textit{Continuing Against Closure}:

\begin{quote}
I would argue that one of the functions of art is to bring dreams and other works of the imagination into the space of appearance.

Reality is that which is, or can be, shared with other human beings, and it is to be found in spaces of appearance, places where things happen, where things do their thing.\footnote{LH}
\end{quote}

Going back to our initial discussion of virtual spaces and their effects on embodiment, Hejinian’s statement seems to support virtual spaces of appearance nonetheless, affirming the importance of phenomenological approaches to realism, which are in turn
suited to the embodied conception of the posthuman and distributed modes of cognition and subjectivity. The embodied and performative figures such as encountered in the space of appearane of Mutu’s works bring the storyteller and the story together into a duplicable but unrepeatable phenomenological, simultaneously inter- and intra-subjective, experience. The “space of appearance” allows visual or figural expression to circumvent the quandary of discourse, as discussed with regards to Adorno and Haraway, privileging works such as Mutu’s figures toward viable articulation.

Ultimately, Mutu’s works challenge certain established social constructions of what blackness and femaleness are. Her creatures bear marks of injury, and show potent regeneration through a dynamic and aggregative ecological splicing, in line with Hayles’ comment that “the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to depend on the splice rather than be imperiled by it.”178 Mutu’s awareness of the cellular level indicates a coherence with Hayles’ theory of distributed cognition and subjectivity: The whole in interactive parts is what makes the being, particularly when the pieces are so disjoint and disparate, joined by mottled pelts and painted armor. A different kind of politics is expressed in her figures, emerging out of the trauma of social marginalization, and offering a new, heterarchical ontology for the politically viable subjectivity. The question now remains whether and how a cyborg interactivity
can actually achieve political means. Is it possible to performatively embody experience and phenomenology in a way that will be understood by a large enough audience? In this atomized culture, though, does the size of the audience matter, as long as there is one? What political clout can a Hayles-ian reading of Mutu wield?

The new humanism that my inquiry seeks to define, calling it cyborg textuality/cyborg subjectivity, requires radical insight into truths that traumatize the contrived holism and segregation that is the cancer of conservative thought, counteracting the trauma that conservatism inflicts upon real humans (marginalized by conservative thought).

\footnote{290, PH}
Chapter 6. Conclusion

Concluding Reflections

This project began as an exploration of artistic productions that challenge and subvert normative grammars of articulation, driven by a love of subversive texts and cultural productions. In the course of my research and analysis, I came to understand that beneath this love is an urgency to engage with and revise the tacit cultural agreement upon the enlightenment model of humanism. It is at this point also that I came to understand why the theorists who appear in my literature review struck such a chord with me. My primary point of dispute with enlightenment humanism is the rigid and hierarchical separation of subjects, and the hierarchical orientation of subjects to their material conditions. I have located this issue rhetorically as a rigid and hierarchical separation of subject and object categories, which I have argued to be an agent of cultural and subjective trauma.

The trans-medic approach that I have chosen mirrors in its structure a resistance to monolithic ways of being in the world. As such, my approach in this inquiry has been flexible and medi/c-ally fluid, to counteract any sort of rigid, hierarchical ways of thinking. I have situated my project of re-visioning humanism as re-visioning the constitution of the politically viable subject, and specifically in relation to the material conditions of postmodernity. Marxism and feminism have served as primary
heuristics in my medic analytical approach, aimed towards theorizing ways in which a conscious and non-hierarchical relationship to material and objective categories can be channeled for such a re-visioning, as well as for the viable political articulation of previously marginalized and objectified subjects.

The structure of my inquiry is also informed by discourses of modernism and postmodernism, and the complex, dialectical relationship between the two categories of art, culture, and economics. I engage these cultural categories inasmuch as they engage and variously challenge the enlightenment view of subjectivity and politics.

The trans-medic movement from and between the works that I analyze has allowed me to engage with the media of silent film, the expressionist aesthetic, language poetry, the hypertext medium, collage visual art. Covering such a breadth of materially reflexive (cyborg) works has enabled me to analyze and theorize politically productive interactions of human subjects with their material conditions as they relate to the political context of modernism in crisis, of the question of feminine textuality, and the politics of race, globalization, and cybertecture. These political contexts are critical to my project.

My inquiry has cathed itself around the figure of the cyborg, defining cyborg textuality and cyborg subjectivity as particular modes of apprehending one’s political and material contexts. Cyborg textuality and subjectivity are keenly aware of and
interactive with material contexts and objective categories, and thus also with the sites of pathology and trauma as engendered by the enlightenment mode of rigid and hierarchical segregation. The cyborg heuristic is one that has a flattened and panoramic visual approach to the world. The cyborg is also appropriate inasmuch as it represents a resistance to gendered subjectivity, and has been circulating in the discourse of gender and feminist theory as such. As I have mentioned, the cyborg is a conceptual conceit, challenging the contrived dichotomy of subject and object categories in the composition of the conceptual apprehension of human subjectivity, and specifically politically viable human subjectivity.

**Political Implications**

The pope’s recent speech to the United Nations had a central message of a need for a project of universal human rights. His talk touched on the issues of cultural contextualization of such rights. I thought to myself, if one’s conception of the human subject depends on a hierarchical segregation of subject and object categories, how are we ever actually going to get away for the chronic marginalization, objectification, and traumatization of human subjects?? This reaffirmed to me that it is absolutely critical to appropriately re-vision the politically viable human subject, since without an appropriately theorized and re-visioned subject, the inception and institution of

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179 The photography of Andreas Gursky is actually a great representation of what I mean by this.
“universal human rights” will not have too much of an impact on the cultural status quo.

If there were a political mission to this project, it would be to empower subjects toward cyborg subjectivity, and ideally, via cyborg subjectivity, to achieve viable political articulation as citizen cyborg subjects. I consider this work to be an important contribution to ongoing conversations about subjectivity, political agency, gender and media in cultural studies. In particular, I seek to take the cyborg to a conceptual and metaphorical level as an important lens through which to examine the categories that are culturally allowed to participate in cognition and subjectivity, versus those that actually do participate, playing a critical role, albeit in some contexts and invisible and unacknowledged role. Such a re-visioning would open the door to a perhaps “more fully human,” to re-cite Jameson, and humane culture—without the traumatic scission of subject and object categories, and driven by an interactive and collaborative rather than hierarchical philosophy of the order of things.

Underlying this political mission is a strong commitment to minority rights and a keen interest in disability studies. Rather than a modernist-skeuomorph of postmodern culture that persists in making unreasonable demands on it subjects to adhere to an abstract ideal model of the human, my argument makes a case for arriving

\[\text{180 As I see it.}\]
at a more truly (and thus perhaps “more fully human”) postmodern culture that allows unaccountable and various unrepeatable of moments of textual and subjective encounters and interactions to constitute its political fabric. This would entail a more reader-ly culture, a culture of curiosity-driven engagement with subjects and texts alike; a culture that operates via inductive rather than deductive reasoning, allowing emergent intelligence to manifest itself in a cyborg fashion. Thus, any and all human subjects ought to be permitted full viability, particularly in a culture where cybernetics have led to a massive atomization of emergent and complexly networked affinity groups, where attempting to regulate and implement a concept of the ideal human subject becomes an increasing impossibility. Rather than bemoan this impossibility (or perceive it as an agent of terror or trauma), it is time to embrace it as an opportunity to gain a more broad and cyber-ian understanding of the dynamically interactive workings of culture and subjectivity.

As Hayles puts it, “I view the present moment as a critical juncture when interventions might be made to keep disembodiment from being rewritten, once again, into prevailing concepts of subjectivity.”¹⁸¹ A guiding methodology that my inquiry advocates, to this end, is a constant awareness of and engagement of with material conditions and media. To return to Hayles’ text, she writes, and I concur:

¹⁸¹ 5, PH

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Of course, this is not necessarily what the posthuman will mean—only what it can mean if certain strands among its complex seriations are highlighted and combined to create a vision of the human that uses the posthuman as leverage to avoid reinscribing and thus repeating some mistakes of the past. 182

The fact that my vision is not one that will emerge through passivity stands in itself as a call to active engagement and participation in the cyborg re-visioning of humanism through an inquisitive and reader-ly approach to culture and subjectivity.

**Future Limbs, Further Lumpy Growths**

Subjectivity is a social, relational and a cyborg phenomenon. Thus, all kinds of boundaries and relationships need to continually be explored and challenged in the quest for a re-visioned understanding of the politically viable subjectivity. Popular culture, art, fashion, evolving media and technologies, trends, and epidemics are all critically important phenomena that can be explored and problematized in terms of how they relate to and shape a culture’s understanding of the politically viable human subject. They can each be appended to the concept of human subjectivity in cyborg fashion as a method of cultural research. Haraway’s recent inquiry into the relationship between humans and their companion animals is one such important example. 183

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182 288, PH
183 *The Companion Species Manifesto*
A recent exhibit at New York City’s Museum of Modern art called “Design and the Elastic Mind” explores the productive inventiveness that emerges when artists, scientists and designers all trans-medically, and cyborg-ically collaborate. The exhibit particularly engages the practical overlap between design and science, looking at the powerful cultural implications of the engagement of molecular biology, nanotechnology, biological and cyborg mutations and representations, and so forth.\textsuperscript{184} There was an overall emphasis on medic applications insofar as the work presented were driven by either a concern for the mutations and ecosystems that need to be developed to ensure optimal survival in our cultural and material conditions.

In my own research, I think it would be particularly fruitful to engage and examine the cultural phenomenon of Autism, and the diagnostic rhetoric surrounding it, as reflecting an important challenge to long-standing rhetorical conceptualizations of human nature, since affect and communication are cast as a primary challenge for the autistic subject. Current research having to do with the relationship of autistic subjects to animals and computers/cybernetic contexts is particularly aligned with my current project, and may be productively theorized as such.

Another important appendage to my inquiry would be one that dwells on the cultural epidemic of eating disorders, since the eating disordered body is a richly problematic intersection of subject and object categories. Also, the eating disorder

\textsuperscript{184} In truth, it sort of felt like a mass 505-project compendium.
phenomenon is one that is in my view a dystopic hyperbole of enlightenment humanism, and the crisis exhibited by the eating disordered body is an example of criticism that is performative and embodied.
In this original drawing by Hermann Warm for the set of Caligari (including the poster warning of the murder of the town clerk on the left), we see the curving and angular lines used to depict the street, looking as if they could come to life at any moment.
In this still from the film, where Cesare has kidnapped [the girl], the characters look literally drawn in as part of the cityscape. The question of who is “really” animate is one that disturbs (and brings the question of the machine into the picture).\footnote{The figures of Caligari and Cesare are particularly stylized, and thus closer to looking like drawings themselves. This is appropriate because they are the diegetic elements of terror.}
Gold, I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture — a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so, by degrees — very gradually — I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

You fancy me mad? — Madmen know well who

Fig. 3a:
FIG. 4a:
FIG. 5a:
FIG. 6a:

FIG. 7a:
FIG. 8a:
FIG. 9a:
FIG. 10a:
FIG. 11a:
CHAPTER 4

FIG. 1b:iii
CHAPTER 5

FIG 1c:iv
FIG. 3c:
FIG. 4c:
FIG. 5c: vi
FIG. 6c:
FIG. 7c:
FIG. 8c:
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\[\text{\textsuperscript{i}}\] Image taken from http://cinema.expressionnisme.bifi.fr/img/expo/zoom/warm-caligari.jpg
\[\text{\textsuperscript{ii}}\] Figs. 2a-11a are stills from the films analyzed, reproduced here in accordance with Fair Use.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{iii}}\] This image is a screen shot from the hypertext.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{iv}}\] Images 1c-3c are taken from the Saatchi Gallery website: http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/wangechi_mutu.htm.

\*\* Images 5c-8c taken from the Sikkema Jenkins & Co. gallery website: http://www.sikkemajenkinsco.com/wangechimutu.html