

CYBORG FICTIONS: THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF POSTHUMANISM

Scott McCracken

The *fin-de-siècle* crisis in socialism has coincided with the reappearance of the cyborg. Cyborgs are everywhere, in films, fiction, politics and theory. Three strands of cyborg discourse can be identified. First, there is the use of the cyborg to represent the increasingly complex relationship between humanity and technology. Implants, transplants, prostheses, hormonal treatment, cosmetic surgery and genetic engineering all blur the boundary between body and machine. Second, there are cyborg fictions: the narratives that explore the imaginative possibilities inspired by new technology. These include the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson and films like *Terminator* and *Terminator II*. Thirdly, there are the theoretical extrapolations of these fictions which map the relationship between the inhuman, global systems of the new world (dis)order and the kinds of hybrid identities that are one of its characteristics. Here the most influential writer is Donna Haraway, who sparked many of the critical debates with her article, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 80s', first published in *Socialist Review*.

Haraway is a historian of science who has devoted most of her work to interrogating that concept of the human which acts as an unquestioned assumption in most scientific research. Her cyborg project contains three central elements. Firstly, she wants to problematise identities rather than reinforcing them. In her 'Cyborg Manifesto', she describes herself as 'Once upon a time, in the 1970s . . . a proper, US socialist-feminist, white, female, hominid biologist, who became a historian of science to write about modern Western accounts of monkeys, apes, and women'. Now she 'has turned into a multiply marked cyborg feminist, who tried to keep her politics, as well as her other critical functions, alive in the unpromising times of the last quarter of the twentieth century'. In this role she wishes to replace traditional science history with narratives that are also 'multiply marked'. That is, they mark difference rather than masking it, highlighting the identities that constitute and are constituted by science. The second

element is an attempt to relate those scientific narratives to the larger contexts of scientific research, contexts which include neglected questions like gender and race. Thirdly, she wants to interrogate the central role of the liberal individual as the assumption around which most science works. Significantly, she writes that her transition to cyborg status occurred in response to the challenge of anti-racist and postcolonial critiques of 'Euro-American feminist humanism'. It was, in other words, part of the same suspicion of 'grand narrative' that has upset many of the carefully constructed projects of emancipation of the twentieth century.

In what follows, my two main examples of cyborg manifestations will be Haraway's collection of essays, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the reinvention of nature*, and 'The Winter Market', a short story by William Gibson. If I am more concerned with cyborg fictions than cyborg realities, then this is not to deny the actuality of the new relationship between humanity and technology. One of Haraway's claims is that the cyborg is 'a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction'.¹ I will argue that, at a time when the limits of existing socialist narratives are clear, cyborg fictions perform an important and 'real' cultural function. They operate as what Fredric Jameson has called, 'narrative as socially symbolic act'.² That is, they provide the kinds of transformative metaphors through which the cultural conflicts of the late twentieth century are mediated. In Jameson's words, 'history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but . . . as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and . . . our approach to it and the Real itself necessarily passes through it prior **textualization**, its narrativization in the political unconscious'.³ The proliferation of cyborg metaphors means that we ignore them at our peril, because it is through such forms that new kinds of consciousness (both empowering and disempowering) arise.

Unfortunately, suspicion of 'cyberhype' has led some **marxist** commentators to categorise all cyborgs as reactionary. Julian **Stallabrass** sees the paradigm as the opening shot in *Terminator*: a robot crushing human skulls.⁴ However, to accept this **Orwellian** vision at face value is to throw away a long tradition of anti-capitalist criticism. Despite the fact that cyborgs are frequently cited as a postmodern phenomenon, cyborg metaphors have appeared regularly in one form or another at moments of social crisis from the industrial revolution to the present day. From Mary Shelley's monster to Carlyle's image of the shuttle that 'drops from fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster' to **Marx's** description of the proletariat as 'an appendage of the machine', cyborg fictions have mediated the evolving relationship between humanity and technology. Rita **Felski** points to examples of male cyborgs during the last *fin de siècle* in the work of Rathchilde. **Andreas Huyssen** writes of the robot's use as a figure for feminised mass culture in Fritz Lang's

Metropolis; and cyborgs have appeared again at the end of the twentieth century.⁸

There is, however, little doubt that, in the **1990s**, most cyborgs are working for the enemy. The absence of socialist alternatives has seen a conservative version of the technological fix run rampant. The unseen hand of the free market is advocated as the inhuman machinery that will resolve all economic problems. A catalogue of cyberconcepts, the information superhighway, the internet, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, interactive programs, cyberspace, cybersex, all function as happy endings to the problems that an untrammelled capitalism is building up for the twenty-first century. They are the cheerful recourse of films like *Mission: Impossible* or thrillers like Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honour*, where the search always provides an instant answer, the technology always works and the smart weapon always hits its target. In politics the story is Newt Gringich's idea of universal access to the internet, Bill Clinton's slogan 'a computer in every classroom', or Al Gore's global network of fibre-optic cables as the solution to economic development.'

In an increasingly uncertain world, these conservative visions offer the hope that, after all, progress and human happiness are not mutually exclusive. They function because they have a powerful utopian impetus and, despite their limitations, even the most facile provide an imaginative space in which new forms of consciousness can be explored. But, like all popular fictions, they would not work if they did not first arouse the anxieties they are designed to quell. To be successful each must provide the means through which a workable, coherent identity can be put together in the context of social and economic forces which fragment the rational self.'

By contrast, progressive cyborg fictions problematise the question of identity. They give precedence neither to inhuman machinery, nor to a conservative version of human nature. Instead, they explore the transformations of what it means to be human. The impact of globalisation is an important factor here. While some socialist commentators have been sceptical about the actual degree of change: it is undeniable that in the latter half of the twentieth century the speed of global interactions, both human and economic, has been unprecedented. This has had real cultural effects. Global population movements and information networks have created a new environment in which the sense of self is radically different to earlier phases of capitalism. From an older Left perspective, a phenomenon like identity politics seemed like a regression, or the special interests of small privileged sectors in the United States and Western Europe. Eric Hobsbawm, for one, has been quick to condemn what he sees as sectional interests over the Left's need for a universalist **project**.¹⁰ But, from a contemporary perspective, the levels of dislocation and alienation currently experienced by large numbers of people mean that identity must

be understood as a vital focus for political activism." Cyborg fictions explore the kinds of identities needed to live in the new world; and interest in them is not confined to elites. New and old concepts, for example, the **mestiza**, hybridity, double consciousness and queer **politics**¹² might all be described as radical cyborg fictions. Each attempts to think through the problem of the self in the context of a world where cultural boundaries are constantly shifting.

The most influential body of work, and the most obviously indebted to popular (science) fiction, has been that of Donna Haraway. Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' deliberately courts the extreme. Haraway argues for a revolution in our understanding of the human.

Cyborgs are post-Sewnd World War hybrid entities made of, first, ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen 'high-technological' guise as information systems, texts, and ergonomically controlled labouring, desiring and reproducing systems. (1)

The thrust of Haraway's argument (and of much of the work that has followed the Manifesto) has been avant-garde in the modernist sense of working at the boundaries of the culturally accepted. Partly, one suspects, this is because the context of many of the debates has been Northern California, a region of the United States strongly influenced by Silicon Valley and the lesbian and gay culture of San Francisco. In the Bay Area changing the sexed body through piercing, tattoos, scarification, hormonal treatment, cosmetic surgery and implants is a practical form of **posthumanism** that exists alongside the technological advances of Apple-Macintosh and Hewlett Packard.

Bodies have become cyborgs – cybernetic organisms – compounds of hybrid techno-organic embodiment and textuality. (212)¹³

In her collection, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, the reader traces Haraway's development from socialist-feminist to cyborg-feminist through her accounts of how primatologists have studied apes. Science, in her account, becomes a story told to regulate and legitimate certain forms of social organisation. The funding and **institutionalisation** of research produces certain results. Most telling is her account of how a focus on male dominance amongst apes was changed by feminist primatologists who pointed to the importance of the mother-child relationship. She marks the shift from the dominance theory of the 1930s to a theory of stress-management in the postwar period so that, 'Primate studies are motivated by, and in turn legitimate, the management needs of a stressed society' (33). In the same way, she notes a change in the biological model from one characterised by metaphors from engineering before 1945, to sociobiology's postwar 'theorizing of nature as a communications or control machine' (61). The communications revolution opened the way to 'a logic of control appropriate to the historical conditions of

post-Second World War capitalism' (58).

The cyborg illustrates this situation, one where the organism is no longer the unit of analysis. Instead the concept of the individual organism is abolished in favour of biology as communications system: 'The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor – all theorized and engaged in practice in terms of communications' (212). In the absence of the comforting and familiar units of liberal individualism, critical analysis becomes a **question** of boundaries.

... bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative modes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies. Siting (sighting) boundaries is a risky practice. (200-201)

Haraway writes of the relationship between bodies and machines as a 'border war' (150). Science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy are useful modes in this context because their subject is the point at which the boundaries between what is 'real' and what is possible are drawn (201). Cyborg fictions are ways of theorizing and narrating these boundaries. The consequence is monster stories: 'Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations' (180). Cyborgs are the monsters which populate the margins of discourse: 'These boundary creatures are, literally, monsters, a word that shares more than its root with the word to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify' (2). At this point, analysis of the narrative, of the fiction, becomes as important as the discovery of the facts, which have themselves been constituted as a story. Science, as the 'most respectable legitimator of new realities' (78) can provide the narratives society needs to resolve 'the contradiction between, or the gap between, human reality and human possibility in history' (42). But Haraway is not content to let those narratives be authoritative. They are always fictions, mediating social reality.

The key element here for future socialist narratives is the challenge these monsters present to the liberal individualist self. In an essay on theories of the immune system ('The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitution of the Self in Immune System Discourse'), prompted by social and scientific discourses around AIDS, Haraway shows how the body's boundaries cannot be clearly defined as an organic whole against an exterior not-self: 'In a sense, there could be no *exterior* antigenic structure, no "invader" that the immune system had not already "seen" and mirrored internally. Self and "other" lose their rationalistic oppositional quality and become subtle plays of partially mirrored readings and responses' (218). This has consequences for conceptions of identity in the late twentieth century, when the 'constructions of an organism's boundaries, the job of

the discourses of immunology, are particularly potent mediators of the experiences of sickness and death' (208).

These are challenging enough ideas in themselves, but it is Haraway's persistent correlation of the problem of the self in medico-scientific theory with the inadequacy of the concept of the individual that presents the greatest challenge of all. To follow the Cyborg Manifesto's call to arms would be to concede that we do, after all, live in a posthuman world, where the old straitjacket identities no longer have force. However, the grandeur of Haraway's claims need to be examined more closely before they can be accepted. Two critical points need to be made. Firstly, the mediation between scientific **paradigm** and 'postmodern world' is highly complex and, at times, Haraway's essays seem to posit an unmediated base-superstructure **model**.¹⁴ Secondly, there are the avant-garde qualities of Haraway's writing already mentioned, qualities that are developed further by some of her followers who argue for a posthuman, **postgender**, **post-identity** politics of **monstrosity**.¹⁵ These concerns might be cited as the preoccupations of a small privileged minority, whose organic intellectuals have the advantage of tenured jobs in California's still generously funded academic institutions.

Both these objections are serious ones, but both can be countered. The first is probably flattened by the weight of Haraway's extensive study, *Primate Visions: Gender Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, which has won widespread praise. The book examines the social and cultural forces that shape one particular discipline, primatology, in the United States, Japan and India. In the context of *Primate Visions*, the extravagant claims of the Cyborg Manifesto appear as a working through of the implications of the bigger study. The second is more complex, because it raises the vast debate about the relationship between cultural elites and mass culture, a debate that extends back to the earlier moment of modernist **aesthetics**.¹⁶ In the case of Haraway (who currently holds the post of Professor at the History of Consciousness Board, University of California, Santa Cruz), the validity of her claims must depend on how successful they are in providing a language that can relate changes in cultural identity to the context of globalisation.

Significantly, one of her key cultural reference points is the work of chicana women writers like Gloria **Anzaldúa** and **Cherríe** Moraga. They write of the permeable and shifting identities that come into being in the human and cultural border traffic between the United States (particularly the state of California) and Mexico. These are the kinds of hybrid identities that are developing as a consequence of globalisation. Of Moraga, Haraway says, her 'language is not "whole"'; it is self-consciously spliced, a chimera of English and Spanish, both conqueror's languages. But it is this chimeric monster, without claim to an original language before

violation that crafts the erotic, competent, potent identities of women of colour' (175-6). Her other example, Anzaldia, writes, in her collection, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, of 'the new mestiza' as on the border between two cultures:

Because I, a *mestiza*,
 continually walk out of one culture
 and into another,
 because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente
 (soul between two worlds, three, four,
 my head buzzes with the contradictory
 I am Northernised by all the voices that speak to me
 simultaneously)"

The new mestiza is not defined by an essentialist identity, but by 'una lucha *de fronteras*/a struggle of borders'. This mapping of boundaries has much in common with comparable 'postcolonial' projects, fictional and theoretical, which have attempted to engage with the intensifying pace of global interaction. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, for example, charts the metamorphoses that occur in the process of migration from the Indian subcontinent to the former imperial centre, a process that creates, in the words of the postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha, a kind of third space of cultural hybridity:

for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom."

Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic constitutes a similar attempt to think outside the fixed and misleading boundary lines of nation states and to create a space in which a double consciousness that is both inside and outside modernity can be thought. The point here is not, of course, to say that the new mestiza, Bhabha's hybridity, or Gilroy's development of Du Bois's double consciousness delineate the same space. It is rather to suggest that current conditions create the same kinds of problems for meaningful narratives in different parts of the globe. Gloria Anzaldia, between Mexico and California, tackles similar kinds of dislocation as (albeit in a very different way) Salman Rushdie between Bombay and London. Chicana poetry and magical realism are both, in a sense, cyborg fictions because they foreground the imperfect stitching that reveals them as monstrous.

Haraway's use of the cyborg as transformative metaphor is productive

because it embraces, rather than runs away from, these new realities. Her concept of the cyborg engages with the kinds of hybrid identities that are being produced by the new global economy. Experience is now both local and global, regional and transcultural, biological and technological. The cyborg, as transformative metaphor, provides the figure through which the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of the new can be thought.

In fact, the problem for the Left is not the difficulty of finding cyborg fictions. As I claimed in my opening paragraph, cyborgs are everywhere and, at the same time, evidence of the inapplicability of the liberal individualist ideal is abundant. The problem lies in trying to read the embarrassment of riches that is postmodernist culture for evidence of a new emancipatory project. William Gibson's work, which forms part of the original 'cyberpunk' movement, is a good place to start. Cyberpunk has been described by Fredric Jameson as, 'a new type of science fiction . . . which is fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself'.¹⁹ The movement is true to its name in its skilful self-promotion. It extrapolates from the cut-throat consumer society of the 1980s and that decade's increasing divide between rich and poor. Gibson's fictional world describes a recognizable geo-political system, characterised by weak nation states and dominant transnationals. Its inequalities reflect the long term outcome of the present crisis predicted by David Harvey: 'heightened international and inter-regional competition, with the least advantaged countries and regions suffering the severest consequences'.²⁰ But, while inspired by the development of new technologies like virtual reality, personal computers and the internet, Gibson's narratives focus as much on the social contradictions thrown up by technology as the machinery itself. On the one hand, cyberpunk is resolutely posthumanist. It delights in the transformation of what is meant by being human: Gibson's characters employ genetic engineering, drugs and advanced forms of surgery to transform themselves. On the other hand, the **cyberworld** is peopled with the descendants of postwar countercultures who represent a persistent romanticism.

Gibson bolts this romanticism onto a Chanderlesque sense of style. A consequence is that the most marked aspect of his world is a sense of lack, or unfulfilled potential. His novels and short stories explore the forms of hybrid, 'cyber' consciousness that arise from the employment of new technologies as a means of domination. His most famous contribution to the science fiction genre is the idea of 'jacking in'. Using a jack into their central nervous system, his characters are able to plug themselves directly into the 'matrix' (an enhanced form of the internet) and explore a virtual world of information, described as:

A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the

mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. . .²¹

We are meant to take this no more or less seriously than Mary Shelley's readers might have taken the possibility of animating the reassembled parts of dead bodies by electricity. Rather, the matrix acts as a metaphor for the kinds of cultural collisions and re-inventions of the self that might now be possible. Thus, it is quite wrong to argue, as has **Julian Stallabrass**, that cyberspace is 'merely the literal expression of the situation of the individual in contemporary society, and more specifically of business people and their camp followers (engineers and intellectuals) spinning universalizing fantasies out of their desire to ride the next commercial wave'. On the contrary, its deployment by all sides in the battle over future meanings has been anything but literal and its politics are in still in dispute.

Some of Gibson's best writing is in his shorter fiction. In his short story 'The Winter Market' the main character, Lise, is akin to the old-fashioned robot, a descendant perhaps of the female robot in **Lang's** *Metropolis*. She is the victim of a wasting disease and can only move with the aid of a polycarbon exoskeleton. She is, thus, already a hybrid being: part-human and part-machine; and, as in *Metropolis*, she embodies both a fear of the feminine and a **technophobia**.²³ She first appears to the narrator, **Casey**²⁴, as a sexual threat when she approaches him at a party:

But she found me again. Came after me two hours later, weaving through the bodies and junk with that temble grace programmed into the exoskeleton.²⁵

As a robot, Lise belongs to an earlier era. Her other more up-to-date talents are not revealed until Casey takes her home. Lise's unconscious creates the kind of raw material which, through 'jacking in', can be recorded and used as mass-market entertainment. Casey is a skilled editor of the kind of dreams she can produce. He fashions the raw material into a saleable commodity. Lise's dreams turn out to be the most powerful he has ever encountered:

You never felt that hunger she had, which was pared down to a dry need, hideous in its singleness of purpose. People who know *exactly* what they want have always frightened me, and Lise had known what she wanted for a long time, and wanted nothing else at all. (147)

The narrative works over some of the now canonical aesthetic binaries that characterise discussions of modernism and postmodernism: for example, the modernist divide between high and low culture. Lise's mass-market talents are compared to the modernist artist, **Rubin**. His raw material is *gomi*, the Japanese word for rubbish: we are told that islands have been built out of *gomi* in Tokyo bay. In **Rubin's** studio, 'One box is filled with the severed heads of hundreds of Barbie dolls, another with armored industrial safety gauntlets that look like space suit gloves' (150). **Rubin** makes his art from physical detritus, while Casey makes his with the

waste products of people's minds. For **Rubin**, 'everything he drags home must have been new and shiny once, must have meant something, however briefly, to someone' (161). The suggestion is that Lise's mind contains similar waste, she and it are cast-offs of a society that is extraordinarily wasteful, both of goods and people. But, where **Rubin's** art-works are displayed in galleries, Casey's editions of Lise's dreams become mass-produced commodities. Modernism's elitism is transformed into a direct relationship with the desires of mass society. Her hunger becomes not just her own, it now belongs to all the dispossessed: 'Those kids back down the Market, warming their butts around the fires and wondering if they'll find someplace to sleep tonight, they believe it' (158). Lise's unconscious is in tune with the collective desires of her audience.

Whether we treat this relationship as productive or oppressive hinges on whether mass culture is seen as a total system or as a contested terrain. In the first case, the 'consumer' of popular culture is understood to be a passive recipient of whatever the culture industry chums out. In the second, she or he is understood to be critically engaged in an imaginative relationship with the popular text, one where that relationship is productive of a workable, coherent identity which allows him or her to live in a (perhaps otherwise intolerable) world. One strand of mass culture theory, developed from **Adorno** in his most negative and least utopian dialectical mode, might see Lise's abilities as no more than a metaphor for the way in which the culture industry absorbs and defuses popular dissatisfaction in capitalist society. For example, **Julian Stallabrass** sees the video game (the form which comes closest to Gibson's vision of Lise's products) as overwhelming the agency of the player: it is a 'phantasmagoric experience of total immersion'.³⁸ Stallabrass's image of 'immersion' is symptomatic of the tendency in mass culture theory to conceive of the subject as powerless in the face of a great wave of pap. It denies the crucial role of fantasy in the formation of a critical subjectivity, where the active 'reader's' needs and desires are projected onto the setting provided by the popular text. Thus, the term 'consumption' is itself problematic because, in **Paul Gilroy's** words, it 'accentuates the passivity of its agents and plays down the value of their creativity as well as the micro-political significance of their actions in understanding the forms of anti-discipline and resistance conducted in everyday life'.³⁹

The persistent strain of mass culture theory in left-wing thought reproduces a static model of culture. It obscures dominance as the product of a continuing social process and it effectively denies the importance of culture in political struggle. However, if power relations are not permanently fixed, but are part of an ongoing (albeit unequal) conflict, then the struggle over meaning is an integral part of any form of politics. Moreover, mass culture theory's model of culture denies the utopian potential of

popular texts. The importance of consent as well as coercion means that some kind of compensation is necessary for those whom power excludes. Popular texts must contain a surplus of meaning over and above their instrumental function, which satisfies our needs and desires and provides an element of hope for a different world.

The transformative metaphor of the cyborg permits a different, more complex understanding of the relationship between reader and text than that provided by mass culture theory. In 'The Winter Market' the narrative unsettles a traditional understanding of the opposition between human agency and the dehumanising effects of the culture industry. Lise's fate provokes a reflection on the reader's imaginative relationship with the popular text. On the verge of death, as a consequence of the disease and her addiction to amphetamines, she arranges to have her personality downloaded into a computer. In this **Faustian** bargain, she will escape the physical limitations of her life, but is beholden to the company, which will not pay for the amount of memory needed to store her unless she continues to produce the hits that make her so valuable. The ambivalent effect on the reader is produced by a semi-comic account of Lise's status as undead.

Because she was dead, and I'd let her go. Because, now, she was immortal, and I'd helped her get that way. And because I knew she'd phone me, in the morning. (140)

Casey is left, like the reader, waiting for a voice of uncertain status, but, as **Rubin** points out, engagement with the machine is inevitable: '... you have to edit her next release. Which will almost certainly be soon, because she needs money bad. She's taking up a lot of ROM on some corporate mainframe' (166). For both Lise and Casey, artist and editor, the future holds no clear borderline between creativity and the machine. Their future selves will both be, to different degrees, posthuman cyberselves. Thus, Gibson's short story maintains the element of ambivalence that is essential to a creative encounter with the future, exploring the new boundary positions that are emerging.

The downloaded Lise even disrupts mass culture theory's persistent gendering of mass culture as feminine, where the fear of the masses is 'always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the **mass**'.²⁸ Her position as artist in the machine suggests a new hybrid that does not fit well with any form of gendered identity. The possibilities this creates have meant that, despite accusation that cyberpunk is fiction for boys, the movement includes women writers like Pat Cadigan and the feminist writer, Marge Piercy. Piercy has returned to the genre in *Body of Glass* (1992, published as *He, She and It*, 1991, in North America) after being credited with creating the first cyberworld in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).

Not all cyborgs are as challenging as Gibson's or Piercy's, but they are now ubiquitous in popular fiction. Tom Clancy's recent thriller, *Debt of Honour* (1995), is a paranoid fantasy that sees a weakened United States overcome a military threat from an aggressive Japan using a variety of smart weapons co-ordinated through the use of satellites and computer technology. Satellites that are able to track fugitives and carry laser weapons turn up in a contemporary horror novel, Dean Koontz's *Dark Rivers of the Heart* (1994). In Clive Barker's fantastical tale of parallel universes, *Everville* (1994), the forces of evil are tracked with a computer database that receives information from every possible source. Even Michael Crichton's bestseller about sexual harassment, *Disclosure* (1994), involves a scene where the protagonist enters a virtual world to retrieve the information he needs to prove his 'innocence'.

This constitutes a quantifiable shift, comparable with earlier moments in the postwar period that demonstrate that popular culture is not about standardised products but is subject to process. John Sutherland has noted the increase in international themes in the bestsellers of the 1960s and 70s.²⁹ Andrew Billon has observed the rise and fall of the 'sex and shopping' or 'bonkbuster' novel with the consumer boom of the late 1980s.³⁰ Feminist critics have charted the changes in the romance novel that accompanied second-wave feminism in the 1970s, when heroines became less passive and began to challenge some of the earlier assumptions about a woman's role.³¹ We now see a proliferation of popular narratives where the protagonists come to an understanding of their position in the world through new technology. In this popular texts are not just reflecting technological change. In order to be successful, popular fiction must do more than perpetuate the powerful ideologies that govern our lives. It must also relate the generalised and impersonal semantic horizons of the new global order to the personal life and self-identity of the reader. Thus, the popular text must perform the difficult and impressive job of relating the personal to the political. Although the popular text is a commodity it is not just a commodity. It must also answer some of the needs of its readers.

Thus, popular fictions, whether in paperbacks, films or political rhetoric need to be recognised as an important terrain of struggle. Simplistic accounts of their function under capitalism fail to explain their range and scope. Narratives are now emerging that do, however inadequately, give a structure to the new relationship between identity and globalisation. Rather than ignoring them, we need a socialist politics that is able to popularise the radical insights of cyborg fictions and to challenge and subvert the reactionary popular narratives that already exist. It is no accident that the two most successful left-of-centre politicians of the moment, Bill Clinton and his shadow Tony Blair, both tell 'stories' about the relationship between national and global economies; but they are not the ones we need.

If the reality is closer to Gibson's vision of the dispossessed than **Al Gore's** vision of development, to **Anzaldúa** than to the rhetoric of NAFTA, and to Rushdie's schizophrenic London than to the blandishments of **EMU**, then the Left needs a narrative that is both innovatory and popular, its own cyborg fiction that doesn't hide the joins, to challenge the ones that do.

NOTES

1. *Socialist Review*, vol. 15, 80 (1985), pp. 65-107, later published as 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the reinvention of nature* (London, Routledge, 1991). From here on page references from the latter are included in the text.
2. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: narrative as socially symbolic act* (London, Methuen, 1981).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
4. Julian Stallabrass, 'Just Gaming: Allegory and Economy in Computer Games', *New Left Review*, 198 (March/April 1993), p. 82.
5. Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' in *Selected Writings* (London, Penguin, 1971), p. 64; Karl Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto' in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *The Portable Karl Marx* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), p. 211.
6. Rita Felski, 'The Art of Perversion: Female Sadists and Male Cyborgs' in *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard UP, 1995); Andreas Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*' in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana UP, 1986).
7. On Al Gore's vision of the future see Herbert I. Schiller, 'The Global Information Highway: Project for an Ungovernable World' in James Brook and Iain A. Boal (eds.), *Resisting the Virtual Life: the culture and politics of information* (San Francisco, City Light Books, 1995). The collection as a whole provides an excellent survey of the political uses of cyberculture.
8. For more on the nature of contemporary popular fictions see Scott McCracken, *Pulp: an introduction to popularfiction* (forthcoming, Manchester University Press, 1997).
9. Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe, argue that the 'the world economy is considerably more globalized than 50 years ago; but much less than is theoretically possible. In many ways it is less globalized than 100 years ago.' Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe, 'Global But Leaderless? The New Capitalist Order', *Socialist Register* 1992, p. 91. For example, they point out that 'Even within Europe, where the thrust towards trade liberalization was strongest, export shares by the end of the 1980s were only a little above those of 1913' (p. 79).
10. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Identity Politics and the Left', *New Left Review*, 217 (May/June 1996) pp. 38-47.
11. Jürgen Habermas identifies this moment as a gap between 'the systems world' and 'the life world' and looks to a time when 'social movements [are] no longer orientated to the system's steering needs, but to the processes at the boundaries between system and lifeworld': *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987), p. 357. It is at these boundaries, at the intersection between the machinery of modern institutions and the uncertainty of everyday life that cyborg fictions emerge. In the very last pages of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Habermas writes that the 'changes with the language of general systems theory that has developed from cybernetics . . . come a lot closer to the sociocultural form of life than classical mechanics' (pp. 384-5). Interestingly, this is not far from the line taken in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'.
12. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza* (San Francisco, Ann Lute,

- 1987); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, Routledge, 1994); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, Verso, 1993); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 1991); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: on the discursive limits of sex* (New York and London, Routledge, 1993).
13. When Haraway concludes the Manifesto with the statement that she 'would rather be a cyborg than a goddess', she is opting for engagement with the cutting edge of new technologies rather than evasion through that other Californian alternative, New Age philosophy.
 14. See, for example, the correlation between the communication revolution and the logic of postwar capitalism cited earlier (*Simian, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 58).
 15. See for example Judith Halberstam (ed.), *Posthuman Bodies*, (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1995).
 16. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*, (London, Verso, 1991), pp. 2-3.
 17. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 76. I am grateful to Nuria Triana Toribio for help with the translation of this passage.
 18. Homi Bhabha, 'The Third Space' interview with Jonathan Rutherford in Jonathan Rutherford ed. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990). p. 211.
 19. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 38.
 20. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989), p. 183.
 21. William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London, HarperCollins, 1986), p. 67.
 22. Julian Stallabrass, 'Empowering Technology: The Exploration of Cyberspace' in *New Left Review*, 211 (May/June 1995), p. 32.
 23. See Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine' *op. cit.*
 24. The great-great-grandson, perhaps, of Casey Jones whose relationship with a machine was legendary.
 25. William Gibson, 'The Winter Market' in *Burning Chrome* (London, Harper Collins, 1993), p. 144 (from here on page numbers in text).
 26. Julian Stallabrass 'Just Gaming: Allegory and Economy in Computer Games', p. 84. For a longer discussion of mass culture theory and bestselling fictions see Scott McCracken, *Pulp: an introduction to popular fiction*.
 27. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 103.
 28. Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other' in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, p. 53.
 29. John Sutherland, *Fiction and the Fiction Industry* (London, Athlone Press, 1978), p. 56.
 30. Andrew Billon, 'Getting Up on the Wrong Side of Bed', *The Observer Review*, (3 Jan 1993), pp. 3-4.
 31. See Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Mills and Boon meet Feminism' in Jean Radford (ed.), *The Progress of Romance: the politics of popular fiction* (London, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1986).