

(IN)VISIBLE GENERATIONS: ANARCHIST TECHNOLOGIES AND EMBODIED
RESISTANCE

by

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“Never believe that a smooth surface will suffice to save us.”

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

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Abstract

This project investigates the employment of new media technologies toward anarchistic revolutionary purposes in three postmodern texts: Williams S. Burroughs's *Nova Trilogy*, Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, and Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*. Spanning over three decades, these texts examine the continuous need for anarchist organizations to develop new and generative practices of resistant tactics against authoritarian hegemonic forces in order to remain relevant. This thesis explores how media technologies are used by these anarchist groups in order to break both the body and technology out of instrumentalizing purposes by apparatuses of control. In developing new embodiments that exist beyond the categorizations of power and authority, these authors demonstrate ways in which anarchist organizations are able to subvert the increasingly networked machinations of control and create potential embodied sites of resistance outside the realm of domination.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The interrelationship between embodiment, technology, and political action is a fascinating and complicated one, and yet, all too often now, these three concepts are reduced to their simplest terms. Fredric Jameson argues that

technology may well serve as an adequate shorthand to designate that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery – an alienated power, what Sartre calls the counterfinality of the practico-inert, which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis. (35)

Among Jameson's major influences is Herbert Marcuse, who, in his landmark sociopolitical work *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), argues that technologies in late-capitalist societies merely serve to "superimpose upon the individual ... the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (5). And yet, Marcuse opens his book with the remark that "essentially, the power of the machine is only the stored-up and projected power of man. ... it becomes the *potential* basis of a new freedom for man" (3). Media are thus considered both implements of authoritarian control and a potential means of resisting that control, and my thesis initially sought to discover the "innate" state of such technologies. Yet I soon realized that there can be no definitive answer, because it is the wrong question to ask. The focus, then, is not whether media are inherently authoritarian or anti-authoritarian, but rather why society often tends to view technologies in this fashion. I argue that the answer to this question is ultimately one of

embodiment: hegemonic forces seek to inscribe upon the human body what is and what is not human — in essence, defining and limiting the body and thus the full extent of human potential. The goal of anti-authoritarian politics, then, is to collapse this boundary, incorporating media technologies into new and generative subjectivities. If we stop envisioning media as a tool of ideology, but rather as an essential part of the human body, then revolutionary acts are not about gaining control of a weapon to use against hegemony, but reconstituting the body. By garnering a new understanding of the relationship between technology and embodiment, it is possible to rescue them both from ideological instrumentality, creating an ever-evolving and shifting network of embodiments not contingent on concrete identity formation.

In examining the interplay of technology and embodiment, I turn to literary depictions of anarchism. Not only is anarchism an exemplar of anti-hegemonic politics, but also its resistance to domination is closely linked to struggles over media control. Indeed, anarchist societies were frequently slotted by the mass media into marginal positions. In his investigation of nineteenth century anarchist movements and their relationship to public space, Arthur Redding claims that the anarchist were viewed as “the figure of the unspeakable other, [who] embodied the repressed and menacing void at the center of the text, an abyss against which modern textuality defined itself” (25). For Redding, anarchism was part of a dialectical equation of society, the antithetical valuation of destruction and violation. Redding points out how newspapers were essential in this approach, wherein the anarchist became one of two paradoxical formulations – “either a fringe (and terroristic) minority, or a boobish majority — a ‘mobocracy’ — at least in the public imagination” (74). Resistance is thus effectively contained when a centralized

media technology is able to fully determine the anarchist in the position of nihilistic terrorist. Yet the appearance of new media technologies in the decades following the Second World War thoroughly changed this relationship. Unlike the print media of newspapers, post-War media opened up new relations between technology and the body. These new models of media allowed anarchist groups to affect resistance to control by crafting new subjectivities from these embodiments. Each of the texts I examine in this project — William S. Burroughs’s *Nova Trilogy* (1961-1967), Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland* (1990), and Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles* (1994-2000) — depicts anarchists who integrate with their respective technologies to establish embodied subjectivities beyond the reductive scope of hegemonic forces. It is only at this juncture of new bodily possibilities that true political resistance can occur.

Marshall McLuhan best elaborates this idea, linking electric media technology to the central nervous system (*Media* 34). McLuhan’s theoretical approach to media technologies forms a foundational aspect of my thesis. McLuhan’s most famous text, *Understanding Media* (1964), opens with the claim that Western culture is “long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control” (7). McLuhan here refers to society’s fascination with a technology’s content, rather than the technology itself. In fact, his opening chapter castigates then-RCA chairman David Sarnoff for his comment: that “[t]he products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determine their value” (11). According to McLuhan, this “is the voice of the current somnambulism” (11). This statement, which views technology as instrumental, “ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a

new technical form” (11). McLuhan elaborates on this idea in the book’s fourth chapter, “The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis,” wherein he offers a radical re-reading of the myth of Narcissus. He argues: “[t]he youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by the mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image” (41).

McLuhan uses this example as a synecdoche for humanity’s continued fascination with new media technologies leading to a continual re-enactment of the Narcissus myth, which McLuhan notes has its origins in “the Greek word *narcosis*, or numbness” (41). In other words, this initial misrecognition of technologies as an extension of ourselves for something disconnected and “other” is a site of significant anxiety. McLuhan refers to this as “autoamputation” (42), a process by which our central nervous system numbs the immediate pain of the shifting world. McLuhan refers to such technological changes as “amplifications” of the body, and the only way to understand this distressing shift is “through numbness or blocking of perception” (43). The body, then, cannot accept these radical changes without shock, and the only recourse is the othering of technology.

Adopting medical metaphors, McLuhan states that “[i]n the physical stress of superstimulation of various kinds, the central nervous system acts to protect itself by a strategy of amputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function” (42). This idea of ignoring or avoiding the connection between the realms of technology and embodiment has recurred throughout human development. The problem is that this self-mystifying defence leads to a larger problem, or, as McLuhan himself articulates, “[s]elf-amputation forbids self-recognition” (43). In an interview with *Playboy* in 1969, McLuhan elaborated that the narcosis and autoamputation reactions were no longer

viable strategies. This is due, he argues, to the speed by which electronic culture moves: “total and near-instantaneous,” not allowing a comfortable time to process and adapt to these new technologies (*Essential* 238). He outlines a stark situation: “[i]f we understand the revolutionary transformations caused by new media, we can anticipate and control them; but if we continue in our self-induced subliminal trance, we will be their slaves” (*Essential* 239).

However, McLuhan also posits a way in which we can escape this numbing trap. The appearance of a new media technology is dazzling and in response we are lulled by its lustre. However, the “hybridizing or compounding of these agents [media] offers us an especially favorable opportunity to notice their structural components and properties” (*Media* 49). Thus, in order to draw attention away from the distracting content of media and towards its true essence as our extended selves, we need to combine technologies in extending the human nervous system in ways that allows for a more radically expansive and inclusive formation of what should be considered “human” (or, rather “posthuman”). McLuhan ends his chapter with this positive call to action:

The hybrid or meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers of forms that snaps us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses. (*Media* 55)¹

¹ In his own way, Rancière echoes this idea, arguing that “the production of a shock produced by two heterogeneous forms of the sensible ought to yield an understanding of the state of the world” (143).

McLuhan's intentions are clear: in order to seize control of the contours of new (electric) media, we need to combine them with another technology in order to break free from their abilities to dominate. The bringing together of two separate technologies will show us the structures of our media, turning the focus away from its contents and toward its functions. The only way to avoid the threat of narcosis (which implies both slumber and addiction), that which keeps the population passive and unquestioning, is to show precisely that, to use McLuhan's well-worn phrase, "the medium *is* the message" (*Media* 7, emphasis added). McLuhan formulates the ways out of the narcosis slumber, yet the question remains: what technology can be spliced in with the electric to snap us out of our narcosis? The second part of *Understanding Media* provides the answer: language. McLuhan argues that "[l]anguage extends and amplifies man but it also divides his faculties" (79).² Language is an old technology, but a technology nonetheless; it is a way of extending man's consciousness into the world. Bringing it together with the electronic environment will cause both to cease dividing our attention, and instead merge them into a totalizing vision.

McLuhan helps articulate the connection of the body and technology, but it is Jacques Rancière who makes explicit the body's place in politics. In his book *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010) Rancière discusses the power of the consensus society, wherein "it is perfectly fine for people to have different interests, values, and aspirations, nevertheless there is one unique reality to which everything must be related, a reality that is experienceable as a sense datum and which has only one possible signification" (144). While people may disagree about different ideas of how a society should work, a

² McLuhan cites Henri Bergson as the originator of "language [as] a human technology" (79). I will discuss Bergson's own theories in my fourth chapter.

consensus society ultimately agrees upon a limited, one-dimensional view of society's ontological organization. In breaking out of this trap, Rancière dismisses art that "[c]alls for the need to struggle against the society of the spectacle, to develop practices of *détournement*" as it all too often repeats "the same standard repertoire of denunciatory techniques" (144). Political action, much like art, cannot bring about new ideas through the reuse of old ones. As power structures evolve and become more complex, the need to develop new revolutionary tactics is required as well. Instead, Rancière offers the eponymous concept of *dissensus*, which he describes as a disruption "between *sense* and *sense*. ... a conflict between sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it" (139). This moment of rupture between the sensory perception of the world and the intellectual understanding is the moment of political genesis, according to Rancière. It is at this site of separation where the individual "re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible ... in short, new bodily configurations" (139). Political art, for Rancière, is solely based on "invent[ing] new forms of collective enunciation" (139), and this only occurs through new understandings of the body.

By combining the works of these two men, along with several other prominent theorists and critics across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I seek to elucidate a model wherein the (post)human body becomes a figuration of adaptation, inclusivity, and unpredictability. In his recent book *Nudities* (2009), Giorgio Agamben claims that "power ... separates human beings from their potentiality and, in this way, renders them impotent" (43). In the chapters that follow, the language of power imagines this human

impotence through the recurrent metaphor of the machine.³ This image help paint the picture of the human being robbed of its potentiality, illustrating the idea of a thoughtless automaton, and therefore without the ability to assert a resistant subjectivity against the authoritative regimes that inscribe bodies in this fashion. To counter this idea, McLuhan's media-as-extension theory helps to completely overturn this limitation: not only is the category of "human being" vastly widened, but it also redeems these media technologies from instrumentalization as well. If the melding of "human" and "machine" appears chaotic, it is necessarily so, and the authors of these texts explore media technologies old, new, and currently fictional in order to demonstrate the manifold ways in which the human body can be expanded and refigured. Rancière writes that art is able to influence politics, "overturning the 'proper' relationship between what a body 'can' do and what it cannot" (140). These many new iterations of the posthuman body that follow demonstrate only a few of these possibilities, and somewhat necessarily so: a totalizing study of all possibilities would not only beyond the scope of this project, it would also defeat the purpose of the thesis's point by making these new iterations finite. In choosing texts that span over three decades, as well as secondary material stretching well across well over a century, I hope to illuminate the way these manifold ideas, like humanity and technology can be spliced together to develop new potentialities that explore ways literature fights back against the instrumentalist ideology of the world and attempts to create a positive anarchist worldview, of generative flows instead of deceptive entrapments.

³ A second recurrent metaphor of human limitation, especially in *Vineland*, is the idea of the reduction to an animal. While not exactly the same as the machine metaphor, the echoes of a being without higher cognitive functions are quite similar.

In my first chapter, I look at the role of the tape recorder in William S. Burroughs's *Nova Trilogy*. Set in a dystopic solar system where a battle for earth is ostensibly waged between the parasitic forces of the Nova Mob and the anarchist revolutionaries that comprise the Nova Police, Burroughs actually depicts a world of stagnation and perpetual conflict, where the endless "war" between the Nova Mob and Nova Police simply results in the continued hegemony of these parasitic entities. Rather, Burroughs locates the potential for liberation in the tape recorder, a technology that exhibits "the twin and somewhat contradictory powers of inscription and mutation" (Hayles, *Posthuman* 217). It is with the tape recorder that Burroughs's vast public entity is able to bypass the false anarchism of the Nova Police and engage in the practice of splicing, breaking out of the limiting and prerecorded "tickets" and combining them in a multiplicity of new, unmanaged embodied subjectivities. By recognizing the tape recorder as an extension of the human body, all the associational gimmicks that keep human beings enslaved to the forces of control can be distorted, shredded, and reconstituted in an infinite variety of ways. This universal rewriting of the body heralds a similar shift in the realm of politics: when bodies can no longer be controlled, and the "subject" becomes a constantly shifting entity without a location, then political control breaks down. Burroughs's novels exist on the cusp of this revolutionary moment, laying bare the mechanisms of power and demonstrating how the public can effect a politically resistant strategy through the integration of media into a wider understanding of the body.

My second chapter focuses on Thomas Pynchon's novel *Vineland* and the variety of technologies that populate its paranoid American landscape. The novel, set at the end of the 1960s amid Nixon's rise to power, and in 1984, during "the Reaganite repression of

the 80s” (Johnston, “Mediality” 174), examines the rise of post-War American political repression. Authoritarian governmental forces maintain an increasingly firm grip on its populace, divorcing its citizens from any significant politically resistant tactics. Like Burroughs, Pynchon is interested in demonstrating how postmodern power operates and how new strategies are required to challenge this hegemonic force. In the radical film society of 24fps, Pynchon demonstrates how turning the establishment’s tools against them is ultimately doomed to failure: 24fps is infiltrated, manipulated, and ultimately destroyed by its own naivete and underestimation of the government agents. Pynchon thus demonstrates the fallacy of technology being “good” or “bad” in a McLuhanian sense, for when media are made into instruments, they can only ever serve the forces of instrumentalization. Yet while this film collective fails to effect any lasting political change, the collective assortment of individuals that come together to populate the titular Vineland forests at the novel’s end are far more successful in halting the progression of governmental encroachment. In a world disconnected from the “real,” resistance is deployed in the potential for other worlds, for ontological possibilities that break the one-and-zero frame of life-and-death that the government holds to. This position is epitomized in the Thanatoids, beings who have died violent deaths, yet persist in physical form, existing to disrupt the linear progression of control and inject a multiplicity that cannot be contained or monitored. That Pynchon’s protagonists maintain a bodily identity that persists and exhibits potentialities outside the rigidity of consensus society demonstrates that control is not complete and that cracks exist in the framework of control. *Vineland* is thus a novel that demonstrates the persistence of the body and anarchist philosophy at the zenith of repressive political power demonstrates the ability of

revolutionary power to continue on, accumulating minor victories and waiting for a time to make itself visible again.

My last chapter moves beyond the analog and digital technologies predominant in the previous chapters, and into the realm of as-yet fictional media technologies.⁴ In Grant Morrison's comic book series *The Invisibles*, these new interactive media — the “fiction suit” that allows one to enter into fictional stories and rewrite the narratives, thereby altering their history, the time machine, and an inhalable reality spray — all serve to turn the dynamic away from a destructive war between the forces of anarchy and control, and toward a generative integration between the two sides. Morrison, like Burroughs and Pynchon, starts off by depicting how his revolutionary group (the eponymous Invisibles) remain trapped in an endless, circular, mutually destructive war with the monolithic Outer Church, who manipulate and control human destiny from behind ideological structures. While the series begins as a fast-paced sci-fi action narrative, Morrison “is never fully satisfied with any of the genres [*The Invisibles*] draws upon” (Singer 110). By scrutinizing these simplistic narrative tropes — the “enemy” are dehumanized creatures without feeling or emotion, the strongest resistance to control lies in violent reaction — Morrison points out not only their invalidity but their very complicity in ensuring the repeated strikes and counterstrikes that serve only to increase the tally of the dead without shifting political consciousness. *The Invisibles* instead finds the way out of this closed circle through the aforementioned media technologies, each of which are developed by the various members of the Invisibles and serve to activate that fundamental shock

⁴ It should be noted that the Puncutron machine of *Vineland* is also at present a fictional technology, but it is relatively minor as opposed to the centering of the media technologies in *The Invisibles*.

McLuhan notes is now necessary to re-engaging the human body with technology. These various media act in ways that echo what Burroughs and Pynchon strive for in their respective texts: the Invisibles discover a new host of embodied subjectivities outside of control, as well as locate the ontological plurality that allows for multiple realities to exist (and be accessed) simultaneously. While Burroughs's trilogy ends on a revolutionary note, and *Vineland* with the securing of a single area that allows for these anarchists to persist, *The Invisibles* depicts the most successful terminus: the "apocalypse" of 2012, which is in fact a moment of global transcendence, as the world ascends to a higher plane of existence, merged together as a composite entity capable of forming an infinity of new subjectivities within itself — the realization of a totalizing anarchy.

I have chosen the title "(In)visible Generations" for this project because the concept of the visibility and its opposite resonate on a several different levels throughout each text, and the idea of the invisible moving into the realms of the seen is what Rancière cites as the development of a new politics (139). Most notably, the concept reflects the theme of invisibility that appears consistently throughout each author's work. In addition to the obvious case of *The Invisibles*, the title itself is adapted from an essay entitled "Invisible Generations" written by Burroughs in 1966. *Vineland*, meanwhile, discusses visibility and invisibility frequently throughout its narrative. The idea of generations also plays off of the progression of both technologies and revolutionaries throughout the thesis: Burroughs wrote his trilogy during the early 1960s, during the heart of revolutionary activity but before the failure of the 1968 revolutions that critics often see as the end of major leftist activity (Smith 109). Pynchon examines the fallout from these failures, looking the 1970s and 1980s under the repressive leadership of both

Nixon and Reagan. Finally, Morrison sets his during the 1990s (when he was writing) and forward into 2012, his end of history. Lastly, and to me most significantly, the title refers to the way these three authors generate new bodily relations and link them to political action. For the idea implicit within each of these works is that true revolutionary power and capability is never destroyed or invented; it is always present, hidden beneath the veil that separates what is considered human from its technological extensions. As each author excavates new possibilities discovered through new media, they lift that veil and reveal these new horizons for all to see; in effect, establishing a new “body politic.”

Chapter Two:

“These Are Conditions of Total Emergency”: Extending Bodies, Liberating Realities in the *Nova Trilogy*

The Grove Press re-release of William S. Burroughs’s novel *The Ticket That Exploded* includes an essay of his entitled “*invisible generations*” in the back, serving as a kind of epilogue to the science-fiction narrative that precedes it. In this essay, Burroughs writes that “there was a grey veil between you and what you saw or more often what you did not see that grey veil was the prerecorded words of a control machine once that veil is removed you will see clearer and sharper than those who are behind the veil” (*Ticket* 209). The rending of this veil is what opens up the body to possibilities that were always already there, merely hidden. The invisible becomes visible. This passage and the larger essay to which it belongs serve, I argue, as the thesis statement of Burroughs’s 1960s science-fiction series known as the *Nova Trilogy*⁵: that ideological resistance and revolution are located in the splicing together of the human body and media technologies. The veil serves as a metaphor of an amputation where the totality of the body is cut off from its full potential, and the goal of Burroughs’s fiction is to splice together the body and technology in order to move beyond this veil of limitation and division; an idea echoed in his repeated call to “occupy The Reality Studio and retake the universe” (*Nova* 7). Not only is this a call to the macrocosmic, to save the universe from its descent into one-dimensional entropy, but also, on the microcosmic level, to save the

⁵ The three novels that comprise the *Nova Trilogy* are: *The Soft Machine* (1961, revised 1966), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962, revised 1967), and *Nova Express* (1964). The trilogy’s order is somewhat ambiguous, and in an interview with Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs suggests that *The Ticket That Exploded* “brought it all to a climax” (Lotringer 127).

body from its viral impediments. Only by recognizing media form over content and bringing disparate technologies together, as Marshall McLuhan states, can humanity escape destructive ideological entrapments. In the action of splicing, Burroughs's novels echo what Jacques Rancière calls *dissensus*, or the disruption "between *sense* and *sense* ... between sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it" (139).⁶ The act of disruption and splicing breaks down the barrier between the human and the technological, and offer a way out of destructive conflict and toward generative iteration.

In *Nova Express*, the nameless narrator explains to the reader that "[i]t is considered axiomatic that the nova formulae cannot be broken" (40). The makeup of these "nova formulae," Burroughs's "algebra of need" or codes of authoritarian control, is what the trilogy is largely interested in. Inspector J. Lee in *The Ticket That Exploded* elaborates on this statement at a press conference where he refers to "the explosion of a planet," (55), or the terminal, entropic movement toward planetary destruction, as "nova" (55).⁷ And yet, this idea of entropy and limitation is replicated on a microcosmic level throughout the series as well, such as the notion that "[t]he Word and Image write the message that is you on colorless sheets determine all flesh" (*Nova* 28). In *Word Cultures* (1987), her exhaustive examination of Burroughs's literary career, Robin Lydenberg argues that "[t]he 'soft machine' of the body, crippled by the determinism of the codes *already written* on its 'transparent sheets' of flesh, will be dismembered and exploded" (71). David Ayers takes this association a step further when he claims that "[t]he body

⁶ Rancière's diction intriguingly echoes Burroughs, as he refers to this process as one that "re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations *between the visible and the invisible*" (139, emphasis added).

⁷ This idea is echoed in *Nova Express*, where the narrator castigates the reader by claiming "[y]ou dogs are all on tape. The entire planet is being developed into terminal identity and complete surrender" (13).

itself is now written. It cannot be healed of its scars because it is itself the scar” (230). Like Lydenberg, Ayers reaches a similar conclusion that Burroughs seeks to write about “the soul, abstracted from personality ... liberated from the world and the flesh” (236). Both critics thus read the purpose of Burroughs’s fiction as liberating consciousness by separating it from the body entirely. This critical approach to Burroughs, far from offering a trajectory of escape from the forces of oppression, inadvertently ends up supporting the claim that the nova control of the body, its degeneration and inextricable movement towards death cannot be overcome and the only possible response is evacuation. In effect, this idea proves the narrator’s point that the nova formulae that entrap bodies into a one-directional, entropic terminus remain in place.

Yet if the body is the “soft machine” Lydenberg refers to, why does the title not reflect this action? Indeed, as the narrator⁸ of *The Ticket That Exploded* claims, “[I]f without flesh is the oven. Only way we get out of hell is through our image in the living” (188). Contrary to many critics’ approaches, Burroughs does not simply wish to abandon the body. His novels trace the inherent disparity in embodiment: while the human organism remains imprisoned by its tickets, the viral word remains completely disembodied, able to elude capture through its continual retreating through the associative links of language. The overall goal expressed in the *Nova Trilogy*, then, is to re-establish a balance between humanity and the virus: it attempts to free the human body from determinism by embodying the virus in the technology of the tape recorder, thereby robbing the virus of its disembodied power. In doing so, Burroughs’s series reveals the

⁸ Alvin J. Seltzer makes the interesting argument that “if we find it impossible to identify with the narrator of *The Ticket That Exploded* ... that may well be because there is no narrator but only a collection of various voices constantly merging with one another” (370-371).

move toward recognizing that humanity and technology are the same. While Lydenberg's and Ayers's analyses argue for a complete severing of human consciousness from technology, Burroughs believes in a radical reconnection. The body is *already* disconnected from technology: it is the very environment that allows the viral entropy of nova — the entrapment of the human body into a decaying and parasitic system — to develop. My argument will focus on recent criticism of the *Nova Trilogy*, and then refer to Marshall McLuhan in order to demonstrate how the goal is to reunite the body with its disconnected extensions, now turned hostile and alien, and in doing so break out of the endless cycle of infection and begin the beneficial process of symbiosis, both for the body and for reality.⁹

Subjectivity in the *Nova Trilogy* is a topic academics have focused heavily on as well. Critical consensus on the series has largely centered on Burroughs's attempt to free the subjectivity from manipulation by the forces of domination and control. Jason Morelyle argues that "Burroughs's work not only offers us a way of beginning to grasp what form this new subjectivity might assume, but it also provides the blueprints for how we can begin conceptualizing the possibility of a *resistant* subject" (75), while Scott Bukatman looks at the creation of "[t]he new subjectivity" that occurs in postmodern science fiction (2). He argues that, in *The Ticket That Exploded*, "the image of the virus (and the virus of the Image) biologizes the waning autonomy of the individual" (76), and Ayers claims that Burroughs employs a science-fiction setting because "this style of

⁹ Contrarily, Seltzer attempts to show how Burroughs "is not scared off by hackneyed *Brave New World* images of a society controlled by machines ... science can be used to help the man it has desensitized and that machines can work for our benefit as well as our destruction" (369). As I will later show in this chapter, McLuhan rejects such categorizations of technology entirely.

fiction offers a dream of individualistic and subversive activity in nature opposed to the collectivizing ideology of the state” (232).¹⁰ However, while these arguments seek to uphold a vision of an individual battling against corrupt institutional forces, Toby Tanner suggests in his article “Rub Out the Word” that “the notion of the individual’s identity may be another ‘gimmick’ by which man is entrapped by the various virus powers which require fleshly hosts” (108). Quoting Burroughs, Tanner points out that “the offer of another image identity is always on virus terms” (qtd. in Tanner 108). Tanner argues that the very concept of individuality is corrupt because the individual implies a sense of hierarchy and differentiation. As Burroughs himself writes, “I am not two—I am *one*— But to maintain my state of oneness I need twoness in all other life forms” (*Nova* 77). Thus the concept of individuality serves to act simply as another entrance point for viral infiltration.

Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman*, offers a potential solution to this conundrum of subjectivity and its potential to be yet another technique (or, to use Burroughs’s parlance, “gimmick”) of control.¹¹ Her theory upholds subjectivity while countering the manipulative effects of individuality. Her chapter “The Materiality of Informatics” applies these theories specifically to *The Ticket That Exploded*. Arguing that the novel demonstrates “not that the body has disappeared but that a certain kind of subjectivity has emerged” (193), she attempts to demonstrate the ways in which the body cannot remain differentiated from the technologies present in the novel. For Hayles, a

¹⁰ Ayers further makes the curious claim that “Burroughs’ work, developing from the American Libertarian tradition rather than any form of Anarchism, let alone revolutionary collectivism, maps a quest for spiritual and physical freedom from a range of forces” (223). As this chapter will show, this assertion is completely contrary to Burroughs’s actual goals.

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to Hayles in this chapter are from this text.

major oversight by philosophers and theorists is the failure to understand the difference between “the body”: “always normative relative to some set of criteria,” and “embodiment,” which “is the specific instantiation generated from a noise of difference” (196).¹² For Hayles, “the body” refers to something universal, while “embodiment” is an individual instantiation. Looking at *The Ticket That Exploded*, Hayles outlines the relationship between the body and technology, where the former “is treated as if it physically were a recorder” (213). The body and technology, then, become inextricably linked and can form a feedback loop capable of generating a “riot of mutations” (211). She claims that, within the text, Burroughs allows for constant, recursive movement between these binaries, which “invite us to see these polarities not as static concepts but as mutating surfaces that transform into one another. . . . a vision of interactions both pleasurable and dangerous, creatively dynamic and explosively transformative” (220). Simply put, Hayles asserts that Burroughs does not head toward a simplistic new figuration of subjectivity, but rather a constantly modulatory, shifting form that evades categorization.

Hayles’s broader discussion of the posthuman body is a vital concept in understanding the *Nova Trilogy*. She promotes a notion of “the posthuman body that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of the human being” (5). Ultimately, Hayles’s work seeks to incorporate the human and the technological in a way that acknowledges the importance of material

¹² Accompanying these binaries are the concepts of incorporation — “an action that is encoded into bodily memory by repeated performances” and inscription — actions that can be “transported from context to context once it has been performed” (199-200).

embodiment. Her work attempts to navigate the troubled waters between the “liberal humanist subject” of the Enlightenment (4) and the more modern, disembodied figure of the cyborg popularized by Donna Haraway. For Hayles, the possibilities of new human figuration made possible through interactions with technology allow subjects to escape the reductive hierarchy which Hayles pinpoints as the “information/materiality hierarchy” (12). Hayles goes on to elaborate that, in such organizing principles, there is “a common ideology — privileging the abstract as the Real and downplaying the importance of material instantiation” (13). Overall, then, Hayles is concerned with preserving and promoting the importance of the ineffaceable materiality that is present in every new iteration of human development. Thus, Hayles’s thesis seeks to synthesize the positive aspects of the liberal humanist subject with the exponential possibilities inherent in the posthuman without the recourse to Enlightenment notions of subjectivity, which Hayles criticizes as portraying “a unified, consistent identity” (4).¹³ There must remain, at some point, a materiality (and, therefore, a sense of limitation and finitude) that disembodiment and informational patterns deny. Yet at the same time, Hayles’s articulation of the posthuman body is one that provides a depth that belies its necessarily limited breadth. For, as she states, her book is interested in “putting back together parts that have lost touch with one another and reaching out toward a complexity too unruly to fit into disembodied ones and zeros” (13): while the cyborg depiction of humanity may offer these “seductive fantasies,” it is ultimately limited to a kind of pattern — a predictability that can be discovered and recorded (and, therefore, controlled). Posthuman

¹³ Additionally, there is a gendered component to this Enlightenment conception of what Hayles calls the “liberal humanist” subject, and its universal sameness is often depicted as “the (white male) liberal subject” (4).

embodiments, meanwhile, are chaotic and variable, and cannot be coded and catalogued.¹⁴ Ultimately, then, in demonstrating the mutability and embodied subjectivity that posthuman figurations represent, Hayles provides an invaluable roadmap for understanding the specific project Burroughs undertakes in his *Nova Trilogy*.

Yet for all of Hayles's insights into the role of embodiment in science fiction and theory, her book does not touch at all on the work of Marshall McLuhan. Indeed, recent scholarship on Burroughs largely ignores McLuhan altogether. Bukatman is one of the few critics who associates the two writers, and he simplistically characterizes McLuhan as a technological optimist, noting how McLuhan's many discussions of media theory constantly evade the question of power, "rendering his vision compelling but incomplete" (71). Referring to McLuhan's book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Bukatman claims that "[t]he media are no longer the extensions of man; man has instead become an extension of them" (73). Any attempt at harmonious synchronicity has been displaced into an externalized and corrupt network, which now displays utter control over the body. While I believe Bukatman's reversal of media extensions is correct, I take issue with the idea that McLuhan's concepts have not been borne out; rather, the world portrayed in *Nova Trilogy* is nightmarish perversion of McLuhan's beliefs. It seems that Bukatman's depiction of the media-as-virus does not prove McLuhan's point wrong, but rather frightfully prescient. As such, revisiting McLuhan's theories on media and their relationship to the human body offers a means of understanding Burroughs's project.

¹⁴ Rancière echoes this sentiment in his discussion of *dissensus*, claiming that "[t]hese sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but *they can never be calculated*" (143, emphasis added).

McLuhan's theories on integration and embodiment are vital to understanding Burroughs's novels. The concept of Narcissus-narcosis is evident in the trilogy, as the earth appears lulled into a sense of differentiation and division that allows the parasitic Nova Mob to operate with impunity. The only way to get out of this enclosure is to recognize and hybridize technology with the human body, thereby rescuing the imperilled body from death and destruction and developing new possible embodiments. Interestingly, McLuhan engages directly with Burroughs's fiction in his short article "Notes on Burroughs" (1964). He argues that Burroughs's novels (focusing on *Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*) are not about upgrading the singular subject for his or her own fragmented induction into a new societal sphere. Rather, what is at stake is the rewriting of the entire environment.¹⁵ And if the electric media environment is the extension of our collective nervous system, then what is needed is to reprogram the sensory ratios entirely. McLuhan argues that "we can avoid the inevitable 'closure' that accompanies each new technology by regarding our entire gadgetry as *junk*" ("Notes" 72). McLuhan reads into Burroughs's fiction a method of "a nonclosure of sensory modes" ("Notes" 72): keeping open the body that would immediately anesthetize and amputate its connection with technology. This nonclosure will allow us active engagement and participation with the electric media environments, whereas a cutting off leads to viral takeover.

Burroughs's novels thus dramatize both McLuhan's fear and optimism. They depict a society lulled into numbness (as well as addiction) by its constant

¹⁵ Here, however, McLuhan commits a rather major misreading of Burroughs's work, where he endorses the use of drugs to take control of the environment. Burroughs himself responded to this idea in a later interview, claiming "junk narrows consciousness. The only benefit to me as a writer ... came to me after I went off it" (*Live* 66). By "junk," McLuhan likely meant hallucinogenic drugs rather than heroin, as Burroughs did not condemn the former.

misrecognitions of an extension of itself as other. The misidentification becomes literalized in *The Ticket That Exploded* as another entity: “The ‘Other Half’ is the word. The ‘Other Half’ is an organism. The Word is an organism” (*Ticket* 49). Burroughs here takes McLuhan’s anxieties about the misapprehension of technology, of our constant tendency to amputate and ignore, and turns them into a terrifying reality. This is shown during the reader’s introduction to the character of Bradley, who is incarcerated in a hellish prison. While there, he is informed by his prison guards that he will be fitted into the “Happy Cloak,” a synthetic version of Venusian Sex Skin, “a critter found in the rivers here wraps all around you like a second skin eats you slow and good” (*Ticket* 4).¹⁶ The narrator points out the inseparability of the cloak from its wearer: “[Bradly’s] skin hairs slipped into skin hairs of the sheath” (*Ticket* 21), but both the title of the cloak and the guard’s reference to it being a “beautiful garment” (*Ticket* 22) echo McLuhan’s idea of clothing as “an extension of the skin” (*Media* 119). Bradley is informed that the Happy Cloak “subdues its prey through a neuro-contact and eats it alive — only the victim doesn’t want to get away once it has sampled the pleasures of the cloak” (*Ticket* 22). Burroughs makes addiction a frightfully literal topic here, showing how the cloak’s overt pleasures mask its destructive qualities. In Burroughs’s eyes, the average person is addicted to content, unable to see the form for what it is, even as it (literally) destroys its user. The importance of this scene cannot be understated: not only does it serve to highlight the constant narcotic function of viewing content over medium (in this example

¹⁶ One reason I find this example so singularly interesting is that the Cloak is, ultimately, a technological rendering of a genuine other (a biological Venusian organism). Thus, it is the morphing of the other into a bodily extension that is still viewed as other (although in a separate fashion). The implications of these layers, unfortunately, are outside the scope of this project.

through sexual satisfaction), but it also serves as a means of viewing the novels' central conflict: the intergalactic "war" between the Nova Mob and the Nova Police.

2.1 The Old Symbiosis Con: Addicted to Nova Content

A superficial reading of Burroughs's trilogy gives one the impression of a dualistic war taking place between the forces of control and anarchy. It is important, however, to see how this is simply a distracting surface gimmick reinforcing the consensus reality. In his seminal text *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse argues that, in modern late-capitalist society, "[t]here is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms" (9). He thus predicts a society where everything ultimately falls into a controllable pattern, one where everything – including resistance strategies – are not only anticipated, but actively part of the larger mechanism at work. Indeed, as Marcuse claims, "[u]nder the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination" (7). This is yet another iteration of Rancière's consensus society. Whatever appears as a counter toward the forces of control is ultimately a part of the wider apparatus of power. The kernel of this idea becomes foregrounded in the *Nova Trilogy* through its science fiction setting. Despite its difficult language, the plot of the *Nova Trilogy* appears, at first glance, somewhat simple. A narrative voice explains that "[t]he Insect People Of Minraud formed an alliance with the Virus Power of The Vegetable People to occupy planet earth" (*Nova* 72). These various interests, known collectively as the Nova Mob, employ many different forms of control and manipulation, but all of their actions inherently revolve around the control and

enslavement of the human race. Opposing these galactic criminals are the Nova Police, who arrive to save the planet from complete destruction (*Ticket* 55). Initially, this conflict is cast in dualistic terms, with the Nova Mob representing the multitudinous forms of totalizing power, and the Nova Police representing a vision of anarchic freedom.¹⁷ The text appears to back this up, as the District Inspector informs rookie Policeman Inspector J. Lee that “the members of all existing organizations are your enemy. ... This is, in point of fact, a *non-organization*” (*Ticket* 9-10). Lee later differentiates the Nova Police from all other “parasitic excrescence that often travels under the name ‘Police’” (*Nova* 51) by explaining one essential difference: “the nova police have no intention of remaining [on earth] after their work is done ... We do our work and we go” (*Ticket* 54).

Burroughs does not uphold this straightforward delineation, however. A Nova Mob scientist states that “we have created an infinity of variety at *the information level*, sufficient to keep so-called scientists busy for ever exploring the ‘richness of nature’” (*Nova* 49, emphasis added). The resonances with Marcuse and Rancière are unavoidable here: Burroughs depicts a society trapped within a one-dimensional plane, a consensus of control in which even opposition is merely part of a larger operation. Likewise, while some critics accept the plot synopsis,¹⁸ others evince scepticism toward this seeming duality. Timothy S. Murphy argues that the trilogy espouses “the reversible symmetry of

¹⁷ The major metaphor that Burroughs uses to describe these two factions is drug addiction and treatment. The Mob are considered morphine, as they are addictive and destructive, while the Nova Police are referred to as apomorphine, which has “no word and no image,” and, thus, no control (*Nova* 48).

¹⁸ Lydenberg claims that “the forces of resistance (the Nova Police) attempt to save humanity from the Nova Criminals” (70), while Tietchen asserts that “Nova police officers... attempt to expose the fact that the Reality Script itself is based only in a sign system whose elements may be arbitrarily rearranged” (113), and Hayles states simply that “[a] counterinvasion has been staged by the Nova Police” (214).

roles, cop and criminal,” and later refers to the Nova Police as “an ambivalent force” (106, 131). These reversals are developed throughout the text. Over the course of the novel, several members of the Nova Mob supposedly shift alliances: Inspector Lee informs the press that “‘Hamburger Mary’ has defected” (*Ticket* 60); the Subliminal Kid is identified as a “charter defector of the nova mob” (162); and Uranian Willy the Heavy Metal Kid vows to “rat on everybody” (181). But this is not simply a one-way avenue. Early on in *The Ticket That Exploded*, while confronting the nova criminal “Genial,” Inspector Lee says to him “I’m immune now remember” (30). The implication here is that Lee himself was once a coordinate point for Genial, and thus an operative of the Nova Mob. Perhaps the most notable example is Bradly, a figure who appears as both a freedom fighter battling the crab armies of Minraud (*Ticket* 25), and as MrBradlyMrMartin, the leader of the Nova Mob (56). Thus, “Bradly-Martin is identified with Bradly the agent — he has taken Bradly’s image and appropriated his name” (234). Thus the echoing of “Bradly” throughout the novels calls to both Nova Mob and Nova Police and it is (deliberately) impossible to separate one association from the other. Nathan Moore states that “control no longer presupposes an ‘outside,’ not even as an induced lack or absence” (457). The lines of separation, the seeming polarities do not exist; or rather, they are artificially constructed. The concept of Nova spreads out to encompass both groups. They are the totality of the discourse. The entirety of Nova is summed up in the novel’s repeated mantra: “Nothing is true—Everything is permitted” (54).

Burroughs, in an interview, further highlighted the ambivalence of the Nova Police: “[o]nce you get them in there, by God, they begin acting like any police” (qtd. in

Tanner 105). This statement forces a recontextualization of the police's presence and purpose in the text. Moore's discussion of what he calls "Nova Law" contends that "control is not dialectical," but rather it is a noise-like structure, which "maintains all possibilities simultaneously, regardless of contradiction"(450, 451). By this, Moore means that control induces into its subjects the notions of a continually recurring loop where there is no difference between one choice and another. The police and the mob ultimately mean the same thing. Thus, Lee's claim that the Nova Police simply perform their task and depart becomes subject to scrutiny: the trouble is that the work itself may never be done. This makes sense when examining the Garden of Delights, one of the power centers of the Nova Mob, "a vast tingling numbness surrounded by ovens of white-hot metal lattice with sloped funnels like a fish trap" (*Ticket 8*). Once again, Burroughs invokes the image of numbness as part of the Nova Mob's operations. The Nova Police, ostensibly on earth to save the planet, receive this bulletin from the Police's Rewrite Department: "[n]ow look, you jokers — We are not here to rewrite G.O.D. (Garden of Delights) you got it?" (*Ticket 84*). According to Burroughs, in other words, the police exist to "protect the disease" (qtd. in Moore 462), and their presence on earth may prolong the nova invasion indefinitely. The significance of the Garden is illuminated by Murphy, who refers to it as "carnal" (123): like the Happy Cloak, it numbs the human body with its content-based desires and conflicts. That the police do not intend to rewrite this central controlling mechanism evinces their part in the machinery of Nova.¹⁹

¹⁹ Murphy adds that the Nova Police are "not so much dialectically or linguistically constructed social subjects, which must recreate conditions of their own existence ... as they are biochemical agents" (131). In spite of Murphy's explanation of them as chemical instead of technological, the overall point remains the same: they are instruments of the nova structure.

Thus, the entire Nova conflict can be read as both an allegory and a symptom of the Narcissus-narcosis effect in action. Murphy refers to the Nova Police as “a kind of second-order addiction” (131), and by this he means that reliance on the Nova Police keeps humanity enmeshed in the systems of domination. Moore elaborates that “[t]he police are concerned not to generate solutions (decisions), but ‘lack of trust,’ so that the provision of security generates its own noise, insecurity” (461). The Nova Police simply become another facet of Nova society, where “there can be no final victory since this would mean the end of the war game” (*Revolution* 39); instead, as Tietchen suggests, the real viral goal is “to transform its host into a replica of itself” (111), which will in turn make the Nova conspiracy last forever. The idea is that “[m]an has hopped himself up by a long series of technological fixes” (McLuhan, “Notes” 72), and Burroughs intends to show that by doing this, we read our very technology as consumable, addictive content. The endless conflict persists because we have turned technology into instruments. The ambiguous role played by the Nova Police is due to the externalization of technology from the human body. Once removed, it can only be viewed as instrumental, capable of being both “good” and “bad,” as Sarnoff stated (McLuhan, *Media* 11), and becomes another “gimmick” through which the virus is able to sustain itself. Burroughs’s plan in showing the failure of the Nova Police is his move to get us to stop thinking of technology as an othered saviour: to do so is to threaten the entirety of the human body with viral invasion.

2.2 “Cut the Word and Sense Bleeds”: The Disruption of Association Lines

In spite of this apparent entrapment, Burroughs offers his reader a way out of this entropy: not by fighting back against both factions, but instead by incorporating them. “Suppose there is no enemy??” the narrator muses at one point (*Nova* 112). Ayers notes that the Nova Mob themselves “attempt to exercise dominion not towards any instrumental end; but because they are addicted to the same schema of control” (228), and Morelyle adds that “[t]he transitory, modulatory subjectivity of the controllers is still limited in some ways by its addiction to identity” (83). Thus, the Nova forces are just as locked into the destructive machinery as the humans they prey upon. It is not that discrete targets must be combatted and eliminated, but that ontological perspectives need to be shifted. Burroughs alludes to this very idea when he considers that “[t]he word may once have been a healthy neural cell. Now it is a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system” (*Ticket* 49). The repeated plea that we “[d]on’t answer the machine, shut it off” (*Nova* 178) is in a way paradoxical: to switch off the machinery that empowers the world in a one-dimensional trajectory toward Nova, we must turn *on* the machinery of the tape recorder. The activation of this media technology grants the potential to disrupt the control mechanisms in place and thus see beyond the content of the empty Nova battles and apprehend the actual, real notions of form and embodiment. Instead of the singular consensus reality, *dissensus* “re-frames the given by inventing new ... configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time — in short, new bodily capacities” (139). This, for Rancière, is the essence of revolutionary politics, and it can

only begin by reconnecting what has been amputated from the body. These methods of “collective enunciation” (139) become a literal action taken by Burroughs: the elimination of the individual for something new.

Indeed, of all the addictive content crutches highlighted by Burroughs, the concept of individuality is perhaps the biggest virus con of them all. Examining the reproductive abilities of viruses, Bukatman notes that the viral takeover of a host subtly reprograms the healthy cell to carry out the same prerogative of malicious reproduction. The trick is that “the host cell ‘believes’ that it is following its own biologically determined imperative: it mistakes the new genetic material for its own” (76). This takeover, Bradly’s surgeon sardonically remarks, is “[t]he difficulty ... with two halves ... First it’s symbiosis, then parasitism — The old symbiosis con” (*Ticket* 85).

Individuality itself is another form of addiction: we are distracted by the content-based belief that we are discrete entities, ignoring the fact that we have actually become “an image on screen talking” (*Ticket* 172). Moore makes this concept overt when he argues that “[i]nformation is the form of knowledge produced by control” (449), while Hayles builds on the idea by showing how the body can “disappear into information without a murmur of protest” (197). The text thoroughly puts into practice Hayles’s ideas on the universal concept of the body. She describes the idea of inscription as existing in the same space as the concept of the universal body, “something normalized and abstract” (198). The idea of inscription — and its implication of a script — is impossible to ignore in the context of the novel: the board, the representatives of the Nova Mob on the earth, controls the world through books “written in symbols referring to association blocks— Like this: \$—‘American upper middle-class upbringing with maximum sexual

frustrations and humiliations imposed by Middle-Western matriarchs” (*Ticket* 139).

These books are used to trap people down into their essentialized identities. This is seen in the first appearance of Bradly, where he is informed by his prison guard that “[f]irst we must write the ticket” (21). The entirety of the body is written out, as a “prerecording” (188). The purpose of the ticket is to trick its receiver into believing in their own individuality, while simultaneously programming them for life. This is summed up by Moore, who explains: “[e]verything that can be said of information can be said of the individuality manifested by it: they are constituted as noise-signal ratios, probabilities, and incommensurable macro-micro phenomena” (453).

Identity itself is a con enacted on every organism: it is not only something inflicted upon human beings in the form of the ticket, but also the way the virus takes control. Lee notes that “in order to invade, damage and occupy the human organism [a virus] must have a gimmick to get in,” and this gimmick is tied to identity: the virus “operates through addicts because he himself is an addict” (*Ticket* 58, 59). Morelyle also comments on this prevailing idea, beginning his paper by highlighting the inseparability of these two ideas: “[a]ddiction and control: in the work of William S. Burroughs, the two issues are inextricably and irrevocably bound together” (74). Borrowing from Murphy, who states that “subjectivity itself is a form of addiction to language” (qtd. in Morelyle 75), Morelyle highlights the way in which subjectivity infects not only the human organism, but the virus as well. Thus, in an ironic fashion, “language can somehow lead the way out of the entrapments of language” (Tietchen 120). Hayles sums up this apparent paradox with the idea that “the reifying and infective power of words can be defused only through other words, which can always turn against their master and

become infectious in turn. Making the word flesh is both how the virus infects and the vaccine disinfects” (214). Language is a means of implementing control and structuring the methods of escape, and Burroughs’s project then becomes cutting off through cutting up.

The cut-up method, the act of taking written sentences, cutting them into pieces, and then placing them back together in random order, is the most-discussed part of Burroughs’s fiction. Its effect in the text is largely agreed upon: jamming the association blocks “with the hope of discovering [the] gap[s] in our hegemonic discourse” (Tietchen 109-110).²⁰ Seltzer claims that “our minds are often out of touch with our senses,” and the cut-up technique “will involve much more the total capacity of the observer” (331, 332). His definition helps link to Rancière, whose *dissensus* concept occurs through the desynchronization of “*sense* and *sense*” (139). Burroughs’s narrator states as much in the text: “[y]ou are to infiltrate, sabotage and cut communications — Once machine lines are cut the enemy is helpless” (*Ticket* 111). However, it is Moore’s articulation of what the cut-up itself does that becomes of primary interest. He argues that “[t]o cut-up is to make explicit the veil of the word” (437). Pointing to a cut-up passage from Burroughs, Moore argues that “[t]hese passages have no meaning but they have sense, a becoming, and a particular evocativeness (sensuality)” (439).²¹ His invocation of the sensual — the embodied — is the most important part of his articulation, in that a rupture between

²⁰ Such an argument is echoed by Lydenberg, who claims that the cut-up is “a linguistic weapon against the binary thinking which generates conflict on a philosophical level (in all either/or antitheses)” (70).

²¹ This further underlines the ambivalence of the Nova Police: for an organization supposedly dedicated to countering the association chains of the Nova Mob, Inspector Lee’s press conference (*Ticket* 51-59) is the most lucid passage in the entire trilogy; it makes the most *sense*, which is always a dangerous prospect for Burroughs.

cognition and sensuality is opened.²² Moore's point is that to employ the cut-up technique is to snap words out of association locks, or, to return to McLuhan, narcosis. In laying down word associations, there is the double effect of allowing people to become once more blinded by narcosis, while allowing the viral powers to elude capture by continually escaping through associative word combinations.²³ "The process of cutting up words," Moore suggests, "is one of silencing words" (442). Thus, to cut the word away from its associative context is to deny its power of meaning, and return it to a position of feeling and embodiment. This action simultaneously "jams" the control that the Nova Mob's ability to evade entrapment by travelling through these association chains, and restores a textured (and textual) engagement with the language by the human being, allowing the reader to engage with the words being written, and to develop their own personalized connotative meanings from these passages, creating an individual, anarchic reading that is not controlled by top-down authorities.

In the context of the novels, of course, the cut-up method is employed to break the association locks of the Nova Mob and rescue the body from the trap of individualization. The narrator explains that he "cut in bulletins from Rewrite with all popular songs using music as punctuation" (*Ticket* 169). This refers to the earlier routine "*do you love me?*"

²² Moore draws heavily from Gilles Deleuze in this section of the article, referencing Deleuze's three propositions related to the word (denotation, manifestation, and signification), and noting how "each relation presupposes the other two in 'the circle of the proposition'" (438). This serves as another apt metaphor to highlight the cyclical nature of the virus.

²³ An added dimension of the cut-up technique, especially in the context of *The Ticket That Exploded*, is cutting up the dualism between reality and fiction. Hayles argues that "if the word is a parasite with material effects, the distinction between metaphor and actuality, representation and reality, becomes moot" (215). In opposition to this point, I would posit that it is the specific cutting into the word that accomplishes this, not the virus.

where such an action take place: “Bye bye body halves — i’m half crazy all for the love of color circuits — Do i love you in the throat gristle? Ship ahoy but remember the red river body explode sex words into color — Do you love me? — Take a simple tape from all the things you are” (*Ticket* 48). The specific diction jumps out: “tape,” “explode,” “body halves,” all refer to important parts of the Nova Mob commands and Nova Police mantras, but cutting them up robs them of their associative context. To adopt McLuhan’s terms here, Burroughs is not focusing on the content of the word, but rather its function as a technology. The cut-up bypasses content for construction, shocking the reader into understanding that the medium is indeed the message. These are the tickets exploding which, Toby Tanner points out, destroys the identity imprinted on to the “soft machine.” These cut-up explosions lead to the “fading of identity” (Tanner 110). The virus works in a linear fashion: “the past prerecords your ‘future’” (*Ticket* 188), but by cutting-up the associative flow of the words, linearity and thus meaning is disrupted, while sense is restored. Such an act, which Lydenberg refers to as “disorienting, frustrating, almost physically unpleasant” (72),²⁴ seems to enact McLuhan’s fears of shock, but in the instantaneous travel of electric media, there is no time to acclimatize to the sudden shifts; it is simply too late. Shock is the only option left in revealing the illusion of the word’s content.

As mentioned above, the novel seeks to cut-up the word not only in order to free the imprisoned body, but also to embody the mobile virus. This can be seen by looking at the Nova Mob. The mob’s leader, MrBradlyMrMartin, unlike the prerecorded humans, is

²⁴ Seltzer echoes these criticisms, but goes even further, condemning the trilogy and suggesting that “[w]hat was shocking in *Naked Lunch* becomes repetitious in *The Soft Machine*, and alternately annoying and uninteresting in *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*” (359).

able to shift constantly, always eluding capture (*Ticket* 61). Burroughs fleshes out the disparity in his essay *Electronic Revolution*, where he discusses “[t]he **IS OF IDENTITY**,” which “always carries the implication of that and nothing else, and it also carries the assignment of a permanent condition” (37, emphasis original). BradlyMartin, on the other hand, serves as the negative proposition. As he explains: “all organisms are by definition *limited* and precisely defined by what they are not. And I am what all organisms are not” (*Nova* 167). The trick of the cut-up technique, then, is not only to explode our own tickets, but also to freeze the ability of the Nova forces from slipping through the endless combinations of language. Once the association chains are shattered, the word is embodied, unable to morph and untangle itself. This refers back to Genial, the Nova criminal who “was not there at the time. He never is” (*Ticket* 20). The narrator asks us to “rewrite MrBradlyMrMartin—The separation gimmick that keeps this tired old show on the road” (*Ticket* 134). In doing as McLuhan suggests and looking at the function of the word instead of its content, and thus its relationship to the body, the Nova Mob is undone; no longer disembodied figures eluding capture, they are now trapped in the same embodiment. In doing so, they no longer need to be approached as an enemy, but can be reincorporated into the totality of the embodied being.

2.3 Infinite Tickets, Infinite Realities

The cut-up’s ability to establish equality through embodiment is an important move, but it is not the final step. Burroughs writes that “once you have broken the chains of association linking sub-vocal speech with bodily functions shutting off sub-vocal

speech need not entail shutting off body sounds and consequent physical death” (*Ticket* 160). This sets the stage for McLuhan’s suggestion of combining – or, to use Burroughs’s term, splicing – two technologies. Hayles’s articulation of the body and its depiction in *The Ticket That Exploded* offers us a particular lens through which to view the novel. She claims that the idea that “[a]udiotape opens the possibility that the voice can be taken out of the body and placed into a machine” (207-8) is the source of revolutionary freedom. Extracting the voice from where it has taken up residence (the body) and thrusting it into the tape recorder is a dramatization of McLuhan’s idea that we need to bring together two different media technologies in order to snap us out of our narcotic slumber. Hayles refers to the tape recorder in the novel as both “a metaphor for these mutations and as the instrumentality that brings them about” (211), but I disagree: the tape recorder is necessary in developing these “mutations” of the body, but that is because it already is part of the body’s functioning nervous system — or, more precisely, an extension of the nervous system as McLuhan articulates. Referring to the tape recorder as “metaphor” and “instrument” only reinforces the disassociation between humanity and technology, which in turn perpetuates the content-conflict of nova. The action of the splice must be understood, in McLuhan’s terms, as a move to break past the instrumentalization of the body toward its integration with technology.

The trick is, of course, to avoid the trap of becoming viral. Throughout *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs seeds the idea of a way out of this endless circle: the creation of “a nice virus” (*Ticket* 19). This distinction becomes explicit toward the end of the text, where the narrator, pulling us out of the Nova conflict, asks us to envision “two subjects designated S and W” (*Ticket* 163). Here Burroughs’s diction takes on a specifically

McLuhanian bent: “S and W carry in their respective and presumably separate nervous systems the equipment to record and playback sound to take in images, equipment of which recorder and camera are the externalized abstraction” (164). Burroughs finally elaborates that “[s]pliced tape and film may or may not give rise to virus forms” (164), and, in a complicated example, shows how this can happen:

We may say that S can give the same signals as W *because he retroactively was W* when an S unit of sound and image is cut into W’s sound and image track replacing W with S. Of course the same replacements are occurring in the sound and image track of S. *If S is spliced into the total record of W and W is not spliced into the total record of S this unilateral splicing may result in W contracting an S virus to his considerable disadvantage. (Ticket 165)*

All throughout the novels, the narrator calls for the audience to “[s]plice your body sounds in with anything and everything” (*Ticket 50*). This culminates in the rallying cry: “Everybody splice himself in with everybody else. Communication must be made total. only way to stop it” (*Ticket 166*). This is the realization of a “new form” (McLuhan, *Media 55*): the moment when two technologies come together allows mankind to re-integrate wholly with the technology heretofore forsaken. In his reading of Burroughs, McLuhan cautions that the world of the *Nova Trilogy* “is a paradigm of a future in which there can be no spectators but only participants” (“Notes” 71). For McLuhan, this is a cause for concern, as “[t]he present is always invisible because it’s environmental and saturates the whole field of attention so overwhelmingly” (*Essential 238*), and we therefore participate mindlessly without removing ourselves to think about the effects of media and their relationship to embodiment. But for Burroughs, once the associations

have been broken and the bodies are re-situated, participation becomes the only possible outcome. Thus, Burroughs pushes McLuhan's thesis even further. To stand outside the action and observe is ultimately an isolating experience, which keeps open the possibility of a return of viral infection. The only way to stop infection is to engage with it fully.

Here Burroughs outlines the final movement of his series. In order for splicing to work, it has to be available to everyone, and everyone must participate in it: “[s]plice yourself in with newscasters, prime ministers, presidents. Why stop there?” (*Ticket* 166). Furthermore, it has to be a mutually embodied one: “when a susceptible subject is spliced in with someone *who is not there* then it acts as a destructive virus” (20). Now that the virus has been embodied in the tape recorder, this disparity between embodied (and entrapped) human and free-floating virus no longer exists. Combined with the liberation of our now cut-up tickets, everyone must become a single organism, splicing their cut-up tickets into the body of the machine. This is the final step in Burroughs's project. By cutting ourselves back in, by putting the technologies of word and tape recorder together, we are able to finally see past the content-addiction and toward the actual extensions of our body. Yet while McLuhan wishes to push us in the direction of the hybrid technology that will allow us control over our bodies through observance and understanding, Burroughs is far more interested in the engagement with this hybridization. The expulsion of language into the embodied system of the tape recorder thus sets both humanity and technology on the same footing: it is here that we are able to recognize the relationship between the two. In doing so, we are able to, as McLuhan suggests, leave open our “sensory modes” (“Notes” 72) while engaging directly with our own bodies. Everybody becomes everybody.

Once this action has been achieved on a singular level, the macrocosmic echoes are unavoidable. The narrator of *Nova Express* posits that “[r]eality’ is simply a more or less consistent scanning pattern — The scanning pattern we accept as ‘reality’ has been imposed by a controlling power on this planet, a power primarily oriented towards total control” (53).²⁵ Once we have collectively fulfilled the criteria of shutting down the control machine and creating new subjectivities out of spliced tickets, then the scanning pattern becomes disabled as well. The only possible host for an infinite amount of subjectivities is a matching volume of realities. Seltzer claims that in place of a discrete narrator in the series, there is “only a collection of various voices constantly merging with one another until the babble becomes fully indistinct and begins to resemble silence” (370-371). The implication of this idea allows us to re-visit the silence that both Burroughs and his critics continually return to: it is not the cessation of communication, but the heretofore-inaudible expression of the fully extended human body.

2.4 Conclusion

McLuhan, referring to the Narcissus myth, states that the mythological figure “would have had very different feelings about the image had he known it was an extension or repetition of himself” (*Media* 42). The *Nova Trilogy* can be read as the rewriting of the Narcissus myth in this fashion. In Burroughs’s surreal landscapes, the refusal to accept media technologies as part of our own bodies has turned our technologies into hostile beings, leading to content-based addictions to limitation, war,

²⁵ This echoes Hayles’s criticism of the cyborg paradigm, as it “privileges informational pattern over material instantiation” (2).

and destruction. Yet while technology has become viral and prone to corruption, to fully amputate the body from these technologies would simply exacerbate the problem, ensuring Inspector Lee's entropic prediction of nova. Instead, Burroughs argues for a radical re-embodiment of technologies. Although the move "[f]rom symbiosis to parasitism is a short step" (*Ticket* 49), cutting up the word breaks the association chains which both entrap the human and empower the virus, returning the word to a position of "sense" (or embodiment). Likewise, the splicing together of two technologies (in this case the word and the tape recorder) fulfills McLuhan's criteria of seeing beyond the content of technology toward form, as well as creating the "new enunciations" that Rancière sees as vital to political development. Burroughs's electronic revolution is his way of returning the human entity to a position of understanding with regard to the body, thus transforming the virus into a symbiotic cell. The destruction of these "gimmick" boundaries, and the resultant splicing together of these tickets also opens up the possibility of new realities. Burroughs's anarchic goal is the destruction of any sovereign control — including reality itself. By creating new subjectivities from the cut-up and spliced-together tickets of everyone, the "scanning pattern" of a single controlling reality breaks down, opening up the now-extended human body not only to new embodied potentialities, but also to new realities.

Chapter Three

“A System of Heresies”: Embodied Networks in Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland*

Appearing in a 1984 edition of the *New York Times Book Review*, Thomas Pynchon’s article “Is it OK to be a Luddite?” tackles the simplistic view (popularized, in Pynchon’s view, by British novelist and academic C.P. Snow) that Luddites served as figures of “the counterrevolutionaries of that ‘Industrial Revolution’” (40)²⁶. Pynchon’s article recasts the Luddites, not as an antithetical force in the dialectical progression of technology and society, but rather as figures who fight back against the controlling apparatus of the machine and come out on top. They are, in Pynchon’s formulation, “the breakers of frames” (40). Further elaborating on this idea, Pynchon states that “[t]o insist on the miraculous is to deny to the machine at least some of its claims on us, to assert the limited wish that living things, earthly and otherwise, may on occasion become Bad and Big enough to take part in transcendent doings” (41). Pynchon’s Luddites, then, are not those who combat technology, but rather those who interpose themselves into the operations of the Machine — the macrocosmic systems that instrumentalize and control human beings, reducing them from their total possibility to ciphers and tools, cogs in the cultural production and proliferation of denial. In breaking frames, Luddites free the human being from entrapment within societal systems, granting the body a place of

²⁶ To briefly encapsulate Pynchon’s argument, he notes that the origin of the term “Luddite” comes from a Ned Lud, a man who broke into a house and destroyed a weaving machine in the 19th Century. Pointing out that such machines had in fact existed for over a century by the time of Lud’s action, the notion that Luddites were reactionary anti-technologists is thus faulty. In Pynchon’s own words, this attack was “likely something more complex: the love/hate that grows up between humans and machinery — especially when it’s been around for a while” (40).

refuge outside the controlling mechanisms of society. Pynchon goes on to explain that science fiction serves as “one of the principal refuges, in our time, for those of Luddite persuasion,” for the literary mode allows for “the Luddite impulse to deny the machine taking a different direction” (41). The Luddite lives on, for Pynchon, in the constant attempt to disrupt and evade the entrapping totality of the machine and find a location for multifaceted (post)human embodiments to flourish.²⁷

Pynchon’s novel *Vineland*, published six years after his *New York Times* article, helps dramatize his description of the Machine and Luddite response. Taking place during the repressive Reagan regime of the 1980s, *Vineland* depicts an America thoroughly monitored and controlled by media. Johan Callens refers to the novel as an “Orwellian vision . . . of television and computer monitors being turned into Big Brother’s instruments of control and repression” (123). Like Burroughs’s depiction of the Nova Mob’s thorough infiltration of the planet, the forces of control in *Vineland* have at their disposal a number of different technologies used to keep human beings under watch. Joey Earl Horstman claims that “the main character is none other than the all-pervasive Tube” (331),²⁸ while David Porush argues that the computer serves as the most significant technology in *Vineland* (“Purring” 39)²⁹. This chapter examines the use of two major media technologies — film and television — to elaborate on the differences in how

²⁷ Furthering the claim that Pynchon’s view of Luddism does not espouse anti-technology, his article ends with the assertion that artificial intelligence will be civilization’s next technological advance and that it is “certainly something for all good Luddites to look forward to if, God willing, we should live so long” (41).

²⁸ This tends to be the most popular position, with Callens and Brian McHale both arguing similar — albeit less emphatic — positions on the importance of television.

²⁹ Along with the Puncutron Machine, a fictional device of Pynchon’s that Sister Rochelle promises the dying Takeshi will “do a Roto-Rooter job on those ol’ meridians, get ‘em hummin’!” (*Vineland* 165). However, unlike the computer, the Puncutron is not a machine employed by establishment forces.

media are understood, and how they can lead revolutionary groups either to successful resistance or utter failure. In *Vineland*, anarchist failure is demonstrated through the radical film society known as 24fps, whose attempts to cultivate a revolution in the 1960s are thwarted, appropriated and dismantled by governmental forces. Their downfall occurs because, like the establishment they struggle against, 24fps attempts to employ media as a tool instead of an extension of the body. As such, they are easily bested by their repressive antagonists. Like Burroughs, Pynchon sees the usage of these technologies as instruments ultimately reflected in the similar employment of human beings, and seeks a way out of this limiting and damaging frame. Pynchon's answer is for his anarchist figures to reproduce such a modulatory, shifting, and parallel series of connections. In the novel this is shown in the Thanatoids, a seemingly passive, disaffected group of individuals who have died yet persist on as physical beings able to interact with the world and its inhabitants and, unlike zombies, they retain their consciousness and personality. It is their persistence, however, and their ontological connection to the television that promotes a multiplicity of potentialities, and ultimately proves them a more potent and successful revolutionary group than 24fps. To resist the forces of governmental control, Pynchon's characters must become frame-breakers themselves, Luddites that attempt to insert and break down the machine's control over human determinism.

Postmodern theorist Gilles Deleuze offers a valuable lens through which to view the organization and function of authoritarian power in *Vineland*. In his short essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992), Deleuze argues that the previous incarnation of societal structure, the Foucauldian "disciplinary society," has succumbed now to "ultrarapid forms of free-floating control" (4). Unlike disciplinary societies,

which Deleuze describes as “*molds*, distinct casings” (4), or, to put it another way, rigid and defined boundaries of power, the control society remains detached and malleable.³⁰ Deleuze employs the metaphor of the factory as the emblematic figure of a disciplinary society, where individuals were “constituted as a single body to the double advantage of the boss who surveyed each element within the mass and the unions who mobilized a mass resistance” (4).³¹ Deleuze thus paints disciplinary societies as hierarchies of power where control was exerted over the body, but in a predictable way that could be defended against. The body was considered part of the “mass,” and the molds of control were sized to fit everyone equally. The machine promotes individuality, but a mediated and controlled form manipulated by discursive regimes. Yet this also allowed a direction of attack, a locus point for which resistant forces could target.

The control society, by contrast, has no such limitation. Deleuze describes this new iteration of domination as “*modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (4). Unlike disciplinary societies, control societies do not have any solid, *embodied* locale that can pin their power down. They exist, rather, as “a spirit, a gas” (4) that constantly moves disembodied and unencumbered throughout. Thus, without a material representative to face, the focus of the individual is redirected back

³⁰ Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman refers to such a conception of power as “solid” or “heavy,” as opposed to this new version of power, almost identical to Deleuze’s, which he calls “liquid” (25). I consider Bauman’s conception of liquid society to be more threatening than Deleuze’s, and will discuss his theories at greater length in my third chapter.

³¹ Again, Bauman echoes this idea with the notion that “[a]mong the principle icons of that modernity were the *Fordist factory*, which reduced human activities to simple, routine and by and large predesigned moves meant to be followed obediently and mechanically without engaging mental faculties, and holding all spontaneity and individual initiative off limits” (25).

toward the self. Deleuze positions the “man of control” as “undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network” (5-6), and therefore unable to be faced or combatted. The central thesis of the control society is, then, that power never remains localized in a recognizable form, and can move constantly through its many iterations, away from the threat of resistant action.

Yet Pynchon’s hope in *Vineland* is that America has not yet totally succumbed to a control society. The major differentiation between Deleuze’s conception of a control society and Pynchon’s depiction of society in *Vineland* comes through the idea of numerical code. Deleuze claims that “the different control mechanisms are inseparable, forming a system of variable geometry the language of which is *numerical* (which doesn’t necessarily mean binary)” (4). However, the central metaphor in *Vineland* to describe the authoritarian apparatus is “a world of simplicity and certainty no acidhead, no revolutionary anarchist would ever find, a world based on ones and zeros of life and death. Minimal, beautiful. The patterns of lives and deaths” (71-72). Thus, while Deleuze’s control society is able to perform more complex permutations of modulation beyond simple binary, Pynchon’s America of the 1984 exists in a transitive state: it is moving in that direction, but is still ultimately based on a one-and-zero organization. Critics also note this shift is not fully completed. John Johnston asserts that “*Vineland* also augurs a new kind of communication setup in which the heterogeneity of information in a partially connected media system will disappear through the digitization of all analogical media, which will then become merely different interface possibilities accessed through a computer terminal” (“Mediality” 184-185). While Johnston’s pronouncement appears ambivalent as to this progression, Joseph Tabbi clarifies by

adding that “there remains a continuing threat of totalization by forces that threaten to join the ‘partially connected media systems’ into a single worldwide net” (51). This net that Johnston and Tabbi envision is analogous to Deleuze’s fully realized control society. The fact that it has not yet occurred in *Vineland*, then, is hopeful: in the partially connected series of media, there remains the chance to exploit the gaps that run between these parallel systems, and to break out of the encroaching frame before it becomes the numerical entrapment of digitized, disembodied, free-floating informational patterns. The posthuman body, in its chaotic inability to be slotted into easily organized patterns, provides the means of disrupting control.

Johnston puts forth the argument that in *Vineland* Pynchon “is not only concerned with the signs and signals these [electronic] media carry but also with the how they block access to other signals no less present in the landscape” (“Mediality” 175), while Tabbi furthers this line of discussion by claiming that “there remains a continuing threat of totalization by forces” involved in the “transition from partially connected media systems to a worldwide Web” (51). Both of these critics argue that the evolution of media systems in *Vineland* demonstrates a progression from a series of interrelated-but-separate technological systems working together to a unified, controlled network that seeks to map and monitor the entirety of the human figure. While less focused on the media technology aspect, Katherine Hayles also alludes to this association of forces, referring to it as the “snitch network,” a faction that “seek[s] to gain information, incarcerate dissidents, and control the population” (“Saved” 15). Thus, Pynchon develops a picture of the interrogative and controlling forces using media as a series of tools by which to map and control the human body. However, as in his previous novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon

develops a counterforce that seeks to oppose and slip outside the networks of control³² by breaking the frames that are employed to entrap and contain the body: a group of similarly resistant individuals who seek to oppose the one-directional teleology of the hegemonic powers through strategies that promote embodiment and connection with one another. By changing the ways the body is understood, these people escape the reductive entrapments emplaced on them — and, by extension, change their surrounding environment.

It is here that Pynchon's project differs significantly from Burroughs's. The latter's interest can be located in the possibility of new, embodied iterations of subjectivity — in other words, by a movement toward a future without control.

Vineland's prospects of the future, conversely, seem progressively bleak: one of the members of the defunct revolutionary film collective 24fps speaks grimly of “[t]he day they'd come and break into your house and put everybody in prison camps. Not fun or sitcom prison camps, more like feedlots where we'd all become official, nonhuman livestock” (264). Rather, the characters' attempts at breaking the frame come by locating a connection to the past. Shawn Smith stresses the importance of the past for Pynchon, suggesting that “[n]early all of the novel's narrative strands conform to this past—freedom/present—repression structure,” and further arguing that the novel is ultimately centered around “nothing less than reclaiming History from the depthless, temporally disconnected world” (127, 97). The novel appears to support Smith's assertion, with a member of 24fps claiming that “the whole Reagan program” is a move to “dismantle the

³² Philip E. Simmons both draws and expands on this same allusion when he argues that “Pynchon suggests that oppression and exploitation are constants in American life and that every generation in every place produces its own version of the Counterforce” (168).

New Deal, reverse the effects of World War II, restore fascism at home and around the world, flee into the past” (*Vineland* 265). Yet on the other hand, Frenesi describes her employment as a federal informant as “the freedom, granted to a few, to act outside warrants and charters, *ignore history and the dead*, to imagine no future, no yet-to-be-born, to be able to go on defining moments only, purely, by the action that filled them” (71-72, emphasis added). Thus, Pynchon’s approach to history, control (and, therefore, the opposition to such structures) is more complex than Smith outlines. Rather, the “past” described is a fiction, mediated by images and pictures on television and in films. For, as the second quotation with Frenesi shows, history is a malleable concept, something to be manipulated by authoritarian forces. Frenesi’s mother Sasha Gates goes so far as to articulate this notion when she explains “[h]istory in this town ... is no more worthy of respect than the average movie script, and it comes about in the same way” (*Vineland* 81). In accepting Smith’s proposition that the novel is about the reclamation of history from the forces that seek to control and manipulate it to their own ends, then history must be linked with something tangible. If Smith sees *Vineland*’s world as “depthless,” then it is because it is disconnected and floating amid empty signifiers controlled by establishment forces. Pynchon’s solution is to develop a community of embodiment — in other words, a comprehensible shape (if not one that is stable or rigid). His goal is to give depth and structure (however fluid) to his anarchistic forces by having their bodies become the focalizing point of these communities. Instead of becoming digitized data that can be toyed with and erased, a fear Frenesi fosters (*Vineland* 90-91), Pynchon’s frame-breaking bodies become an anchor that cannot be broken by the aspects of control. Just as Burroughs showed with his call to wise up the marks, Pynchon seeks to establish a

collective of individuals who work together outside to puncture the machine's frame that entraps human beings.

The manifold media technologies that exist throughout the novel, then, all become potential sites of breaking the frame, where the human body can assert a healthy relationship with technology that is not reliant on the unequal domination of the machine. Technologies offer ways to reshape the body, giving it form in a depthless world. By asserting a modulatory human body that shifts through embodiments and avoids being pulled down into the labelled boxes of the controlling apparatus, the potential for escape and transcendence remains possible. The machine Pynchon describes is the one that Johnston sees as "life and death reduced to the minimal but beautiful language of pure information" (181). Yet he also notes that

[i]n *Vineland* differences between media still count, producing not only different kinds of subjectivity and the possibility of different reading effects, but also a complex form of temporality in which a mythic past, two distinguishable historical moments (the 1960s and the 1980s), and a different technological future are all simultaneously 'present.' ("Mediality" 184)

As Johnston demonstrates, each media holds the possibility to demonstrate different iterations of subjectivities and embodiments outside of hegemonic coding. Thus, each media possesses a possibility to be connected to the body, a site of history that — in *Vineland* at least — cannot be totally effaced. In looking past the empty, visually based content these media offer, the "hum of computer circuitry and the flickering light of the television" (Simmons 167), Pynchon's characters seek to find a physical, embodied connection that can be used as a means of finding the depth that Smith sees as missing, a

foundational structure from which to effect a proper resistance. Hayles refers to Pynchon's movement in the novel as one of "recuperation" ("Saved" 25), a means of retracing and holding out against a progressively more powerful and ingrained oppressive structure. Thus, the goal in *Vineland* is to find a center point between the controlling apparatus that dominates the American populace. In the depthless, flattened world of one and zero, human beings are reduced to beings of a similar shape: existing only in life or death, as defined by the establishment's apparatus. What media technologies in the novel do is promote Rancière's concept of *dissensus*: the way the Thanatoids intersect with the television creates a way outside of the binary view of human existence. Instead, the liminal existence becomes like the channels of a television, producing a numerical variety of ways to see beyond the limiting frame, just as the revolutionary call in the *Nova Trilogy* to break out of the singular scanning pattern of reality, and thus produce a viable threat to hegemonic power.

This potential for modulation is directly related to the ubiquity of vision in the narrative. In *Vineland*, The visible aspects of control are subsumed by this new liquid iteration, where power is impossible to locate or even see. As repressive forces become "deeper, and less visible" (*Vineland* 72), they exist beyond lines of sight, and are all the more dangerous for it. This dimming of repressive structures is marked in turn by an increasingly visual culture. Horstman notes that "all is rendered televisually" in the novel (346), meaning that there is an increasing focus on manipulating what is seen and what remains invisible. Joseph Slade follows this line of thought with the critique that "visual imagery is more insidious than language, because it seems more 'real'" (73). In Brock's dreams he feels himself "moving through rooms of a large, splendid house belonging to

people so rich and powerful he'd never even seen them" (*Vineland* 275). These are, to Brock, the "Real Ones," those who "however political fortune below might bloom and die ... remained year in and year out, keeping what was desirable flowing their way" (276). For Vond, these figures are "Real" because they are not trapped by images, but rather they are the ones who control them.³³ Brock, as well as Pynchon, sees the manipulation of what can be visibly detected as simply another means of entrenching the authoritative power structure.

Yet while this tactic is clearly used as a means of dominance by the entrenched forces of power, Pynchon also sees it as a possible means of escape. When the power of media is directed against the population, it is used to disconnect the body in a flurry of unrelated, unconnected images. But when media is employed by individuals or groups who resist the dominant ideology, then its connection to history performs a double-movement: it hides the body amid these infinitely proliferated visions, obfuscating it from the ever-increasing means of control. Slade outlines the idea that "[c]ommunication shapes culture, which, like all functioning systems, is structured by hierarchies of information channels" (71), but when hidden in these images, the hierarchical monitoring breaks down. Indeed, Slade outlines a negative trajectory for the novel: "[a]t the beginning of *Vineland*, federal agencies keep tabs on troublemakers by sending them government checks. By the novel's end, television has rendered the expense

³³ Smith makes the argument that presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, Pynchon's figureheads of repressive control in the novel, are examples of the Real Ones, as "their invisibility is consistent with Brock Vond's vision of the 'Real Ones'" (133). While it is true that neither president appears in the narrative itself, I find this explanation to be misguided: Nixon and Reagan are highly visible figures, immediately recognizable to the American public. The Real Ones, by contrast, are the ones that are *never* seen, and thus, never trapped by an image.

unnecessary” (71). I disagree with this assertion: when submerged underneath the waves of images, the actual body becomes hidden from the omniscient government eye. Yet at the same time, this connection does not divorce the body from itself. When used by the Thanatoids, the television is able to both keep them hidden from the government’s all-seeing eye, while allowing them to remain visible and understandable to each other. The power to shift between visibility and invisibility becomes a powerful tool of resistance in *Vineland*, and the successful depiction of an anarchist organization.

3.1 An Image Onscreen Talking: 24fps and the Dangers of Visibility

The most overt force of resistance in *Vineland* manifests itself in the organization known as 24fps, a “guerilla movie outfit” co-founded by Prairie’s mother, Frenesi Gates (194). The organization’s goal is articulated by Frenesi during an interview with a local news team who ask her if what she’s doing is dangerous. Frenesi responds: “to see injustices happening and ignore them, as your news team has been ignoring the repression of farm workers in this county who’ve been trying to organize — that’s more ‘dangerous’ in the long run, isn’t it?” (*Vineland* 195). Here Frenesi articulates the thesis of the film collective’s being: forces of control are capable of cultivating (through selective application or obfuscation of targets) a specific vision of reality. This also has a very close resonance with Rancière’s articulation of politics, wherein “those who were destined to remain in the domestic and invisible territory of work and reproduction, and prevented from doing ‘anything else,’ take the time that they ‘have not’ in order to affirm that they belong to a common world” (139). Ultimately, then, 24fps attempts to perform a double-movement of making-visible both the oppressed and the oppressors. What Frenesi

and the rest of 24fps seek to do, then, is to turn the implements of control back against their operators in order to open up the world. Frenesi later tells herself that “she was making movies for everybody, to be shown free everywhere there might be a reflective enough surface” (209). The goal of 24fps, then, is to use the camera like an extension of the eye, opening up perception beyond commercially developed media and bringing it into the light of day.

Indeed, the idea of light is central to the operation of 24fps. The narrator explains that “[e]verybody in 24fps had their own ideas about light, and about all they shared was the obsession” (*Vineland* 201). Frenesi, the central character in the collective, possesses the strongest affinity with lighting, wanting to utilize “as much light as they could liberate from the local power company” in their films (201).³⁴ This not only increases the illumination in the shots Frenesi composes, but it also serves a secondary purpose of “draining off the lifeblood of the fascist monster, Central Power itself” (202). A later dream sequence helps to further elaborate on Frenesi’s relationship with light and her belief in its power:

Often, through some dense lightning-shot stirring of night on night, she would be just about to see Its [Power’s] face when her waking mind would kick in and send her spreading awake into what should have been the world newly formatted, even innocent, but from which, as it proved, the creature had not after all been banished, only become, for a while, less visible. (202)

³⁴ Frenesi’s fascination with light and its powers is something that runs in her family, and it is worth noting that the company her father Hub Gates owns is called “Lux Unlimited” (*Vineland* 370).

The interplay of light, power, and embodiment in this dream sequence offers a valuable lens through which to view Frenesi's ideology. Bathing a subject in the glow of light has the potential not only to make viewers aware of the plight of those ignored by the camera eye (like the union farmers 24fps investigates), but also to bring into the realm of consciousness the true face of the systems of control. And yet, Frenesi's desire appears to be that, when brought into illumination and visibility, the monster³⁵ that is power will be exiled, overthrown by the citizenry who are able to look upon its face. Her dream helps establish the impossibility of Frenesi's goals as they currently are: by using film as a simple tool, power can never truly be captured and revealed.

An interesting point critics take with the section of the novel devoted to 24fps is its binary distinction between the past and present. Brian McHale asserts that "the general tendency is to associate film with an irrevocable past, and TV with the present" (121). The idea here is that 24fps and the other revolutionary groups possessed the potential to affect a genuine resistance movement against American governmental forces, before the encroachment of a control society; their failure to bring about this change has resulted in the helplessness of the following generation of the 1980s to be able to stand up and affect resistance. Even then, reception toward the organization is ambiguous: Smith argues that "Pynchon would have us believe that a true 'revolutionary' cinema is simply another illusion separating his characters from direct political action" (117). As before, I find Smith's narrow categorization of media as existing uniformly along the axis of repression

³⁵ In addition to the above reference of Frenesi's dream depicting Power as a type of creature, she also notes that "she had begun to discover in dreams of that period, personally aware, possessing life and will" (*Vineland* 202). While outside the scope of this project, the idea of power being a self-sustaining iteration of a kind of life has notable resonances with Burroughs's idea of control as an addiction to itself.

and control to be a significant misreading of Pynchon's work.³⁶ Yet he is nonetheless correct in identifying the failure of 24fps as resulting from their inability to use their potential in a new fashion; rather, "24fps does not carve out such new ways of seeing 'reality' with its cameras. Instead, the group's revolutionary agenda fails because they base it on images rather than material reality" (Smith 117). In a roundabout way, Smith is correct here: the film collective fails because they end up simply mirroring the instrumentalization of film technology, rather than truly extending it in an embodied, revolutionary fashion. The narrator mentions that 24fps was actually created out of "what was left of the Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollektive ... a doomed attempt to live out the metaphor of movie camera as weapon" (*Vineland* 197). In the hands of this failed collective, the camera becomes a mere tool that is employed to move against hegemonic operators. Even though Frenesi views the defunct Kollektive as "doomed," its ideology cannot help but infect the new iteration of the society, as

a rump of the Kollektive's more stubborn personnel ... had put some of the language of their old manifesto into 24fps's new one — "A camera is a gun. An image taken is a death performed. Images put together are the substructure of an afterlife and a Judgment. We will be the architects of a just Hell for the fascist pig. Death to everything that oinks!" (197)

Thus, even though they attempt to move beyond the adolescent nihilism of the previous incarnation, 24fps cannot entirely escape the instrumental pronouncements, and this is

³⁶ Porush offers a far more nuanced reading of Pynchon's relationship to technology, asserting that "Pynchon's fictions employ machinery to expose the very un-machine-like machinery of the reader's consciousness at work" ("Reading" 117), and, later, that "Pynchon, somewhat paradoxically, sees technology and technique ... to be potential means to transcendence" ("Purring" 39).

what dooms the group at its very inception. By reflecting the methodology of the detached, depthless, and repressive apparatus back at itself, 24fps ends up unwittingly recreating the same actions as their enemies.

After Brock has convinced Frenesi to frame the hapless Weed Atman as a government collaborator, she tells the federal agent that she is “going to be filming it. Once we have him on film, whether he lies or whether he confesses, he’s done for, it doesn’t matter” (240). Frenesi believes in the camera’s ability to capture and project a glimpse of reality, emblazoned on someone’s face. While Hayles notes that 24fps’s “philosophy reflects and inverts Brock’s belief in criminal physiognomy” (“Saved” 21), she is only half-right: rather than inverting his reductive depictions of embodiment, Frenesi’s beliefs simply echo them. In the end, her idea that the camera will reveal truth as measured on Weed’s face is little different from Vond’s adoration of Lombroso’s phrenological theories.³⁷ Thus the failure of 24fps as a society comes about through its inability to do something new. Rancière condemns these tactics as being ultimately devoid of power: “[c]alls for the need to struggle against the society of the spectacle, to develop practices of *détournement*, continue to come from all quarters. And they do so by invoking the same repertoire of denunciatory techniques” (144). The goal of 24fps is to make all things visible, but its failure to break out of the essential instrumentality of its technology proves its central failure. Technology’s instrumentalization and disassociation

³⁷ Brock is beholden to Cesare Lombroso, a 19th Century Italian criminologist who theorized that criminal behaviour was specifically linked to physiological features, and that “the phenomenon of criminality [was] possibly the product of arrested development at a more primitive mental state (*atavism*) ... a process of *degeneration*” (Mazzarello 97-98). Pynchon playfully inverts this idea in the narrative by having Brock believe in “the Lombrosian concept of ‘misonism.’ Radicals, militants, revolutionaries, however they styled themselves, all sinned against this deep organic human principle, which Lombroso had named after the Greek for ‘hatred of anything new’” (*Vineland* 272-273).

from embodied engagement metonymically links to the employment and instrumentality of the entire revolutionary act itself: Frenesi “pretends the camera reduces her to an impersonal eye, and allows Brock to turn her into an accessory, thereby compounding the reification” (Callens 136). As Pynchon makes clear, the danger of using technology as an instrument is that it becomes just a short step until everything is instrumental.

In the novel, 24fps is torn apart through the act of filming. Brock Vond, wanting to simultaneously destroy both PR³ and 24fps, employs Frenesi not only to convince the rest of the film collective’s leadership that Weed is an informant, but also to have him murdered. Brock gives Frenesi a gun to in turn give to the radical Rex Snuvvle, an unstable and disillusioned member of 24fps who is jealous of Weed. After giving her the gun, Brock asks Frenesi if she is able to see “the two separate worlds — one always includes a camera somewhere, and the other always includes a gun, one is make-believe, one is real” (*Vineland* 241). Hayles identifies Brock as someone who “thinks of metaphors as unreal and therefore ineffectual” (22), whereas the power of the gun is something that has the ability to impact the world. The core flaw of 24fps, according to Simmons, is that they confuse “the power of images for the power of physical force” (169). For Brock, the culture of the image is simply a tool that allows for detachment and disconnection, whereas the gun is able to impact the world in a physical, material fashion.³⁸ Even the actual murder scene itself is coded in ambiguities, for when the enraged Rex confronts Weed, “while trying to find the ring to open the aperture, [Frenesi] missed the actual moment, though shapes may have moved somewhere in the frame,

³⁸ That said, Hayles goes on to argue that it is in fact “the act of filming itself that stole [Weed’s] soul, for turning the camera on him in bad faith destroyed him more surely than the gunshot that followed” (“Saved” 23).

black on black, like ghosts trying to return to earthly form” (246).³⁹ Smith argues that “[t]he murder’s invisibility ... paradoxically confirms its reality” (116). Hayles, meanwhile, sees this as evidence that “the image cannot speak for itself, nor can the camera eye reveal an impartial truth. The lesson is that all images are mediated and all camera angles encoded with presuppositions” (“Saved” 26). In attempting to rely wholly on the power of the image (especially the image flooded with light), Frenesi and 24fps ultimately end up playing into the hands of Brock and the Real Ones of control. While the attempt to enlarge the scope of vision, both by revealing the plight of the oppressed and the operations of the oppressors is an essential goal for Pynchon, 24fps’s attempt to do so only ends up shallowly aping the tactics employed by the authorities in power. In a direct confrontation, the resources at the disposal of 24fps pale in comparison to the vast mechanisms that support Brock and his crusade to dismantle the revolution. Returning to Callens’s idea that Brock turns Frenesi into an instrument,⁴⁰ we see that this detached and disembodied power cannot be battled with the same tools that it uses. For, as seen in Brock’s understanding of the Real Ones, power is dislocated, free-floating, and unable to be pinned down.

While the goals of 24fps are noble (and in many ways similar to the strategies of resistance proscribed by Burroughs in the *Nova Trilogy*), Pynchon articulates a more sophisticated system of control in *Vineland*. The old strategies no longer possess the same

³⁹ The narrator goes on to state that “the sound of the shot [was] captured by Krishna’s tape” (246), allowing the spectator Prairie to approach the murder on some level.

⁴⁰ He reiterates this point in an interesting fashion, noting that “whenever Brock seeks access to a world beyond, he does so with the express intent of appropriating and corrupting it: witness his recourse to Frenesi’s camera skills to finish off Weed” (129). Not only does this establish Brock’s tendency to view everything around him as an instrument, it also shows how power reacts to the new by attempting to break it down and absorb it into familiar power structures, turning action into commodity.

efficacy, and can be easily turned back against the forces of control. When viewing technology as weaponry, it is a simple fact that the control apparatus has a bigger arsenal, as well as more numerous and powerful operators. However, far from the pessimism and borderline-nihilistic pronouncements of critics who lament that “each succeeding generation also becomes progressively more entrenched in mass culture, which paralyzes social activism and obfuscates historical awareness” (Smith 126), Pynchon articulates the need to see beyond the old, recognized attempts of resistance, where cameras are guns to shoot at the entrenched structures of power. Pynchon uses the failure of 24fps to effect any real change to demonstrate the need for a new relationship between technology and the body: a connection that extends the body beyond the controlling frame and allows it a plurality of possibilities.

3.2 “Transcendence Through Saturation”: Jamming the Tech-Death Impulse

Due to Brock Vond’s efficient disintegration of the revolution at the College of the Surf, as well as the film organization devoted to fighting authoritarian power, critics see little hope in the abilities of revolutionary organizations to affect resistance. Simmons states that “*Vineland* leaves us wondering what forms of resistance, if any, are possible in a world in which power is at the same time everywhere and nowhere, directing our lives from the sanctuary of no known address” (152), while Tabbi rhetorically asks “when consciousness, like corporate power, is itself composed of a collection of partially connected modules or media, what resistance is possible?” (52). Under the instrumentalizing power of the repressive apparatus, we see what Porush refers to as

“society’s death-wish addiction to the application of technology to human control” (“Reading” 132). However, Deleuze’s idea of a control society’s modulatory state can be seen as an answer to these questions. Deleuze states that, indeed, “the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses” (6).

Although I have argued that the authoritarian system in *Vineland* has not quite reached the fully realized plateau of Deleuze’s control society, it is nonetheless certain that digitized media have come to represent Pynchon’s view of America. Zoyd reflects fondly on “the Mellow Sixties, a slower-moving time, *predigital, not yet so cut into pieces*, not even by television” (*Vineland* 38, emphasis added). By 1984, television and the computer have become imbricated in the instrumentalizing delineations and divisions imposed on the human being. In the above quotation, we again encounter the fear of factors like time, identity, community being fractured, cut into pieces like frames in a film. If film represents an ambiguous media in *Vineland*, then television is much less so. Callens claims that “television tends to express a corporate consciousness and movie representations individual agency” (129). In harsher terms, Horstman concludes that “[t]elevision is characterized by the novel, then, not only as trivializing but manipulative, as a more efficient and thorough pacifying agent than brute force for a conservative government or culture” (339), while Smith states that television is “the foundation for postmodern culture’s temporal depthlessness” as it “transform[s] cinema’s simulacra of reality into a historicized fulfillment of fascist collectivity” (119). To put it simply, television is considered by critics to be an exemplar of the complete dominance of repressive forces in the novel. Television is employed as a tool keeping the population of

the United States permanently disconnected from history, activism, and revolution through a series of hyperreal images that disrupt any genuine connection to an authentic existence. The people who watch television (and, due to the ubiquity of its presence in *Vineland*, that includes everyone) become little more than addicts (Callens 116), which is personified best in the character of Hector Zuñiga, a “Tubefreek” who is dispatched to a mental care facility to undergo “Tubal Detox” (*Vineland* 33). Television is thus often depicted in the novel as a damaging, controlling technology that only furthers a severing of human experience from the “authentic” world and cultivates a slavish devotion to a series of unconnected, unrelated images. Smith believes that this depiction of television demonstrates how “Pynchon ... argues that mass culture, especially televisual culture, *represses* our perception of what is real” (110). Just as light serves to reinforce the structures of power instead of tearing them down, the unceasing light of the Tube disrupts the body and prevents it from having any genuine contact or interaction with any other body.

McHale offers a different way of examining television in the novel. He notes that “it seems very hard to avoid the conclusion that *Vineland* is fascinated with TV and that Pynchon is, at the very least, equivocal about it” (124). In a novel so thoroughly permeated with televisual references, it seems difficult to argue that Pynchon is wholly negative about the experience. Where critics like David Cowart interpret Pynchon’s representation of television as “favor[ing] historical surface to historical depth” (6), McHale provides an alternate explanation: “[w]here the movies had arguably functioned in the modernist period as cultural dominant, modernism’s preferred model or metaphor of itself, TV has come to function as the postmodern culture’s privileged model or

metaphor” (125).⁴¹ Television promotes a different way of thinking from the supposedly “rational,” logical being. Here we encounter again McLuhan’s ideas that media technologies can help reframe the human body and its relationship with the world. McLuhan describes media as that which “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (*Media* 9). The television thus offers a way to reshape the human body beyond the myth of a rational, linear subject, which McLuhan sees as a creation of print culture elitism. Likewise, for McHale television is potentially capable of “introducing a second ontological plane or level with the plane of the fictional world” (125); or, to put it another way, it introduces a level outside of the consensus reality of control. Many critics have remarked on Pynchon’s propensity to discuss the possibility of alternate worlds,⁴² and this serves as a means of breaking out of the entrapping mechanisms of authority.

The idea of alternative worlds is indeed a recurring theme throughout the text, and in a notable passage, the children of Van Meter demonstrate the ability to “meet, lucidly dreaming, in the same part of the great southern forest” (*Vineland* 223).⁴³ Van Meter later refers to this phenomenon as a moment of “transcendence” (223), which is significant. Porush writes about the absolute necessity of transcendence in Pynchon’s fiction as “the only hope for redemption from pedestrian, but ubiquitous, evil” (“Purring” 32). For

⁴¹ In arguing this point, McHale refutes the tendency of critics and theorists like Neil Postman to denigrate television, claiming that “[d]emonizing TV relieves Postman of the obligation to examine the ‘rationality’ of print culture too closely or critically” (124).

⁴² McHale claims that “*Vineland* is pervaded by the alternative realities not only of the mass media . . . but also of dreams and hallucinatory visions” (137), while Callens refers to Pynchon’s “well-known concern with ‘alternative worlds’” (116), and later asserts that “*Vineland* does offer many glimpses into an alternative realm” (136).

⁴³ The fact that the children meet in the *Vineland* forests is significant. I will discuss the relevance of the forest as a liminal space later on in this chapter.

Porush, transcendence for Pynchon is the moment when “epistemological and ontological commitments collapse” and the characters “suspend the quest for certainty” and “give up simply surviving and immersing ... in favor of recognizing deeper and unutterable truths” (32). Porush’s definition of transcendence thus appears remarkably similar to Pynchon’s articulation of the need to break the frame. By moving beyond the one-and-zero of binary control, there is a potential to see a multiplicity of ontological possibilities, and thus a snapshot of the human body that is more than just the animals that Brock and the Real Ones so desperately desire. These transcendent moments, then, are moments when the human being is capable of asserting its material power by disrupting the flow of the machine, and in doing so locating “*that special place beyond systems of codes and information where our humanness resides*” (Porush, “Reading” 117). Opposing the claim that “TV ... is designed to distract attention,” which serves in *Vineland* as “a positive value term,” McHale instead figures television as a technology that instead “encourages ‘selective inattention’; its tendency is to mesh with the world rather than override ongoing activities of the empirical world” (123, 127). Thus, the worlds of television serve to “insinuate themselves into the real world in order to pluralize the latter” (McHale 129). Television, then, offers its viewers the potential to maneuver themselves outside the realms controlled by governmental or other hegemonic powers, and into a realm beyond. Thus we again approach the idea of *dissensus*, of the possibility of breaking out of the singular “sense datum” that composes a policed society (Rancière 144).

This *dissensus* is achieved in *Vineland* through a group that appears only in the aftermath of 24fps’s downfall and the subsequent triumph of repressive forces. Known as the Thanatoids, a collection of beings who exist in a state “like death, only different”

(*Vineland* 170),⁴⁴ and who live in the hills close to the forests of Vineland, these beings are ones who have died, but whose materiality has not vanished. Indeed, death is portrayed in the novel in a strange fashion: death does not actually bring about a cessation of life; that is only achieved through the disappearance of characters, such as Takeshi's colleague Minoru, a person who "no longer existed in the form Takeshi had known," and the governmental assault on PR³, which results in "no reported deaths but a handful of persons unaccounted for" (156, 248). Death, in the world of *Vineland*, is not a permanent condition, as seen in the Thanatoids (among them Weed Atman, the novel's explicit murder victim),⁴⁵ but disappearance is. Indeed, it is the "death" that the Thanatoids exist in that offers a potential means of escape from controlling forces, as the Thanatoids significantly remain embodied creatures, possessing a materiality that persists after their (often violent) ends. The lingering physicality of the Thanatoids and their presence in the world disrupts the one-and-zero flow from activity to non-existence. The Thanatoids persist.

Critical reception of the Thanatoids is, however, largely ambiguous, if not outright negative. Callens reads them as a metaphor for "squandered technological opportunity" (116), while Smith sees the figures as "mak[ing] concrete postmodern culture's flattening of time" (118). The Thanatoids often appear as helpless, passive

⁴⁴ This is itself a recurring mantra throughout the novel, as Zoyd makes the comment that his out-of-body experience is "like Mr. Sulu laying in coordinates, only different," and Takeshi later refers to his job as a karmic adjustor for Thanatoids to be "just like insurance — only different!" (*Vineland* 40, 173). This recurring phrase underlines the things that exist outside the rigid binary of control.

⁴⁵ Puzzlingly, Hayles appears to misread the function of the Thanatoids in the novel, seeing them rather than the literal dead as "a cult that has accepted their death as the only reality worth knowing" and later refers to Weed as being "apparently only wounded by the gunshot" ("Saved" 26).

receivers, more victims of technological instrumentality than beings who can transcend its entrapment. Even the narrative itself admits that “[a]s a Thanatoid one’s reduced to hanging around monitoring the situation, trying to nudge if you don’t think it’s moving along fast enough but basically helpless” (*Vineland* 365). Even McHale, who offers perhaps the most positive analysis of the Thanatoids, ultimately describes them as “the characters most addicted to TV viewing” (123).⁴⁶ He describes these “compulsive TV-viewers” as indistinguishable from ‘normal’ TV-addicted Americans” (118). I, however, reject this notion that the Thanatoids can be considered “addicted’ to television in the same way that people like Hector are. These Tubefrecks are still unambiguously involved in the realm of the living, and as such the television becomes a tool of distraction, keeping them divorced from anything real. The Thanatoids, on the other hand, are liminal beings in the space between life and death; a space enabled by the development of new media technologies. Their very bodies are in-between the binary provinces of life and death, and as such the television is less a tool of distraction and more a way of orientating their bodies to now-limitless possibility. The mere existence of the Thanatoids helps to drive a wedge into the structure of control. For if the authoritarian infrastructure in the novel is built upon the idea that “human action, perhaps even the human soul, can be reduced to ... ones and zeroes” (Hayles, “Saved” 20), then the Thanatoids serve to disrupt such an easy passage. The passage into the world of the Thanatoids appears to be the one thing that Brock Vond and his real ones cannot control. McHale makes this point when he argues that these singularly liminal beings “occupy the excluded middle ground between the one and zero of life and death” (140), and this has several significant

⁴⁶ Callens also refers to the Thanatoids as “TV-addicted” (116).

meanings for *Vineland* and the possibility of resistant action. Although it in the gap of the binary delineation hints at the increasing sophistication and movement in the direction of a numerical system of authority (thus firmly in the realm of control), the government holds no sway over the Thanatoids. The television that critics rail against as an indicator of the “culture’s temporal depthlessness” (Smith 119) actually becomes a means of envisioning both McLuhan’s idea of media reshaping the body as well as McHale’s ontological plurality; the Thanatoids literalize the infinite possibilities that exist outside the binary of life and death.⁴⁷ Instead of television being used to control or monitor the state of the Thanatoids, it seems to create them, and the interrelation between television and the Thanatoids is thorough.

The Thanatoids end up appearing, then, as a very literal embodiment of Rancière’s *dissensus*. Both characters in the novel and critics responding to it appear puzzled by their presence, and Smith wonders if “the Thanatoids [are] ... more ‘real’ than McCarthyism, Nixon’s election, or the commercialization of *Vineland*?” (108). Initially, the Thanatoids appear to violate Hayles’s idea that posthuman subjectivities should embrace their own finitude and mortality, rather than be “seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality” (*Posthuman* 5). But this criticism is

⁴⁷ Takeshi and the Puncutron Machine perform a near-identical function in the novel. After Takeshi is mistaken for Brock Vond in Japan, ninja assassin DL Chastain inadvertently hits him with a death technique known as the “Vibrating Palm,” designed to inflict a delayed death (*Vineland* 154). In order to save Takeshi, he is brought to the Puncutron Machine, which is designed to reinvigorate his chi pathways from decay and bring him back in the direction of life. Thus, just like the Thanatoids, Takeshi is rescued from the one-directional route toward death and brought back to life (although not entirely: he is intriguingly referred to as “part Thanatoid” by Ortho Bob (171). Another notable element is that the opponents of the machine’s usage “included the ever-vigilant FDA” (164), again highlighting the governmental need to control the boundaries between life and death. However, unlike television, the Puncutron is not a media technology, and thus is outside the primary focus of this chapter.

undermined by the text, for the Thanatoids are “victims . . . of karmic imbalance” (*Vineland* 173) who are seeking to progress into the realms of death. The text later informs us that “[s]ince the end of the war in Vietnam, the Thanatoid population had been growing steeply” (320). Between this mention and the fact that the two most visible Thanatoids are Ortho Bob — a teenager who died during the Vietnam War — and Weed — the target of a government-orchestrated assassination — Pynchon’s implication is clear: the Thanatoids are the revenant figures of the destruction authority brings about on its own citizens. It remains little wonder, then, why the operatives of control attempt to “disappear” dissidents rather than outright killing them. Additionally, it is noted that the Thanatoids “feel little else beyond their needs for revenge” (171). The television, in Smith’s eyes, is a tool that effaces history (110), but the Thanatoids remember the cause of their current state, and attempt to right it. Takeshi, “a metonymic figure of ontological plurality” (McHale 134), opens a karmic readjustment business in the hills of Vineland specifically catering to Thanatoids to help them progress into death. In this way, then, Takeshi serves to rescue Thanatoids from their “unjust” death at the hands of the government (whether directly or indirectly), and “right” their unlives, giving them the potential to move on with the proper karmic boost. Death exists in a bizarre condition in *Vineland*, and “an enhancing factor, in Takeshi’s opinion [was] television, which with its history of picking away at the topic with doctor shows, war shows, cop shows, murder shows, had trivialized the Big D” (*Vineland* 218). While on the surface this appears to be a critical comment on the way postmodern culture has rerouted life so that death no longer seems to have any prevalence, there is an anarchic sentiment buried in this passage as well: death, the other half of control’s binary equation, is depowered by the mere

existence of the Thanatoids. The violent deaths that resistant figures face is undone, and the possibility of their return is maintained. Smith argues that “[f]reedom ... is the concept that is repeatedly ‘killed’ in the repressive backlashes that characterize the textual world of *Vineland*. Yet it also returns to ‘haunt’ the characters, tantalizing them with memories of the freedom that they once had but which was stolen from them at some point in time” (128). The Thanatoids become the literal embodiment of this haunting, a constant reminder that the establishment does not maintain total control, and that anarchist frame-breaking remains a possibility.

Although Simmons argues that, in the novel, “television itself has become a potent historical force that, by producing a docile and distracted citizenry, has largely superseded the efforts of the state security apparatus in enforcing an oppressive status quo” (167), it can also be read as the necessary connection in jamming the influence of control. The existence of the Thanatoids as passive-but-present figures disrupts the Establishment’s vice-grip on life and death. Rather than serving as “hyperreal refutations of death” in *Vineland* (Smith 118), the Thanatoids serve as the epitome of Pynchon’s alternative-worlds seeping into the “real” world and eroding its singular control. The Thanatoids’ presence in the novel serves to disrupt this simple passage from life to death, and Takeshi’s business in helping the Thanatoids move on to a death by fixing their disrupted karma acts as a way of fulfilling these possibilities, allowing Thanatoids to exist and correct the injustices that have befallen them. But this is not simply a one-way movement, either. The novel’s final section begins with the Thanatoids’ community filled with “the opening of J.S. Bach’s ‘Wachet Auf’ (*Vineland* 325). The response is notable:

They blinked, began to turn, their eyes, often for the first time, sought contact with the eyes of another Thanatoid. This was unprecedented. . . . What was a Thanatoid, at the end of the long dread day, but memory? So, to one of the best tunes ever to come out of Europe, even with its timing adapted to the rigors of a disco percussion track able to make the bluest Thanatoid believe, however briefly, in resurrection, they woke, the Thanatoids woke. (325)

While the Thanatoids up to this point in the novel have remained largely background characters — invisible to the omniscient eye of the government — this passage suggests that the Thanatoids are becoming not only aware of their bodies, but active figures in the conflict with the establishment; in other words, becoming visible. The Thanatoids, then, are both avatars of postmodernism's disruption of a singular "reality" as well as a new formulation of the body as a pluralized, non-linear, liminal figuration. These concepts are directly related to one another. In their liminal bodies, the Thanatoids project the way the body and wider ontology can break out of the negative frame it has been heretofore entrapped within. The Thanatoids remain the most overtly "posthuman" — if posthumous — of any of the characters in *Vineland*, and their ability to move both toward death and life serves as a disruption in the way the government controls its population.

Accepting McHale's proposition that television serves as the model for plurality, the Thanatoids, despite their passivity, are the representatives of its liberating potential, as they — through their connection with television's plurality — manage to escape the one-directional (and one-dimensional) deaths plotted out for them and move to jamming authoritarian control. This action is one of the clearest examples of anarchist disruption in the text, and is a far more successful interruption in the mechanisms of control than the

actions taken by 24fps. By the novel's end, it is possible that they have progressed from simple jamming to the more active role Deleuze describes: that of piracy. In the novel's closing pages, Brock Vond, his crusade against the denizens of Vineland brought to a halt by the very government he works for, finds himself stranded in the woods around Vineland. Porush argues that "the Thanatoids intervene, kidnap him, and take him to the underworld" ("Purring" 37). Yet Porush's description downplays what exactly happens in this passage. His abductors, Vato and Blood, take him deep into the woods, into the territory formerly belonging to the Yoruk tribe, and specifically their borderland between the living and "Tsorrek, the land of death" (*Vineland* 379). Brock finds himself amid "voices, not chanting, together but remembering, speculating, arguing, telling tales, uttering curses, singing songs, all the things voices do, but without ever allowing the briefest breath of silence. All these voices, forever" (379). The men then inform Brock that "[t]hey'll take out your bones ... The bones have to stay on this side. The rest of you goes over. You look a lot different, and you move funny for a while, but they say you'll adjust" (380). Rather than a simple carrying across into the underworld, Brock, the representative of the Real Ones and their ability to selectively frame reality, is pulled into this ceaseless cacophony of speaking, of memory. The central irony of this passage is that Brock, the manipulator and categorizer of bodies, becomes disembodied from it, becoming as close to a Real One as he will ever get. Thus, ultimately, the Thanatoids are able to pirate Brock, disappearing him as well into the vast history of the Vineland forests. Yet just as they take action to ferry Brock away, the Thanatoids also manage to slip back into their previous, ignored or invisible mode of life. The Thanatoids are thus able to both actively and passively disrupt hegemonic control, becoming a subversive

mirror of the control society's modulation, able to move between invisibility and visibility with ease. In the end, then, the Thanatoids remain an indelible, *dissensual* embodiment that slowly comes into shape and visibility as the novel progresses.

3.3 Conclusion: Vineland the Good

Pynchon's *Vineland* subtly explores two very different anarchist groups and their attempts to develop strategies to resist and overthrow the powers of control. On the surface, it is 24fps who are the more viable anarchist collective: they are active, engaged, and attempt to bring the fight to the establishment, while the Thanatoids appear as a group of passive observers who do little at all. And yet Pynchon demonstrates how active force does not always prevail. 24fps views the media of film as a weapon to be turned on authoritarian power. That their revolutionary goals are turned against them, and the collective destroys itself, is almost a foregone conclusion in Pynchon's narrative. Rather, it is the Thanatoids, whose mere existence drives a wrench into the binary frame of control, that bring about a true change. Television promotes a multifarious understanding of the body, an ontological plurality that breaks through the frame of life-and-death. The Thanatoids, in their relationship with the television, serve to make that wedge an embodied reality, and therefore disrupt the continuous flow of power.

It is not surprising, then, that the Thanatoids' locus of existence is in the titular *Vineland*. There are definite utopian echoes in this location, as Smith notes the "reference to Vinland also points to the [Norse] sagas' representations of Vinland as utopia," and later refers to Vinland as a "utopian machine" (99, 107). Ultimately, *Vineland* serves as

the confluence of all possibilities outside of the reductive, enclosing boundaries enacted by the Real Ones and Brock Vond, a place of mythical potential where plurality is physically present, seen in the caves of “the mythical Yoruk and their realm of the dead” (Tabbi 52). It is also the safe haven for the anarchists of the novel, past and present, as “[h]alf the interior hasn’t even been surveyed — plenty of redwoods left to get lost in, ghost towns old and new blocked up behind slides that are generations old and no Corps of Engineers’ll ever clear” (*Vineland* 305). All of the novel’s revolutionary figures, from the Wheeler family and its antecedents, to Takeshi and DL, to the remnants of 24fps, come to Vineland at the novel’s end, safe in its shroud.⁴⁸ Existing in a state of invisibility is a vital way to remain outside the grips of control. Invisibility, like plurality, is the power of not being seen in the light of control and entrapped within a categorization.⁴⁹ To have control over invisibility is a way of moving outside of governmental control.

This is not to say, however, that invisibility is the only mode available to the anarchists of the novel. Indeed, invisibility is simply the strategy to keep them protected from the antagonistic elements that seek to dismantle and appropriate them. Within Hayles’s “kinship network” (“Saved” 15), the characters are open to new embodied possibilities. The Thanatoids remain fully visible to one another, and possess the ability

⁴⁸ The Kunoichi Attentives, a clan of ninjas who aid the protagonists in the novel, help embody this idea. DL Chastain, an Attentive as well as a former member of 24fps, knows a “well-known ninja invisibility technique known as *Kasumi*, or The Mist. By wiggling her fingers precisely in [a soldier’s] face, she selectively blinded him to her presence — he could go on with his life, but without DL in it” (111, 253). Indeed, DL in many ways serves as the opposite of Frenesi, most notably when the narrator notes that “[i]f Frenesi’s realm was light, DL’s was dark” (250).

⁴⁹ Indeed, the characters frequently wish for invisibility throughout the novel: DL fantasizes about becoming Clark Kent, the mild-mannered, anonymous alter ego of Superman (*Vineland* 133-134), while Frenesi later wishes to “make believe . . . that she was on her own, with no legal history, no politics, only an average California chick, invisible” (236).

to interact. Callens views the end of the novel as a spot where the characters “all try to penetrate that ‘magical exact film frame’ and reach beyond” (139). The reference to frames brings us back to Pynchon’s notion of the Luddites and their ability to break through the frame and reach transcendence. George Levine finds the anarchy in Pynchon’s fiction as “suggesting that life, in its extraordinary capacity to produce surprises, constantly resists the heat-death, as must we all” (67). These transcendent moments come through the Thanatoids’ new relations to technology and their bodies, disrupting the inevitable push towards death. Rancière claims that politics comes about in the negotiation of “new configurations between the visible and the invisible” (139),⁵⁰ and *Vineland* presents this modulatory movement between invisible to the outside world and fully visible to the members within this kinship network. The movement from invisibility to visibility mirrors that of the binary alterations of the Thanatoids authoritarian opponents, but their multivalent and indeterminate forms help to break out of this one-and-zero frame. The embodiments in the Vineland enclave are numerical in origin, and their potential to transgress the boundaries of life and death moves outward with the arrival of the revolutionaries from the land of the living. A new generative cycle of anarchic frame-breaking will continue, the novel’s end suggests, and the Thanatoids, shrouded from the despotism of outside forces but fully visible to one another, become a positive figuration of Deleuze’s modulatory society: a society of freedom.

⁵⁰ Intriguingly, Vato and Blood, Brock’s ferrymen to the Yoruk underworld, are described early in the novel as performing “acts of conversion” in the woods (*Vineland* 44).

Chapter Four

“There Is No Enemy”: The Anarchic Circuitry of Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles*

Toward the end of the second volume⁵¹ of Grant Morrison’s comic book series *The Invisibles*, an ideological position is put forth by the antagonists. The demonic imp known as Mister Quimper, a representative of the oppressive Outer Church, captures two agents of the eponymous Invisibles: King Mob and Jolly Roger. Placing them under a psychic thrall, Quimper explains: “[y]ou forgot you were parts of a machine. Because of your forgetfulness, the machine is inefficient. We can correct your functioning. We *must* correct it” (6:132), adding that he will help return Mob and Roger to “the objective reality of the machine” (6:132). While Quimper’s rhetoric is typical of Outer Church agents, what is interesting is that, by this point in the series, Morrison is no longer interested in outright rejecting the Outer Church’s philosophies of instrumentality, but instead reshaping them into a generative idea. *The Invisibles* seeks to show how the body is the site of revolutionary development, and the evolution of the human being mirrors anarchic uprisings that will bring about the end of hegemonic control. In order to accomplish this movement, the body must expand its horizons through integrations with technology. Media technologies in the series, then, again become the sites of extension through which this anarchic potential can be achieved. *The Invisibles* is focused on reshaping human consciousness and pushing perception beyond reductive and destructive dualisms.

⁵¹ The organization of volumes is somewhat confusing in *The Invisibles*. The series consists of 59 issues collected into seven trade paperbacks. However, the series is officially broken up into three “volumes”: the first consisting of books 1 - 3, the second 4 - 6, and the final book serving as the final volume. As secondary literature on the series tends to refer to this delineation, I will as well in order to avoid confusion.

Morrison's project⁵² begins as a war narrative, but the series' gradual evolution comes to challenge this binary reduction and instead seek to develop a generative anarchism that is able to truly challenge postmodern figurations of power.

Morrison is similar to Burroughs and Pynchon⁵³ in his usage of a science-fiction narrative that is a complicated, multivalent and often-confusing assortment of ideas and allusions. It is true that summing up the plot of *The Invisibles* is no simple task. Douglas Wolk aptly refers to a typical Morrison comic as "essentially a cracked treatise on the nature of reality, cast in the form of a fast-paced action-adventure story" (260).⁵⁴ The series' plot is non-linear not only for the audience, but for the characters as well, with plot developments and revelations presented in a twisting, fragmented fashion. In the second volume, the reader discovers that our reality as the product of two "meta-universes," one "healthy" and the other "sick" (5:52). These "meta-universes" overlap and create a holographic illusion that we see as our space-time continuum. The series follows a secret war between the representatives of these meta-universes taking place throughout all of time. Nick James articulates the binary function in the plot as "the story [is] of a group of anarchist occult terrorists and their literal and metaphorical struggle

⁵² Wolk is right to point out, however, that "even though Morrison is the guy who holds *The Invisibles*' copyright, I don't mean to ascribe it to him alone: he wrote the whole enormous thing but drew only one page of it. The rest was drawn by [different artists] ... and picture making in the conjunction of words and images is particularly significant in this story" (260-261).

⁵³ While links with Pynchon are not as evident, Morrison clearly is inspired by Burroughs. *Doom Patrol*, a series Morrison worked on just prior to *The Invisibles* (from 1989 to 1993), explicitly invokes Burroughs. In issue #23, "The Butterfly Collector," the Doom Patrol team travels to a pocket universe to rescue a captured teammate by employing the cut-up technique as "a kind of divination, like casting the runes or reading the flight of birds. Only with *words*" (126).

⁵⁴ A second accurately colourful description of Morrison's comics comes when Wolk refers to them as "reality-bending metafictional freakouts dressed up in action-adventure drag" (258).

against the Archons, ultra-dimensional entities seeking to subjugate humanity using the authoritarian technologies of military force, government, law and education” (435). On the “healthy” side are the members of The Invisible College, anarchic agents with eccentric codenames like “King Mob,” “Lord Fanny,” and “Tom o’Bedlam,” who are committed to waging a war for total freedom from authority and whose arsenal include everything from occultic magical abilities to tantric sex practices. In their own words, they are seeking to “pull off a track that’ll result in *everyone* getting exactly the kind of world they want. Everyone including the enemy” (1:204). Conversely, the “sick” universe serves as the domain of the Archons, grotesque “ultra-dimensional” (James 442) monsters who command the Outer Church, a rigid, collectivized hierarchy referred to by the author as “insect machines” (Neighly and Cowe-Spigai 234) devoted to absolute obedience and order through the complete eradication of free will. In our reality, the Outer Church’s agents are almost always found occupying positions of authority and power, from the American military officer Colonel Friday to the aristocratic Sir Miles Delacourt, who “holds a ‘consulting director’ position at MI6 and his security clearance is several levels *higher* than all the leaders of the free world put *together*” (7:11). The Outer Church’s operations are manifold, from horrific genetic experiments performed on political prisoners (4:91) to secret concentration camps hidden throughout America (3:105), their ultimate goal is to “make puppets of them all” (4:22), meaning, in this case, the entire world.

The war between these ideological universes and their agents thus takes place through many proxy battles spanning across different continents, time periods, and dimensions. Regardless of context, the Outer Church’s forces seek to instill universal

conformity and subjugation, while the Invisibles attempt to strike back and destroy these limitations. The audience finds its surrogate in the protagonist⁵⁵ Dane McGowan, a young delinquent from Liverpool who becomes embroiled in the conflict. Each side attempts to recruit — or force — him into the battle for the fate of humanity and the universe,⁵⁶ which appears to hinge upon the millennial coronation of the “Moonchild,” a horrendous, deformed, and unintelligent monster that will serve as the vessel for the Archons to inhabit, infecting the holographic universe and commencing an unending terrible reign of terror (7:238). The battle lines appear then definitively drawn between the forces of order and chaos, with the Outer Church seeking to bring about the apocalypse through the manifestation of the Archons, and the Invisibles seeking to avert this catastrophic end of history.

The series’ first volume opens with a character commenting that “[t]his war’s been going on for a long, long time” (1:89), presumably since the beginning of time itself. The underlying reason for the war’s longevity is due to the more fundamental division between the self and the other. The war between the Invisibles and the Outer Church serves as a macrocosmic extension of this self-defeating, limiting conflict, and Morrison’s project in writing *The Invisibles* is to break out of the entropic narrative of war and examine humanity through a different lens. Like Burroughs and Pynchon before him, Morrison establishes a deceptively simple binary opposition between freedom and

⁵⁵ Wolk argues persuasively that “[o]n a first reading, the series is pretty clearly the story of Dane,” but that, as the series encourages multiple readings to understand its complex plot and thematic developments, “[t]he identity of *The Invisibles*’ protagonist is ... up for debate” (264).

⁵⁶ The resonances between Morrison’s comic and the 1999 film *The Matrix* are hard to ignore. Indeed, in an interview Morrison claimed that “I just thought it was the greatest fucking movie I’d ever seen in my life ... Then I got really pissed off, because I saw how much had been lifted [from *The Invisibles*]” (Neighly & Cowe-Spigai 234).

control, and then demonstrates how direct confrontation (in this case, violent guerilla war) does nothing but reinforce the larger consensus reality of domination.⁵⁷ The series gradually shifts away from the idea of an all-encompassing war and toward the more generative, benevolent metaphors of a rescue or a game, which coincide with the development and employment of new media technologies that fundamentally alter how the body is conceived, both by the self and the other. This dual shift helps to demonstrate Morrison's overall movement, one that rejects self-destructive violence and instead promotes a radical reconfiguration of what humanity is and how we interrelate with one another so that a true revolution can occur — a revolution that completely alters the ontological understanding of what a human being is. Morrison ultimately moves the Invisibles away from the consensus reality that leads irrevocably to war and instead uses media technologies to create the *dissensual* disruption of the body needed to bring about true political change. The only way to escape the never-ending cycle is to reinvent reality from the ground up.

Marc Singer provides a helpful navigational statement for the series when he claims that Morrison purposely “complicates the series’ investment in Gnosticism” (102).⁵⁸ While several critics have acknowledged as much, their analyses tend to cast a wide net. By focusing specifically on the way technology fundamentally changes the body’s understanding of its surroundings, I argue that Morrison’s project is about saving

⁵⁷ An idea Louis Althusser touches upon when he writes that “*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony*” (98), meaning that a violent coup of the ruling class will ultimately lead to the enacting of restrictions and limitations to ensure the safety and perpetuation of this hegemony.

⁵⁸ This appears to be a point of critical consensus, as James avers that Morrison “offers a more relevant and less dualistic form of anarchism which he labels ‘ontological terrorism’” (436), while Wolk notes that “[t]his sort of Manichean outlook on selfhood, Morrison wants us to know, is a Very Bad Thing” (268).

humanity from endless, recursive violence and preparing it for a posthuman future by promoting technology-based integrations that will spur on an infinite amount of new human embodiments. This integration with new media technologies creates an unlimited series of temporary subjectivities that are not dictated or controlled by the fear of an other — an eternal, anarchic circuit. When Wolk states that “[w]hat Morrison tells us, every chance he gets, is that a higher-dimensional construct ... can be correctly perceived only from a multiple perspective” (266), he means this literally: the subject must take up multiple embodiments in order to engage in a *dissensual* disruption and therefore gain a new understanding of reality. The way outside of the narrative of war and toward a generative vision of the human can only come through the intervention of media technologies that serve to break out of the restrictions imposed on the idea of the subject and the nature of reality. By both splicing together discrete subjectivities into something new, as described by McLuhan, as well as promoting a vision of ontological plurality, as demonstrated by McHale, Morrison’s project serves as the culmination of the different anarchist strategies of ontological development.

In order to understand the way in which Morrison undermines the narrative of war, it is first necessary to examine how he views the limiting reality of his narrative. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Zygmunt Bauman helps to elucidates the notion of free-flowing authority and the power structures that it develops. Bauman describes modern political society as “*post-Panoptical*” (11). Alluding directly to Michel Foucault’s sociological adaptation of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, Bauman argues that such a society “was a model of mutual engagement and confrontation between the two sides of the power relationship” (10). Power established itself through concretized manifestations,

metonymically rendered through the Panopticon, a centralized tower able to monitor all citizens at once. Yet, as Bauman notes, this structuring of power “requires presence, and engagement, at least in the form of a perpetual confrontation and tug-of-war” (10).

“Presence” is the key term in this passage, as power in this set-up is predicated upon being physically available, and, thus, physically vulnerable. However, “Bentham and Foucault’s powerful metaphor of the Panopticon no longer grasps the ways power is working” (85). Just as Deleuze depicted in his control society, postmodern power structures have become more complex and elusory than those authoritarian regimes of the past. In Bauman’s liquid modernity, though, we see its most mutable (and dangerous) manifestation.

Bauman describes liquid society as that which “augurs *the end of the era of mutual engagement*” as “the prime technique of power is no escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the best rejection of any territorial confinement” (11). The insidious depiction of liquid power nonetheless leaves one with the question of what is there to enforce power’s agenda. Bauman, echoing George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, uses the metaphor of Big Brother to demonstrate the functional operation of a heavy-modern, Foucauldian society, where power is centralized and localized (25); now “there is no more ‘Big Brother is watching you’; now it is your task to watch the swelling ranks of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and watch them closely and avidly, in the hope of finding something useful for yourself” (30). *The Invisibles*’ makes this concept tangible in the Archons, the monstrous, Lovecraftian rulers of the Outer Church are entities that remain “outwith the four dimensions of the spacetime supersphere” (5:185). Rarely entering into our holographic reality to intervene, they become a literalization of Bauman’s depiction

of liquid power as being removed “to the territory which ... can only be described as an ‘outer space’” (39). The Archons cannot be defeated or destroyed through violence,⁵⁹ and the murder of their various proxy agents does little to impede their agenda. Thus, in the comic, power remains untouchable, moving behind and beyond visible power structures, intangible, yet still present, although in a different way than in Foucault’s conception of society. Like a ghost or a demon, power haunts the world of *The Invisibles*.

Indeed, the network is a valuable metaphor to understand how these modes of power and control function. Louis Althusser, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus,” adds valuable context when he claims that “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (117).⁶⁰ For Althusser, ideology works to constrict individuals by keeping them within a network of predetermined relations. For, as he goes on to articulate, “the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects” (121). This central Subject⁶¹ becomes then the means by which individual bodies are defined. He argues that “all ideology *is centered*” around the “Absolute Subject,” which thus defines the smaller subjects orbiting around it through difference and othering. Thus the system of control operates in this far more invisible and insidious manner, where,

⁵⁹ That said, the series does actually end with King Mob using a gun to kill the King-of-All-Tears, the final Archon. I will discuss this moment later on in this chapter.

⁶⁰ I do not wish to involve a wider discussion of Althusser’s contributions to theoretical thought; I simply find his description of subjugation to be fruitful for my examination of *The Invisibles*.

⁶¹ Althusser makes sure to highlight this difference by noting the “convenience” of rendering “this new and remarkable Subject by writing Subject with a capital S to distinguish it from ordinary subjects, with a small s” (121).

caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and absolute guarantee, the subjects ‘work,’ they ‘work by themselves’ in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the ‘bad subjects’ who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. (123)

It is here that we are able to understand the full import and operation of such a system. This type of power promotes a surrendering of the body to a system that immediately defines it as a negative valuation, as a subject against the Absolute Subject. Any attempt to rebel against this organization of power is met with violent confrontation, yet even then actual power is not threatened: those who combat each other and die are human beings, regardless of ideological affiliation. Liquid power maintains its removal from these violent threats and continues on unencumbered. The pessimism evident in these theories ultimately demonstrates the inability of violence to affect significant change in a contemporary, postmodern political climate.

Yet this is not to say that *The Invisibles* succumbs to any kind of nihilism. Rather, it is the most hopeful and triumphant of the texts studied in this thesis.⁶² The hope that exists in *The Invisibles* comes about through its refusal to play into the apparatus of domination. Rather than participating in this rigged system, “liberation is best achieved not through violence but by changing our models of language and selfhood” (Singer 101). The goal of the series, then, is not to wrest control away from the shifting liquid flows of

⁶² Indeed, one could argue that it is *too* optimistic, at the expense of real-world political activism. Sean Rogers levels the critique that Morrison “too often simply amplifies the spiralling, vertiginous feelings of idea-rich complexity that Morrison is everywhere at pains to induce, and ignores the hollowness that resounds at the work’s core” (“Flex” n.p.).

matter and energy, but rather prevent the disassociation whereby power possesses this capabilities of this elision while the human subjects are instrumentalized and entrapped. by directly challenging the notions of ideology, deconstructing the fundamental supports that allow a hegemonic State system to self-perpetuate and maintain a removed domination. Morrison locates these supports at the level of the self, as the only way to truly change humanity's progress is to challenge and ultimately do away with the concept of a singular self constructed in opposition to an other. A way to understand this idea comes from John Johnston's conception of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the machine. He argues that the two theorists' "entire body of work provides a fresh perspective for thinking about how science and information technology have begun to loosen and transform one of Western culture's most fundamental boundaries, dating back to the Greek opposition between physis and techne" (*Allure* 107). Johnston discusses how Deleuze and Guattari "postulate the existence of a special realm they call the machinic phylum, which cuts across the opposition between history and nature, the human and the nonhuman. The term itself suggests a conjunction or interface between the organic and the inorganic, a form of 'life' that combines properties of both" (107). When Johnston notes that "Deleuze and Guattari's central concern [is] with the chaotic flux of matter and energy and its capture and stratification by various coding mechanisms" (109). Matter and energy are eventually turned into discernible patterns that are used in new hegemonic regimes. According to Johnston's reading,

[w]ithin the assemblage agency is completely distributed; no centrally located seat of power, control, or intentionality allocates and guides its functioning.

Nevertheless, assemblages are always subject to capture and overcoding, most

egregiously by the State apparatuses that form despotic and imperialist regimes of power. (117)

When oppressive apparatuses take control of these assemblages, a disparity arises: power maintains the fluidity and multivalence ascribes to the entirety of the assemblage, while humanity at large becomes codified and entrapped. In essence, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the assemblage and its reterritorialization (117) into an apparatus of power helps connect Bauman's ideas of liquid modernity with Althusser's notion of subjugation. However, entwined within this idea is the seed of escape from a recurring circle: if these sites refuse to be broken down into interpretable and recognizable patterns, instead remaining in a constant fluctuation of processes, then no Absolute Subject can be solidified, no stratification of the chaotic assemblage can take shape and become the instrument of hegemonic operators. This is the anarchic circuitry of ever-shifting change, of bodies without limits and selves never permanent or truly defined, and the way in which escape and evolution can truly be located.

The Invisibles spends most of its first volume developing a narrative of war and destruction, where human beings become literal instruments in a game of ideological warfare between the hazy and shifting concepts of "control" and "freedom." The effects are not solely limited to the Outer Church's experimentation and instrumentalist ideology: the Invisibles' violent retaliatory tactics are just as complicit in inflicting death and destruction, albeit not nearly on the same scale.⁶³ This belief not only establishes a

⁶³ And, indeed, some members of the cell appear more cognizant of their violent actions, most notably Boy. After King Mob makes a quip following his murder of a squad of Myrmidons, Boy responds: "[y]ou wanna give it a rest with the gallows humor, K.M.? I smell human flesh cooking, it makes me gag, okay? This is horrible and jokes don't make it any better, okay?" (2:30). Later, after Boy's traumatic "deprogramming" incident

fear of the other, but it also engenders horrific violence to be released. King Mob, a member (and occasional leader) of the eponymous Invisibles' cell, epitomizes this callous attitude toward death and violence, viewing the forces of the Outer Church as simply “the enemy” to be exterminated without reflection or remorse. James makes the argument that Morrison “challenges the assumption that ‘freedom’ and ‘control’ are diametrically opposed notions” (435), which becomes apparent in the latter volumes as the series focuses its critique on the use of violence in bringing about political change.

Accompanying this increased scrutiny of violence is the development of new media technologies within the narrative that create *dissensual* disruptions in the characters and allow them to break out of their contexts without the recourse to destruction. By viewing things through the lens of a game or a rescue mission, the viability of violence and war as a means to bring about liberation are called into question. These technologies also accompany a new understanding of the body and its relation to ideology. Once again McLuhan and Rancière’s theories are able to help describe the Invisibles’ development, along with Henri Bergson’s creative formulation of time. By transgressing the boundaries of history, fiction, and identity, the Invisibles are able to gain a fuller understanding of life and organization, and are thus able to transcend the limits imposed on them, bringing about closure to war and opening up a new chapter of humanity and reality. In rejecting violence that destroys the body and instead examining how these technologies instead break down the barriers that limit the body’s full extension — history, fiction, and self — Morrison is able to project perhaps the most

(which I will discuss later in this chapter), she decides to leave the Invisibles permanently, claiming “I don’t want my life to run on *hate* anymore” (6:22).

positive and generative anarchism of each of these texts: an anarchism that avoids troubling dualisms and a dependence on consensus reality.

4.1 “I/You”: Power and Violence as Anxious Expression

In order to fully understand Morrison’s conception of a generative embodiment and a successful ontological anarchist movement, it is important to first examine how Morrison both establishes and critiques the dependence on violence in *The Invisibles*. The series’ opening book offers the most straightforward and dualistic illustration of this hidden war. In doing so, it also paints the false or reductive view of each side. The Outer Church in the first book is shown to possess many of the characteristics of a heavy-modern society. The opening issue of the series highlights this format best in the Outer Church agent Mr. Gelt. Gelt serves as head of the repressive Harmony House reform school Dane is sent to after beating his teacher Mr. Brian Malcom⁶⁴ and firebombing his school.⁶⁵ Gelt informs his charges that they are merely “cog[s] in the great machine of society,” and later threatens Dane by telling him that “we will make you ... smooth between the legs, smooth between the ears, and what we take from you, will feed the kings of this earth” (1:31, 40). Gelt’s articulation of Outer Church ideology possesses all the hallmarks of a heavy-modern, Panoptical society: the centralized power structure of Harmony House, the attempt to discipline and reform its “students” into tools for the

⁶⁴ Malcolm is later revealed to be the Invisibles agent Mr. Six, “one of the scariest guys on the planet” who “can do just about anything” (3:128).

⁶⁵ A critique of this heavy-modern mischaracterization appears as early as this opening issue, when Mr. Malcolm asks Dane “[w]hat do you think you’ll accomplish?” in response to burning the school to the ground (1:27).

greater machine. James goes so far as to refer to Gelt as an “authoritarian caricature” (441), a figure embodying all the repressive elements of Panoptical control in an heavy-handed fashion. Gelt is a throwback figure, a representative of “the advancing troops of the ‘public sphere’” who sought to eliminate “private autonomy” (Bauman 39). Gelt is the representative of this oppressive, encroaching public sphere that seeks to violate individual liberty. Likewise, the response to Gelt and his Harmony House follows along the lines of mutual engagement: King Mob infiltrates the facility, kills Gelt, rescues Dane, and burns the place to the ground (1:40-44). Yet even at this point in the series, a subtle clue of power’s evolving milieu is described, as Mob notes that Gelt is not truly dead: “[t]hey’ll have given him an escape route. They always do. I expect they’ve relocated his consciousness in a temporary body. An animal, probably, or an insect. He’ll hide out there until a suitable body can be found for reincorporation” (1:45). As demonstrated in this passage, the destruction of Harmony House does not lead to any real damage in the Outer Church’s operations, as their operators simply slip away from this destruction.⁶⁶

Bauman argues that heavy modernity’s ethos was in “the shaping of reality after the manner of architecture or gardening; reality compliant with the verdicts of reason was to be ‘built’ under strict quality control and according to strict procedural rules” (47). The idea of this inflexibility and rigid shaping is echoed in the first volume as well, which continues the science-fiction rendering of heavy-modern characteristics by developing

⁶⁶ Ironically, Gelt *is* killed in this issue, as his consciousness, placed inside a beetle, is inadvertently crushed by Dane moments after King Mob’s explanation (1:45). Nonetheless, Gelt is simply an Outer Church instrument, and his death still does not impact the Archons in any tangible fashion.

the fear of automata in the creatures known as CIPHERMEN,⁶⁷ hivemind drones that serve as the Outer Church's psychic foot soldiers. Bauman describes a major aspect of heavy modern society to be order, specifically "monotony, regularity, repetitiveness and predictability" (55), and the CIPHERMEN embody the concept of automata fully. In the artwork, these figures possess notably accentuated insectoid qualities: gas-mask-like helmets with ruby, bug-like eyes (Morrison 1:161), in addition to being identically dressed and thus indistinguishable from one another. Even the name "CIPHERMEN" reinforces this notion, as it implies a human body made blank, emptied of its own thoughts. Certainly, one of these drones threatens the Invisible Ragged Robin that she will become "empty like us. Ready to be filled" with orders and instructions from a superior (1:203). The CIPHERMEN, who represent the example *par excellence* of automated beings, are described by an Outer Church scientist as going through a process of "ego deletion and reinstallation – human to tadpole" (7:175). The CIPHERMEN thus represent the extreme end of control's goals: completely emptied husks employed as agentless tools of those in control. Yet, just as Gelt and his Harmony House are artifacts of a bygone mode of power, so too are the CIPHERMEN.⁶⁸ As the comic progresses, these figures fall away to the far more variable and elusive depictions of power.

⁶⁷ Originally written as "Cyphermen" (Morrison 1:169).

⁶⁸ Unlike Gelt, the CIPHERMEN do not vanish entirely from the narrative, but their future appearances are negligible. They only appear twice more: in volume two a lone CIPHERMAN is dispatched to the 1920s to look for a weapon known as the "Hand of Glory," and is quickly dispatched by the astrally projecting King Mob (5:113-121), and in the final volume Dane and Jolly Roger shut down a group of CIPHERMEN in their ammonia tanks, preventing them from defending Sir Miles's forces during the climactic showdown. The effortlessness with which the Invisibles dispatch the CIPHERMEN helps demonstrate their outmoded utility in a liquid society.

Bauman describes one of the key aspects of liquid society to be the individualization that was so absent from its predecessor. Yet “[i]ndividualization’ now means something very different from what it meant a hundred years ago and what it conveyed at the early times of the modern era” (31). By this Bauman means that the notion of the individual subject that posits itself as a free being has been replaced instead by that of an enforced subjectivity, a symptom of what Bauman calls “negative freedom,” that is, the ability to choose between a series of predetermined values.⁶⁹ Bauman’s claim that “[p]ublic power has lost much of its awesome and resented oppressive potency — but it has also lost a good part of its enabling capacity” (51) resonates explicitly with the notion that individualization and freedom has come about in the end of the heavy-modern stage. Rather, in liquid terms “‘individualization’ consists of transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance” (31-2). Bauman here makes a distinction between “individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion” (34), an idea that resonates with Burroughs’s notion of the individuality gimmick and the prerecorded subject of Nova control. *The Invisibles* depicts this in its move away from caricatured figures of authority like Mr. Gelt and toward more dynamic antagonists. James refers to Outer Church operative Sir Miles as yet another “villainous caricature” when he is first introduced in the series (449), a stereotypical reflection of the British gentry, and indeed, Morrison seems to depict him in such a light, right down to wearing a traditional hunting outfit while leading aristocrats through the streets of London to hunt and kill captured

⁶⁹ “Negative” freedom is opposed to “positive” freedom, which Bauman describes as “the freedom to set the range of choices and the agenda of choice-making” (51).

vagrants (1:62). Yet James notes that, by the final volume, “Sir Miles has become a sympathetic character” to the audience (450), as the comic more thoroughly explores his personal life and history. Sir Miles rejects the idea of automation, continually expresses reluctance and fear at being “converted” into a cyborg priest of the Outer Church (3:44), sardonically referring to the process as “hardly an alluring prospect” (6:14). Another, more subtle moment occurs when Miss Dwyer, a “prioress” of the Outer Church is defeated with the reality-bending drug Key 17, which causes her to see the words “World’s Greatest Dad” written on a coffee mug and break down, confessing “daddy it’s so scary where I am” (3:200). In spite of Dwyer’s high-ranking position in the Outer Church “hierarchy” (3:43), she is still depicted as a human individual with recognizable human responses. The Outer Church does not wholly erase the human, but instead incorporates it as a tool into its grander schemes of control — a far more nuanced and dangerous teleology

Indeed, Miss Dwyer’s flashes of humanity and Sir Miles’s fleshed-out character do not mitigate their roles as willing instruments in the Outer Church’s agenda; rather, their complicity is indicative of how liquid power operates. As all of the Outer Church’s forces are human (save for the extra-dimensional Archons),⁷⁰ the anxiety is thus made clear: it is not a fear of automation, but a fear of “individualization” in the liquid machine. Bauman’s ideas of liquid society are all about the negatively-free individual, and the Outer Church’s more direct goal is to have its opponents *want* to become part of

⁷⁰ The other exception is Orlando, an assassin in the Outer Church’s employ who admits to being a demon from the Aztec religion whose “native land is the place of the unfleshed” (1:137). Orlando does not appear to be involved in the Outer Church’s ideological schemes, however, and appears to work for them out of sheer sadistic pleasure.

the great society. At the end of the first volume, Sir Miles tells the (once-again captive) King Mob that “[w]e don’t want you to betray your friends against your will. We want you to do it because you know that it is your duty” (3:60). Mr. Quimper, the Outer Church’s primary representative in the second volume, echoes this sentiment: “[t]hat look in their eyes when they know they have been broken. That ‘thank you.’ That’s the bit I look forward to” (4:59). Individual “freedom” is the operational motive of the Outer Church: the surrender to negative freedom and acceptance of the mutable, liquid, yet ultimately one-dimensional reality, ultimately beholden to the Absolute Subject of the Archons. This moment is highlighted at the opening of the second volume, where the reader is given a glimpse into the Outer Church’s meta-universe: an endless black-and-white realm of concrete shapes, including, notably, a sphere with the words “I/YOU” patterned across its surface (4:68-69).

While Dwyer and Miles represent the upper echelons of Outer Church power, and therefore a more willing descent into instrumentality, the subtle effects of control are felt throughout the series even among the Outer Church’s rank-and-file. Bauman ominously writes that, in liquid society, “individualization is a fate, not a choice” (34). Shapeless, formless power gives people nothing to react collectively against, and leaves them entirely reliant on themselves: individual instruments. The most overt example is seen in the issue “Best Man Fall,” which describes the life of Bobby Murray, a Falklands War veteran who initially appears to have no connection to the larger machinations of the Invisibles/Outer Church war. Although it does not become clear until the issue’s end, the readers have met Bobby Murray once before: he is one of the Outer Church’s indistinguishable foot soldiers (known as “Myrmidons,” again reinforcing the insect

imagery) remorselessly executed by King Mob in the series' opening issue. The critical reaction to this issue is notable. Patrick Neighly, for instance, claims that this "otherwise anonymous soldier ... is revealed to be a human being with a full life story" (Neighly & Cowe-Spigai 54), while Singer asserts that in this issue "Morrison forces us to acknowledge the human cost of the violence that entertains us" (113). Murray, who within the context of the war is nothing more than a security guard, becomes the epitome of the ramifications of the liquid power: his death accomplishes nothing in the secret war, and simply reinforces a nihilistic cycle of violence.⁷¹ It is a trope Morrison returns to throughout the series: an Archon attempts to break Dane by haunting him with a vision of a soldier he had murdered (3:173), and Singer notes that the second volume "repeats the life-of-a-henchman trick from 'Best Man Fall,' but Morrison and [artist Phil] Jimenez compress it from an issue to a single page" (113). In all of these cases, Morrison urges the reader to see that these soldiers are neither evil masterminds nor are they dehumanized robots; they are, instead, individuals caught within a network of power so vast and ill-defined that they cannot even see it. They are tools, forced to rely on themselves alone without any institutional or collective assistance. Far from portraying these characters as villainous, Morrison seeks to portray them as victims of liquid power's unencumbered dominion.⁷²

⁷¹ There is an intriguingly subtle detail in "Best Man Fall": Murray reveals that his greatest fear as a child is an old gas mask hidden behind his family's cellar door (2:103). While Singer sees this as "foreshadow[ing] his death at King Mob's hands" (113), the mask's greater resonance is with the similarly styled masks worn by the CIPHERMEN. The connection should be evident to readers: even the members of the Outer Church possess a lingering fear of automation.

⁷² Of course, Morrison does not attempt to glorify or make martyrs of these men. Murray is depicted in the comic as an abusive husband (2:100), and Singer argues that "Bobby

In spite of this ineffaceable humanity, the Invisibles are shown as viewing their Outer Church opponents in ways that specifically ignore their humanity. In the middle of the second volume, the Invisible known as “Boy” is ostensibly kidnapped by the Outer Church, who attempt to convince her she is (and has always been one of them). She is informed that she serves “the great King-Archon in whose macro-anatomy we toil and multiply and die” (5:204), yet again reinforcing the imagery of insects, and later telling her “[y]ou are no longer human: you are a malign cell from a region outside space and time where all things are consumed in the macro-geometry of Abaddon, the archon of annihilation,” and that she must “follow the dictates of [her] programming” (5:208). They refer to themselves as “bacteria, engineered to infect this universe and render it hospitable for Abaddon, our host, that’s all” (5:205). Yet in fact Boy was never a sleeper Outer Church agent, and her abductors are in fact “Cell 23,” a deep-cover Invisibles sect that “specializes in psychodramatic debugging of so-called ‘Invisibles’ operatives,” or “experts in the removal of enemy emotional implants” (5:223).⁷³ The manifold imagery that is employed during this arc — insects, bacteria, programmed robots — all contribute to the dehumanizing ways in which these agents are viewed by the Invisibles, which makes violence possible and self-justified.

The Invisibles’ destructive violence directed toward Outer Church operatives — including but not limited to a grenade attack on Myrmidon soldiers (1:122) and three

Murray is no innocent victim either ... He is no more romanticized than King Mob” (112).

⁷³ The idea of deprogramming emotional blocks through traumatic scenarios designed to depower them shares many notable resonances with Burroughs’s concept of the engram, which he describes as “words recorded during a period of unconsciousness” in a child that “store pain and that this pain store can be plugged in with key words” (*Nova* 170). While the child is unaware of these controlling mechanisms, “the controllers have the engram tapes any childhood trauma can be plugged in at any time” (171).

incredibly bloody raids on military facilities (4:5-7, 4:48-100, 6:121-171) — ultimately demonstrates not only the human cost of violence, but also its inability to change the world. It is here we see the sinister machinery of liquid power at work: it reduces everyone to instrumentality, even those who opt against it. This is the essence of Marcuse’s one-dimensional reality, where loyalists and rebels invariably act out the struggle that keeps the hegemony of the ruling elites in power indefinitely. This post-Panoptical version of power subjects everyone to mechanistic responses, while avoiding any confrontation. This dilemma enters into the comic’s narrative as well, seen when King Mob, introduced to the 64-letter alphabet,⁷⁴ is forced to “generate auto-critique” (5:213). In this mode, Mob mouths his own fear that “[t]he most pernicious image of all is the anarchist hero-figure. A creation of the commodity culture, he allows us to buy into an inauthentic simulation of revolutionary praxis” (5:213). Mob’s confession⁷⁵ demonstrates the realization of violence as an inefficient means of transformation in the face of liquid power, and this critique of violence comes to dominate the final volumes of the series. As seen in the character of Jolly Roger, the American female mirror of King Mob, who refuses to reject violence as a means of resistance, the only option is death (7:245).⁷⁶ The way out of this enclosure is rather through the development of *dissensual* media technologies that help to decenter the singular subject.

⁷⁴ A facet of the series that Wolk rightly notes is “prima facie ridiculous if taken literally (would speakers of, say, Japanese have an entirely different perception of abstraction than speakers of English?)” (272).

⁷⁵ In the beginning of the second volume, Mob, confronted with his violent actions after killing dozens of Outer Church soldiers, can only joke “[i]f we don’t get out of here soon I’m going to start questioning the already fucking dubious morality of my actions” (4:93).

⁷⁶ Wolk makes the very interesting point that Roger is also one-eyed, and that, if “standard stereoptic vision won’t do,” then “[l]ess-than-standard vision is even more

4.2 “The Part of Heaven We Can Touch”

Technological development as a means of revolutionary action is not an idea that appears at the series’ inception. Technologies appear to be more aligned with the province of the Outer Church, and the rhetoric of technological subservience recurs frequently from these conformist agents. Returning to the scene I referred to in my introduction, Quimper taunts his captives by telling them they are nothing more than “[b]iological robots, operated by electrical firings and chemical spasms,” and that it is the Outer Church who control these robots: “[w]e can steer you like cars” (6:130). Likewise, Colonel Friday receives upgrades similar to Miss Dwyer in the form of a “4D dispersion suit” (4:68), but explains that in the Outer Church’s meta-universe “they had machines that could cut thoughts into pieces,” then he immediately follows this statement with the prompt to “...obey ... obey ...” (6:120). A Cipherman comments that their automated beings are created through a kind of technological “surgery” (1:203), while the Invisible John-A-Dreams, who enters the realm of the Outer Church likewise “consents to surgery” that “influence[s] his freedom of thought” (Neighly & Cowe-Spigai 268). Technologies, for the Outer Church, are just a means of limiting and controlling their agents, reducing them to recognizable patterns. The technological upgrades these characters receive is always used to reinforce an adherence to the Outer Church, preventing the bodies from experiencing anything outside obedience to the mechanisms of power.

hopeless” (266). Roger cannot see past what is in front of her, and is unable to adapt and change like many of the other Invisibles.

Having challenged the series' binary focus on the war between chaos and control, Morrison moves on to challenge the larger belief system at work: that there is an "other," a force capable of projecting its will onto the pliable human machine. Morrison's major task lies in rewriting the body/mind dualism and fully eliminating the self/other dichotomy. For Morrison the recourse to dualistic thinking on any level is ultimately damaging, and his comic book becomes interested in a radical reinterpretation of what we view as life. Instead of the an encoded pattern that can be controlled by hegemonic operators, the series moves toward the chaotic multiplicity apparent in Hayles' works — shifting, inconstant bodies lacking any pattern to follow. In the comic, the idea of changing the body and its relationship to the world manifests itself through several technological devices developed by Invisibles agents. Whereas technologies are used by the Outer Church as another aspect that reinforces conformity and instrumentality, the Invisibles' incorporate technologies to change the body's relationship to its surroundings and, in doing so, disrupt the self/other dichotomy. This idea occurs in the text during Dane's encounter with the Barbelith satellite, an alien technology that helps bring about transcendent enlightenment. During his experience, he is informed that "[t]he soul is not outside the body. The body is inside the soul" (2:195).⁷⁷ In discovering enlightenment, one will have to enter into new relations with one's body. These media thus create the essential *dissensual* disruption that allows a transcendent moment to occur in the books, a way to reinterpret the way the series has portrayed its events and begin moving from a war to the truly shifting, anarchic circuitry of games and rescues.

⁷⁷ Singer makes the prescient note that, during this scene, the artwork's "corresponding image shows a Möbius strip" (116), again reinforcing the falsity of opposing "sides" and the need to recognize humans as essentially one.

The fiction suit that appears late in the second volume serves as one of these *dissensual* technologies, granting its user the ability to traverse the border between the “fictional” and the “real” and engage with “characters” inside a fictional narrative. The echoes with Pynchon’s belief in alternate worlds and McHale’s idea of ontological plurality are obvious here, as well as Burroughs’s idea of breaking reality out of its singular vision, and they serve as one of the many strategies of reconstituting the body and developing a generative anarchy. Frank Verano offers perhaps the most succinct description of the first version of the fiction suit we see, explaining that “the history of the Invisibles is adapted into a film in the future, which the character Ragged Robin rewrites, adding herself into the story, then travels back in time to participate in the historical events she wrote as fiction” (321). These actions are both achieved through the use of new media technologies, and they each bring Robin a new understanding of either reality or her body. Robin accomplishes the first part of this process in “the Ganzfeldt Tank at Berkeley U” in 2005 (6:154).⁷⁸ She describes her actions as “writing a book. . . . floating in a warm ocean of living words” (6:155). The idea of such technology is that it disrupts the boundaries between the real and the fictional, and creates a crossing point for these categories; Verano’s central thesis is that “Morrison excels at generating ‘real unrealities’ by blurring the lines that designate ontological categories” (321). Robin herself echoes these sentiments, claiming that “if I write hard enough and honestly enough, I think I can make it real” (6:155), and later rhetorically asking herself “[h]ow many people have to tell a true story before it becomes true? And what really happened in

⁷⁸ This machine is a reference to the “ganzfeld” (German for “total field”) experiments in parapsychology. The process involves “mild sensory deprivation” in order to “investigate ESP phenomena, especially telepathic communication between a ‘sender’ and a ‘receiver.’ (Goulding 22).

1998?” (6:173). Robin’s use of the Ganzfeldt Tank operates as a type of fiction suit in the narrative of *The Invisibles* as it allows the injection of the “character” of Ragged Robin into the history of the Invisibles. The technology available to Robin allows her to write herself into the story, breaking down the wall not only between the past and the present, but also between the fictional and the real. Robin’s actions *make* what happen real, while simultaneously granting her an understanding of the multiple realities that she is able to access and influence.

Although time travel appears as a method of transportation as early as the first book, it is entirely disembodied, as King Mob explains: “we fold psychic constructs of ourselves from one point on the supersphere to another” (1:144).⁷⁹ The Invisibles’ minds are thus projected back in time, while their bodies lie inert, an action that lands the Invisibles in serious trouble, as their unconscious bodies are left without any guard, nearly leading to a gruesome death at the hands of the Outer Church assassin Orlando (1:171-179). Time travel is also the province of the CIPHERMEN, whom the Invisibles battle in each of these psychic episodes. The juxtaposition of the individualistic Invisibles and the hivemind collective of the CIPHERMEN is significant in that it ultimately shows the inadequacy of both sides. Just like the CIPHERMEN, who cannot do anything but

⁷⁹ Morrison’s depiction of time travel at this stage is very similar to Burroughs’s in *The Soft Machine*, where the narrator explains how “when I fold today’s [news]paper in with yesterday’s paper and arrange the pictures to form a time section montage, I am literally moving back to the time when I read yesterday’s paper” (82). However, the significant difference is that Burroughs’s time traveller remains embodied, mentioning that in “the months that followed I worked in the fields” (88). Thus, Burroughs’s traveller is able to engage with his surroundings in a way that the Invisibles’ are unable to, and it is the ability to physically interact with the past that creates a perceptual shift (albeit not to the extent that the timesuit does, which shows the totality of time rather than a simple section).

“think about ... how to obey orders” (1:209), the Invisibles are mired in a narrow and reductive view of individuality and selfhood.

Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* (1907) is a valuable tool to study the importance of time and embodiment. In his work, Bergson argues that time can be viewed in two fashions: the mechanistic, clockwork time that counts out hours and days, and the durable, creative time inherent in human beings (23). The human element is crucial to understanding time, Bergson argues, because “[i]f our existence were composed of separate states with an impassive ego to unite them, for us there would be no duration. For an ego which does not change does not *endure*” (3). What Bergson is arguing for is the need to view time not as a simple progression of minutes that can be measured by clocks, but as a creative process by which the human entity grows and develops, keeping in touch with the past while pushing toward the future. The human being must break out of its singular reliance on mechanical time and adopt a more multifaceted, universal outlook, an idea Bergson tacitly explicates when he argues that “[t]he universe *endures*” (7). Moving from time in a strictly linear, organized sense to something more creative is a revolutionary tactic that can bring about a true *dissensus*, as the body is freed from its segmented, ego-focused enclosure and allowed to see the totalized extension of the body and its position in reality. The ontological shift in the narrative comes with the introduction of the physical time machine, also known as a “timesuit,” developed by novice Invisible Takashi Satoh (5:22). It is at this point where several thematic and narrative developments begin to undermine the previous assertions set up in the series. Most immediately, the timesuit, unlike the earlier psychic version of time travel, involves an integration of human and machine, body and mind. The wearer of

the timesuit (in the narrative it is the enigmatic Invisible Ragged Robin in 2005, taking place after the majority of the comic's chronological events) is thus able to transmit herself back in time and physically interact with the environment in a way that the psychic projections are unable to. The more important revelation of the timesuit's power, however, comes from Takashi, who theorizes that "in our subjective universe we experience three dimensions of space and one of time" but believes that "time, like space, *also* has more than one dimension" (5:22). The significance of such multidimensionality is hard to ignore, and extends Bergson's notion of time's dimensionality into realms the theorist had not even considered. When the Invisibles — and the Ciphermen — previously traversed time, they did so in a way that did not interrupt their one-dimensional view. Projecting back into time simply meant moving to an earlier point in established history. This movement through time does not generate any *dissensus*, as the body does not become engaged in the time shift. It is only when the physical body enters into the timestream that an actual rupture occurs.

Entering the timesuit, Robin is not moved in a reverse but singular direction of time, but is instead pulled outside our universe altogether. She later (or rather, earlier) tells King Mob, "I went out of space and time. I could see all of it and ... it wasn't exactly below me, it was something else; I'd moved in a direction I hadn't even thought of until then" (5:49). Wolk refers to this event as a "making-multiple of vision" (266), an action that again leads to a *dissensual* disruption between what is felt and what is known. By disrupting the ontological equilibrium, Robin gains a new way of seeing her reality and the conflict around her. This new form allows Robin to "understand herself as both observer and observed" (Wolk 270), once again highlighting the disruption of subjects.

Robin's bodily understanding of herself in relation to the ideology of the universe is fundamentally ruptured in her movement outside the linear space-time continuum. She reaches the higher plane of existence, the "supercontext," a macro-reality that encompasses not only our holographic space-time, but the meta-universes as well, and where time and identity are experienced in total simultaneity. Entering this higher plane allows Robin to understand the nature of reality on a new level. Being both in and above the time stream opens Robin's body and mind up, and she even refers to this process as being "a software upgrade" (6:182). The illustrations which depict Robin's travel help to underscore this idea, as we are given a white page with several panels drawn in a chaotic confusion. This layout not only disrupts the linearity of Robin's time travel experience, but also shows the panels in extreme angular positions so as to show their panel-ness, or the artificiality of such borders. We do not see Robin's view of the universe until the final volume, where it is revealed that the human body is "decades long, billion-eyed and billion-limbed, the worm-cast that you leave in time. This is your *complete* body, not its *section*" (7:253). When seen from the perspective of the supercontext, the body is illustrated in a fashion that literalizes Bergson's concept of duration: it is an accumulation, a "huge centipedal tree of time" (Morrison, qtd. in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai 209) that stretches back infinitely. It is the combination of these two technologies that allows Robin to fully achieve enlightenment, moving outside of time fully and becoming integrated with the supercontext (6:196). Robin's enlightenment is thus a mediated experience, and it is only through her understanding of these media technologies that she is able to extend her body beyond its limitations and achieve transcendence.

Just as Robin moves outside of time, the narrative moves even further away from the language of war. Wolk presciently remarks that when Robin moves outside of time, “three-dimensional objects first appear artificially flattened and iconic, and her temporal linearity is no longer aligned with everyone else’s” (266). Her vision, as well as her understanding of reality fundamentally shift at this moment. The idea of formerly three-dimensional images compacting into two-dimensional surfaces — like “image-planes of comic book panels” (Wolk 270) — is a potent metaphor for the ontological shift that Robin (and the reader) undergo. The timeless war between control and freedom is revealed to be a flat, dimensionless, empty idea that was mistaken for reality. Instead, the series takes on the discourses of game or a “rescue operation” (7:18),⁸⁰ and these terms come to dominate the third volume. The mysterious entity known as the Harlequinade informs the Invisible Mister Six “[y]ou are playing a game disguised as everything” (7:184). Another, more complicated version of this idea appears when paranormal detective Jack Flint exasperatedly informs his partner: “[i]t’s everything! This! It looks like everything! ... ‘The Invisibles’ is an immune program: triggered by the Barbelith buoy when the game crashed and embedded the player” (7:207). King Mob later conceptualizes the self’s entrance into holographic reality as a “fiction suit,” akin to “Tom Hanks meeting LBJ and John Lennon in ‘Forrest Gump’ ... All the shit we believed in when we were high on ‘E’ ... It’s real and it’s *us* ... underneath the suits it’s just *us*” (7:228). Put simply, Mob means that the persona is simply a means by which we

⁸⁰ This idea of the artificiality of the war narrative and its conception as a game is noticeable, albeit subtle, as far back as the series’ second arc, “Arcadia.” The storyline begins with King Mob at an Indian puppetry performance, where he is informed by a spectator that “The *dalang* is more than a puppeteer. His skill makes us believe that we see a war between two great armies, but there is no war. There is only the *dalang*” (1:124).

constrict ourselves in order to move through reality.⁸¹ Meanwhile, in the distant future of 2012, we see the initial fears of the series projected back to us as play, stripped of their anxious contexts. Ragged Robin remarks that, by 2012, cybernetic implants are “as common as tattoos or piercings” (5:37); no longer a signifier of surgical upgrade by the Outer Church, these implants instead become quotidian aesthetic accessories. Meanwhile, King Mob becomes the head of a multinational conglomerate called Technocult — a portmanteau denoting the combination of the machine elements of the Outer Church and the occultic province of the Invisibles — and markets an inhalable reality game called “The Invisibles” which allows its user to experience an “Extreme Impact Environmental Immersion Option” where she can “play any of 300 characters” (7:271).⁸² This move “outside of one’s context” brings one to the level of the supercontext. Hence the

⁸¹ The fiction suit is used by John-A-Dreams, the former leader of the Invisibles cell who discovers a discarded timesuit in a church in Philadelphia that ends up pulling him outside of the universe (2:10). Neighly and Cowe-Spigai explain that this action brings John into the realm of the Outer Church, which he believes is “the limit of objective reality” (268). John, now a part of the Outer Church, opts to return to the holographic reality under several disguises, most notably as Mister Quimper, and later as the Invisible known as Detective-Inspector Jack Flint. The most interesting facet of John’s story (which largely happens off-page) is that, while he becomes a part of the Outer Church hierarchy, his “objective self is sublimated by the subjective selves of Quimper and Flint, who remain unaware of their true nature” (Neighly & Cowe-Spigai 268). This is particularly significant in the fictional guise of Jack Flint, as he actively aids the Invisibles’ cause. Later, during the climactic showdown with the Outer Church forces, Jack informs his partner George that “I’ve seen how it all turns out. Listen, I’ve just remembered that this is just a suit for experiencing ‘The Invisibles’” (7:226), moments before he is killed by Orlando. The fiction suit thus mitigates the effect of death, as the higher subjectivity simply returns to the macro-universe. In essence, the fiction suit operates in a very similar fashion as the television does for the Thanatoids: both open up the possibility of multiplicities outside a binary movement between life and death.

⁸² King Mob’s plan to distribute the anticipated game to the world during the Christmas rush (7:272) becomes a way for the Invisibles’ *dissensual* technologies to become universalized, just as Invisible Mason Lang manipulates the military into mass-producing the timesuit while he possesses “trapdoor access into all of those systems” (6:217). In a striking irony, authority is undone by the very mechanisms that created them: capitalism and the military-industrial complex.

relationship between time travel and games: understanding reality as a game (importantly, a game with replay value) serves as a metaphor for the non-linear, chaotic combinative powers of such an evolved state that incorporates both the singular and the general. These technologies help Robin (and later the entire world) experience reality in a way that directly challenges her previously held conceptions of reality. The subject's reductive focus on the ego (and, ergo, on everything outside it being "other") is broken down and recontextualized, as the body is viewed in a new light. The figure of the Harlequinade is projected back in the penultimate issue to reveal that they contain iterations of all the comic's characters (7:255). Just as Burroughs sought in the *Nova Trilogy*, subjectivities intersect and become intermixed, but only when the limiting veil of liberal humanist individuality is rent and the totality of existence is seen.

As The Blind Chessman explains to Dane, "[e]go' scaffolding is necessary to your development but must now be husked before it constricts your growth" (7:253). As this "scaffolding" falls away, the fully-extended human body is shown as a time-worm stretching back throughout history (7:253-254). The comic's art helps to illustrate what is the most literal of *dissensual* disruptions, showing that "if we can experience our own bodies in that form holistically rather than as a cross section, we enter the omniscient supercontext" (Wolk 266). Once these elements of humanity have been fully explored, it is time to push beyond them and into new arenas that provoke new understandings of the body, as well as new understandings of the universe at large. Once these elements have been fully explored, it is time to move on to a higher level, one that has not yet been corrupted by controlling influences. In 2012, the concept of the individual has been replaced by MeMes, the "[a]ccess to multiple self-images and potentials, a menu of ...

contradictory personas” (7:270). Dane bemoans to his Invisibles colleague Reynard that “[w]e didn’t have MeMes when I was little. ‘Personalities’ we called them” (7:268). Reynard counters by telling Dane that this was “why you had *war*” (7:269). These MeMes offer a mass-market *dissensus*, allowing a continual breaking out of narrow, singular contexts. This idea also eliminates the fear of otherness, of a foreign control over the body, as the idea of self and other melt away in the supercontext. As it is revealed just at the end of the series, the Archons are, in fact, a manifestation of “threatening ‘not-self’ material . . . the confrontation and integration of ‘not-self’ being a necessary stage in the development” (7:277). The Archons represent the fear of the other, and the acceptance of all forms of life as possible extensions ends the need to believe in an other. King Mob mocks the King-of-All-Tears, the final Archon, who proclaims itself “King of thizz aeon,” by responding “[w]hat? The one we just ended?” (7:290). Humanity is at the crossroads of an evolutionary leap, where individual identity is subsumed under the possibility of infinitely new integrations. The Archons no longer have power over the universe, inflicting upon it a singular, one-dimensional view. Mob proceeds to kill the Archon by dousing it with the Key reality drug and “shooting” it with a pop gun. The narrative notes that “[t]he supercontext absorbs the King effortlessly, welcoming his quaint ferocity, converting it to narrative” (7:281). The implication of this passage is that otherness and the Absolute Subject, as exemplified by the Archons, have reached the end of their evolutionary usefulness and are no longer necessary to human development. Yet it is also worth noting how King Mob’s destruction of the Archon ironically recalls the violence of the earlier series. With power finally located, King Mob’s response looks on the surface to be a continuation of his murderous past, but it is in fact a more abstract

overcoming of a concept. The Archon's destruction ends the division of self and other, and is the final hurdle in the series before the generative "apocalypse."

Having collapsed this self/other binary, which Donna Haraway rightly pinpoints as being at the root of all other "troubling dualisms" (442), the war ends definitively and humanity is able to ascend to a higher realm of existence. This is seen in Ragged Robin, who descends momentarily from the supercontext (also tellingly referred to as the "AllNow") to explain to King Mob that "[t]he timesuits what are we become in AllNow. I they we in AllNow" (7:284). McLuhan's concept of media integration with embodiment is unavoidable here, as the human bodies become fully fused with their technologies in order to exist in this higher-plane of existence. In fully integrating man and machine, the result is a being of infinite possibility. The series ends with the apocalypse, but it is no longer seen as catastrophe, but rather the joyful moment of evolution. "Nothing ends that isn't the start of something else" (7:285), Dane tells the reader in the final moments of the book. For Morrison, it is not only the assurance that we are not automata, but the characteristics of automata become extensions of a multiplicity of inventive new selves.

4.3 Conclusion: As Above, So Below

Returning to the scene I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Quimper informs his captive Invisibles that "There are no monsters. There are no demons" (6:133). Interestingly, this same idea is articulated by the Invisible master Mister Six in the final volume when he explains to his recruits that "there is no enemy" (7:18). The forces of anarchy and control ultimately reiterate the same idea, and Morrison uses this subtle point

throughout *The Invisibles* to show how both the philosophies of the Invisibles and the Outer Church are integral parts in reaching the next stage in human evolution. An intriguing moment occurs in the series' last issue, when King Mob informs Dane that the "Invisibles" spray's "basic fractal generator's pretty simple: yes/no/as above/so below" (7:271). The return of this mantra — recurring throughout the first volume but notably absent afterwards — at the series' end allows its audience to return to one of the original thesis statements of Morrison's during the series: the universe and the body are reflections of one another. Having taken a hermeneutical approach to the body and technological anxieties, "as above/so below" takes on a new significance for the reader. Without the entrapping subjugation of the subject that the codification of the assemblage, there is nothing for the subject to be measured against. There is no other, no enemy to impede growth. Having moved beyond the reductive dualisms of freedom/control and all the sub-categories that this entails, the extended human body, intermingling in a variety of possible permutations, is allowed to understand the greater significance of the supercontext. Like Burroughs and Pynchon before him, Morrison establishes a society of control — one predicated on instrumentalization — and then uses the idea of media technologies to help shock the characters out of their contexts. If integrated with the body, media can open up new ways of seeing and existing in the world previously hidden, previously invisible. *The Invisibles'* depiction of new subjectivities and ontological plurality successfully builds on the foundation established by Morrison's antecedents. Ultimately, Wolk is right when he argues that "Morrison debunks the idea of the heroic character arc: both 'sides' of the conflict, it turns out, are necessary agents of

change” (264).⁸³ As these new technologies produce *dissensual* interventions, the Invisibles reach a point of transcendence that ends the violence of their war. The end result of humanity in the supercontext is never shown, and the exact political dimensions of it are left up to the imagination. Thus, in the end *The Invisibles* is a sort of extension itself, a media technology created for the specific purpose of deprogramming the entrapping contexts that keep liquid power structures firmly entrenched. *The Invisibles* serves to create that moment of *dissensual* disruption in its readers,⁸⁴ leading to what is hopefully “an increasingly self-determined and self-generating technology [that] continues the natural evolution by other means” (Johnston, *Allure* 107-108). Without an Absolute Subject to dictate the terms, the assemblage remains in a constantly mutating, generatively chaotic flux. Quimper states that “God is in the machine” (6:133), but, as Morrison makes clear, God *is* the machine — the body inside the soul — and we are both.

⁸³ This is not to say that the two sides are interchangeable. The Outer Church’s mission of the “Complete Invasion of human consciousness and reality” (4:68) is something that needs to be opposed and dismantled. Rather, what I believe Wolk is saying is that it is necessary to understand all possible contexts in order to gain a higher understanding.

⁸⁴ Another point that Rogers vituperatively criticizes Morrison’ for: “[s]uperheroes are moral exemplars, as platonic ideals, as fiction bombs left latent in our universe which will one day explode in blinding blazes of inspiration and mass perfection: does Morrison actually *believe* this cack? It seems, regrettably, so” (“Flex” n.p.”).

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In his article entitled “Identity without the person,” Giorgio Agamben discusses how advances in technology have led to an increased disassociation between a person’s body and their identity. He writes of “the dangers embedded in the absolute and limitless control of a power that has at its disposal the biometric and genetic information of all its citizens,” and ominously asks “[w]hat kind of identity can one construct on the basis of data that is merely biological?” (51). Agamben expresses a common fear: that technology further drives a deep wedge between the human and the mechanical, and can be used to turn the human being into little more than data to be processed. Yet Agamben ends his essay on a relatively hopeful note, explaining that “we must be prepared, with neither regret nor hope to search — beyond both personal identity and identity without the person — for that new figure of the human” (54). This new figure, for Agamben, not only expresses a new iteration of human identity, but also implicitly reacts against the increasing political domination over the body. It is an invisible figure, and it is the task of critical thinkers to locate and understand this figure, and, more importantly, to make it visible.

My thesis follows all the major elements of Agamben’s essay in ways that both accept and challenge his proposals. I have looked at how the members of anarchist movements have changed not only their bodily relations, but their political aims and goals as well, growing and developing in each generation. Yet unlike Agamben, who sees technology as the tools of control, I understand it as the means of realizing these new

bodily possibilities. As McLuhan argues, technologies are extensions of the body, and therefore intimately related to it. By accepting and harnessing this potential, the body is opened to a whole host of new potentialities that were not previously considered possible. This ontological shift is vital for anarchist groups in twentieth-century literature as these new understandings of the body accompany a new understanding of anarchy.

In each of the texts I have examined, the authors first demonstrate an unsuccessful anarchist organization that fails to bring about any significant change. The Nova Police, 24fps, and the Invisibles (in the first half of the series) are each simply a part of the cycle that allows the processes of domination to continue. Ultimately, it is because these groups see technology as part of an arsenal: either something these groups can exploit, or alternately the tools of the enemy. It is only when the characters in these texts realize that technology is intimately part of the human body and can be used to restructure the boundaries of perception that genuine anarchic action occurs. In employing new media technologies, bodies shift with battle lines and real change and development is made possible.

It is interesting to note that, in each of the works I have examined, the mechanisms of power always move toward the same end of pure instrumentality. Regardless of time period or available technology, the teleology of control remains identical: divide and limit the human being through disassociation with its fully realized body. By making technology an instrument, the end goal of these hegemonic powers is to similarly make human beings the same thing: instruments forever in service to the self-perpetuating machine of power. Yet the same cannot be said for the ontological anarchist groups that challenge these powers. As Katherine Hayles presciently argues,

literary texts do more than explore the cultural implications of scientific theories and technological artifacts. Embedding ideas and artifacts in the situated specificities of narrative, the literary texts give these ideas and artifacts a local habitation and a name through discursive formulations whose effects are specific to that textual entity. (*Posthuman* 22)

In each text, the new bodily extensions manifest themselves in entirely new and generative figurations. Hayles argues that “[w]here hope exists in *Ticket*, it appears as posthuman mutations like the fish boy, whose fluidity perhaps figures a type of subjectivity attuned to the froth of noise rather than the stability of a false self” (220). William S. Burroughs’s new bodies are thus mutants of the splice, half-formed creations that are constantly and necessarily contingent and non-permanent. Thomas Pynchon’s most visible avatar of new embodiment comes in the form of the Thanatoids, the gaunt humanoids existing in a state of semi-death, still physical and available to intersect with the world. Grant Morrison, meanwhile, has his extended body literally illustrated as a time worm, a human being stretching back throughout time as a repeated version of itself. Each generation does indeed develop its own new resistance, and I have attempted to show this is accomplished by bringing to light new possible ways for the human being to view itself.

In the end, these multiple new figurations of the technologically extended human being are what signal the success of the literary tradition of anarchism. Burroughs, Pynchon, and Morrison all excavate new ways of recognizing the human being. New media allow for new integrations, and as technology continues to evolve and become more complex, so too does the human. Jacques Rancière argues that political resistance

so often fails because “the mechanism ends up spinning around itself and playing on the very undecidability of its effect” (145), yet it is possible to reverse the direction of his claim, pointing it instead at the forces of control that continually enact the same practices over and over again. The control machine and its motives remain wholly comprehensible. As literature progresses and new media technologies become available (or, as is the case with Morrison, authors creatively develop their own fictional media), there will consistently be new ways to discover and explore the extension of the human body in directions heretofore unfathomed. In the same vein, anarchy will persist in the same fashion, constantly locating and exploiting the cracks in the faulty mechanisms of instrumentality. Thus, no matter how powerful or all-encompassing control appears (even in the modulatory nature of the Deleuze’s control society), it is always surmountable by virtue of its predictability. However these societies attempt to repress or dismantle anarchism, it remains hidden, waiting for a new way to understand the body and bring its limitless potential back into the realm of the visible.

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