

**BECOMING INDISCERNIBLE: FROM BARE LIFE
TO FEMALE MACHINES
A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF AGAMBEN AND DELEUZE
IN THE SPACE OF SCIENCE FICTION**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The tendency within science fiction to satirise and expose dominant political and social structures works in harmony with Agamben's paradigmatic, philosophical system, which seeks to similarly expose the functioning of biopolitical structures in the West. Agamben is known for his controversial statement that the concentration camp has become the paradigm of modern western government. A key aspect or bi-product of this process is the situation of bare life – a state of being excluded from the polis that emerges as a result of the suspended nature of the paradigm of western government. This state is one of political denudation, such that governments may sanction the abuse and even killing of certain groups: a chief historical example is the murder of Jews during the Nazi holocaust.

Sf novels, particularly the work of Philip K. Dick offer unique insights into the process that produces bare life, partly by exhibiting its own specific examples: positing the inhuman or post-human, androids and even women as instances of such. This thesis argues that Womankind is perhaps the central and most pervasive case of bare life, given her long-standing historical oppression. Furthermore, the representation of women in sf often exposes and in some cases critiques the patriarchal power structures that have allowed women to inhabit this political state.

The philosophy of Deleuze offers the much needed potential to break away from this never-ending system of female oppression that the current paradigm of biopolitics facilitates. His and Guattari's system of becoming and immanence provides a framework for discussing the position of women as, rather than hopeless victims of a stagnant system, one of potential that they term becoming-woman; this process can be manipulated in certain emancipatory directions, freeing women from patriarchal, political practices. The sf figure of the gynoid in particular acts as a zone of indeterminate becoming whose presence in sf popular culture, literature and also in sf video games (e.g. the Mass Effect and Deus Ex series) is a conduit for exploring and imagining alternatives to current modes of being that are not necessarily gendered. I call this process becoming-gynoid, which offers new avenues for exploration in terms of gender and feminist theory both in sf fiction and sf video games.

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Introduction: *Indistinction* and Immanence in Science Fiction

In this thesis I shall explore the movement from potentiality/virtuality to actuality in Giorgio Agamben's system of *paradigms* and Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of immanence in relation to specific examples of science fiction literature and other sf media. One of the central aims of this thesis is to highlight and explore the nature of gender, when considered as an Agambenian *paradigm* and as a fundamental and ancient zone of *indistinction*. I intend to bring together aspects of Agambenian and Deleuzian thought as well as the work of feminist theorists together with sf narratives, in order to form a new and original approach to analysing gender as a biopolitical phenomenon that is as ancient as biopower itself. Arguing from the perspective that sf literature acts as a singular literary and creative space in which narratives can act as sites of *suspension* and/or becoming, my project will be to use these texts as a platform for an analysis of Agamben's radical and intricate concept of *inoperativity* as well as Deleuze's theory of *assemblages* and his concept of the *Body without Organs* (BwO), as products of his wider system of becoming through difference and repetition. I will examine how Deleuze's understanding of *becoming*, opens up new ways of envisioning how gender may develop as a cultural and political construct.

Though Agamben has done no work on gender himself I believe his system lends itself to an exploration of gender as a site of *suspension* wherein the categories of male and female are blurred; rather than being distinct categories, they are instead founded on almost entirely fictional concepts of male and female, masculine and feminine. Basing my analysis of gender on Agamben's claim that all hierarchical oppositions are similarly indistinct, I will argue that the accepted opposition of the categories of male and female is an illusion: that it is a fiction that is unsustainable.

In combining the philosophy of Agamben with gender theory I intend to argue that the former is highly valuable in understanding the nature of gender as a fundamental historical paradigm rooted in biopolitical power structures. Most crucially, however, Agamben's paradigmatic system does not rely on dichotomies of self and other as a means of theorising differences and/or hierarchical practises of oppression. Agamben's philosophy thinks beyond what has become the dominant way of conceptualising binary power structures, through his concepts of *suspension* and

indistinction. I will argue that these two terms are invaluable in understanding the nature of gender in Western society, how it has evolved and continues to dominate our society and politics.

Before beginning my philosophical analysis of critical sf and gender theory, however, I would like to ground my approach by examining and defining some of the highly complex terms employed by Agamben. My starting point will be Agamben's notably ambiguous expression, *inoperativity*. This concept can be described as a source of potential drawn from the disruption or *suspension* of an actuality, a term first defined loosely in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* as "a generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted" (Agamben, 1998, p.62). In order to interpret this rather cryptic description it is crucial to develop a nuanced understanding of two of Agamben's other key terms, *suspension* and *indistinction*. The latter of these terms is closely linked to the former. *Indistinction* is the result of a process where the qualities that held seemingly contradictory categories in opposition begin to erode such that the binary in question becomes indistinct and the members belonging to the categories become *suspended*. *Indistinction* describes *suspension* and vice versa. This joint process leads to *inoperativity* which can be understood as both the moment of *indistinction* as well as a denotation of the potential that lies within a zone of *indiscernibility*.

One of Agamben's most famous claims can be found in his work *Homo Sacer*, where he states that "today it is not the polis but the [concentration] camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West" (Agamben, 1998, p.181). Agamben further developed this view in his later work *The State of Exception* by claiming that all democracies are fundamentally states of exception: "the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension" (Agamben, 2005, p.2). The biopolitical relationship between state and citizen depends, and always has depended, on the fact that the subject may become *suspended* by the law in a state of emergency; given the correct circumstances the sovereign may the exclusion of a given citizen, or group of citizens, from the law – as in the case of Auschwitz or Guantanamo Bay, where a subject's apparent political standing and legal rights can be confounded provided that the right political conditions are in place, as in the case of Nazi Germany and the 'Final Solution', or America's 'War on Terror'. The citizen's

position is tenuous as he or she can, when necessary, enter a zone of *indistinction* where they are both prosecuted by the full force of the law (included), while no longer retaining the legal rights of a citizen (excluded). It is this biopolitical *indeterminacy* that “appears as an ambiguous and uncertain zone in which de facto proceedings...and juridical norms blur with mere fact – that is, a threshold where fact and law seem to become undecidable” (Agamben, 2005, p.29). I argue that women find themselves in this exceptional state as a result of their politically defined status as women. Furthermore, as a result their socialisation as women – beings opposed to men – women enter a zone of *indistinction* that makes them uniquely vulnerable to social and political inequality.

In his earlier work, *Homo Sacer*, Agamben explores what in *State of Exception* he later terms the phenomenon of “*Being outside and yet belonging*” (Agamben, 2005, p.34) (italics his) through the eponymous ancient Roman figure. The source of the human exception can be found in this archaic law which “while it confirms the sacredness of a person, it authorises (or more precisely renders unpunishable) his killing” (Agamben, 1998, p.71). The *homo sacer* is stripped of his/her *bios*, what the ancient Greek’s understood as political and social life – “the form or way of living proper to an individual or group” (Agamben, 1998, p.1). But what remains is not *zoe* – “which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)” (Agamben, 1998, p.1) – but something else indistinct: *bare life*. This should be described more as a quality rather than a loss of life; to have *bare life* is to experience the full force of the law from the point of view of the exception (it is a new political condition, way of being – rather than the complete removal of political life it is rather to drastic alteration of it), continuing to be “included in politics in the form of the exception, that is as something that is included solely through an exclusion” (Agamben, 1998, p.11). Agamben’s project is to reinforce the proximity of democracy and totalitarianism through the biopolitical model of the living exception, hinged on a mutual constitutive component – the presence in actuality, or the spectre in potentiality, of *bare life*: “at once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (Agamben, 1998, p.9). The biopolitical substance of the law and its contamination of politics (Agamben, 2005, p.88) are such that the concentration camp remains an alarmingly real possibility

whose potential must be vividly acknowledged to avoid its recurrence. The nature of the law as fundamentally biopolitical means that *bare life* exists as a necessary or inevitable aspect of government; I argue that women often occupy this position and can be seen as an example of *bare life* that is inextricably bound up with the concept of *bare life* itself. I will explore how male and female can be seen as immediately *undecideable* categories whose *suspended* nature is frequently exposed in works of feminist sf that examine future dystopian/utopian worlds, or alternate realities, where gender norms are disrupted through technological, sociological, or biological influences – for example Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, (2010) and Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* (1993)¹. To reinforce my analysis of *indistinction* in these novels, I will show how zones of *indifference* are highlighted or exposed through various characters or marginalised groups that can be interpreted as having *bare life*, a chief example of which is the female community as a whole.

Much dystopian feminist sf – a prime example of which is Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2003) – features women who, where not directly abused or stripped of *bios* by the state, are nevertheless subject to a startlingly similar process of humiliation and powerlessness on a large-scale societal level. I will use Agamben’s system to explore how these novels highlight the position of women in modern western society, following the long-standing feminist insight into the system of patriarchy as a matter of female political subjugation and loss: “The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection” (Pateman, 1988, p.207). Since Carole Pateman wrote these words in 1988, great political and legal strides have been made in the area of women’s rights; however, I will show how patriarchy can be understood as a *paradigm* whose pervasiveness goes beyond the spheres of the political and the social. Embedded in the

¹ Science fiction as a whole and particularly feminist sf from the new wave period of sf has a rich tradition of playing with gender roles. The examples I have chosen for my analysis in this thesis I consider to be generally representative of the experimental tendency (in terms of gender) that was prevalent during a specific period in sf that I am interested in exploring. However, other classic examples of this literature include: Ursula LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* which concerns a planet populated by aliens who are neither male nor female as humans understand these concepts, rather they only assume a particular sex when mating; several works by Jeanette Winteron; and several short stories by James Triptree Jr, including *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* and *Houston Houston, Do You Read?*. Others by not specifically feminist authors include Robert Heinlein’s *All You Zombies*, Theodor Sturgeon’s *Venus Plus X* and Samuel R Delany’s *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*.

fabric of society, I will show how the *paradigm* of patriarchy hosts a zone of *indistinction* in which an entire gender is subject to an experience akin to *bare life*.

Woman is *suspended* between the one woman (the common, exemplary case) and the many individual instances of women throughout the world, as the supposed qualities of the mass of women are applied and imposed upon each and every individual female. She is doubly suspended in fact because her biological existence, *zoe*, defines her political position, *bios*, since men and women alike have historically fought over juridical control of the reproductive powers of women's bodies. Imbued with the power of procreation, female *zoe* is sought after, commoditised and subject to government regulation through the fraught processes of abortion law, marriage contracts and the social stigmatisation of women who refuse to turn their bodies over to the societies and governments that demand dominion over them.

As such *zoe* defines Woman's *bios*, so that these categories become *indistinct* and her political being is reduced to that of an animal, a being without *bios*, stripped down to the barest of existences: *bare life*. Though these truths relate largely to the historical position of women, they are still relevant to their modern situation. The *signature* of patriarchal domination over women has altered significantly in the West over time, accommodating *paradigms* of gender and sex that allow for greater freedoms for women. However, the signatory assumption of hierarchical difference that is inscribed in language, custom and law, and that separates women from men in dignity, endures. The *paradigm* or *signature* of Woman is founded on the social and political fiction of her ineptitude, an assumption of mental weakness that has been historically compounded and justified by physicality – lack of physical strength, the physical toll of childbirth, menstruation, etc. *Zoe* suppresses the female mind and female *bios* in preservation of the female body's unique capabilities. Yet this body is simultaneously denigrated, subjugated and routinely politically oppressed. Society continues what the polis begins, as law limits female bodily freedoms, and society shames, belittles and scorns the female body itself – in both its functions and its appearance. The simultaneous social and political requisitioning of female *zoe* ensures government domination over women through the complicity of social prejudice and pressure – forcing women into specific modes of behaviour (passivity), the development of

certain skill-sets (nurturing, care-giving) and the confinement to certain specific areas of endeavour (the sphere of the home).

Having been so long confined to the *oikos* (the home), Woman has historically been made sedentary through the division of sexual labour, constrained to a specific way of life, a specific form of *bios*, *suspended* and founded on female *zoe*, and based on a founding fiction that holds both as *indistinct* categories. Woman is imprisoned within the home, held hostage first by social imperative to breed and then by the responsibilities that come with child-rearing and today still fall largely on the shoulders of women. The assumed female duty to reproduce, to attend to the physical and emotional well-being of others and at the same time to place her needs below every other person's is based on the fiction that women's bodies, instincts, skills and emotions are all designed to prepare them for these abilities. Yet the presumed emotional nature of women and the very aspects of their biology that make possible their capacity to reproduce and nurture (in a physical sense) are precisely what society expects women to hide both physically (by dressing 'modestly', covering their womanly 'imperfections' that result from childbirth and childcare) and mentally (because, having been taught to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of others, usually men, women sacrifice their own feelings and desires in order to be the emotional and psychological carers of others).

The central contradiction of Woman is that she must conceal that which defines her. If she dresses in the manner of a harlot, a wild conduit of physical desire and reproduction, she will be punished socially if not also physically by male aggressors. If she fails to have children, she has failed in her moral duty to breed, even if she succeeds in conforming to social and commercial conceptions of beauty. If she successfully reproduces, and loses her physical beauty as a result, or otherwise fails to maintain what is considered a physically desirable body, she has also failed to uphold the social image society expects of her. That is, she has failed to uphold her public facing *bios*, which is of course, in reality, her politically gendered *zoe*. The result of this is that each and every woman is under pressure at every turn to control, to censor, to maintain herself through the lens of her bodily being. To be happy and successful she must first succeed in, and in some senses confine herself to, those spheres of the home to which female gendered *zoe* is inextricably connected. This is one of the

central operations of government biopower which cements political control of the *oikos*, ensuring a significant dominion over the home and the organisation of physical relationships, the production of life, and the people – women – that produce and maintain those lives.

This is a central part of the *oikonomia* of modern biopolitics that organises itself in an economy of *auctoritas* (government power) and *potestas* (individual political activity or the democratic power of the people). This is, for Agamben, the fundamental *suspension* at the heart of government that sanctions its ambiguous authority over its subjects while supporting the central fantasy of Western democracy: that authority truly or partially lies in the hands of the people. The founding fiction of *auctoritas* and *potestas* is the *paradigm* of government that holds both in *suspension* through an *oikonomic* management that maintains its sway over the *potestas* partially but significantly through its dominion over the *oikos* and the management or *oikonomia* over the home itself. Biopower begins with power over the locus of family, reproduction, sexual relationships; therefore to be successful it must control that which is at the centre of this complex network: Woman.

Much sf literature and popular culture – particularly novels with a feminist slant or those specifically concerned with an exploration of gender theory – expose and examine these truths. In this thesis I examine many examples from feminist sf, such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*. I have chosen these works because I believe they represent a range of various ways of examining gender roles in relation to the variables that are central to gender debates, for example: biology (the question of whether it is right or useful to attribute significance to biological differences – and to what extent), society and politics (to what extent does our environment shape our gendered behaviour and attitudes?), technology (what new forms of gender identity might emerge through technological innovation both inside and outside the human body?). Furthermore, these feminist sf works reflect many of the problematic or contentious aspects of some pervasive forms of feminist politics. They often rely on a narrative of women versus men, where some – *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Female Man* – even depict physical wars between men and women as opposing sides of a bloody

organised conflict². These novels also contain female characters with traditionally female traits of passivity, better than average emotional intelligence, a strong connection with children etc., which are glorified as exemplars of female being, as shared traits of universal womanly experience. The feminist project is largely built on some of the premises which influenced the second-wave feminism of the mid twentieth-century: that is, primarily a binary understanding of men and women, and an aggressive and antagonistic attitude towards the opposite sex. These ideologies founded on difference, and held together by a powerful narrative of sisterhood, served to further entrench traditional conceptualisations of gender and sex. This had the effect of further concretising, under the banner of progressive politics and liberal reform, the very same *paradigms* of male and female gender stereotypes that have sanctioned and preserved the patriarchal domination of women by men for thousands of years.

The feminist project, grounded in identity politics, relied on the very same dichotomy of male and female as separate entities, unified by shared biological and mental traits, which patriarchy has historically relied upon in order to maintain control over women. If we understand patriarchy as a *signature* that runs parallel to the biopolitical *oikonomia* of government, we see that these work seamlessly in tandem, restricting the movement of women by restricting their political and social freedoms to the sphere of the household while also politically defining Woman as a being characterised by *zoe*. With fewer rights than her male counterpart, her being is imprisoned through the apparatus of patriarchy within the *oikos*, what was once described by the feminist writer Betty Frieden as a form of concentration camp (Frieden, 2010, p.228). Patriarchal domination, and the biopolitical framework which partially depends upon it, rely on the denudation of women, the stripping of their *bios* in the affirmation of their politically gendered *zoe*. It rests on the implicit presumption of women as *bare life* which sanctions – if not their actual killing – the manipulation of their physicality in brutal ways. Much of feminist politics seeks to obtain freedom from this tyrannical system by utilising these same constructions of female *zoe* in order to unify women within a fixed notion of femaleness; in fact, some aspects of feminist discourse relies on the glorification of the same values which ground and validate patriarchy.

² These are not the only examples of sf to represent gender politics as a literal battle of the sexes. For example, see Monique Wittig's *Les Guerilleres*.

This is the founding fiction of the feminist movement, not unlike that which upholds the *oikonomic* system of government authority, in that both apparatuses are similarly *suspended*. Feminist rhetoric frequently idolises the traditionally feminine, the assumed instincts embedded in the state of womanhood that assumedly offer women superior nurturing capabilities, a greater capacity for understanding and care-giving, enhanced emotional intuition, etc. The social imperative under patriarchy to breed is transformed into a feminist reverence for the awesome power of female procreative ability and the idolisation of physical aspects of womanhood, which in turn (just as in the case of patriarchy) are said to determine female faculty, personality, being. This becomes the foundation of female identity, underpinning womanhood as *zoe* – pure biological instinct bereft of *bios* and yet, through the feminist movement, demanding political recognition, but on the same terms which were oppressive to women under patriarchy. The feminist movement, paradoxically, depends on the *suspension* at the heart of biopolitical power – between *zoe* and *bios* – for its very existence. Feminism needs patriarchy to exist; it requires *bare life* to fuel its own narrative of gendered politics.

To clarify, the *bare life* which women possess creates the conditions necessary to produce a narrative of victimhood upon which to base a unified fiction of universal female experience and shared identity. This narrative was perhaps necessary in order to mobilise women as a political movement, and it was certainly successful (inevitable given the tremendous success of patriarchy) and yet was simultaneously devastating to the feminist project of female liberation. Having based an ideological narrative on patriarchal assumptions, the implicit contradictions quickly become painfully obvious: womankind demands equality with mankind while simultaneously avowing the patriarchal assumption that she is in fact inferior and unworthy of the parity on which she insists.

Of course the feminist movement was, and remains, wide ranging and diverse; as a result it is impossible to make general assumptions about the aims of feminism as a whole – there are too many sub-categories of feminists, all of which have varying ideas as to what female emancipation means and how one can best go about achieving it. Nevertheless, I think it is true to say that the idea of a shared sisterhood and a binary,

and often antagonistic, understanding of men and women are both dominant themes within feminist discourse – even if these do not apply to all forms of feminism.

These same problematic aspects exist within much of the feminist sf literature that was published during the heyday of the second-wave feminist movement. Of course there are many positive and intriguing elements present in much feminist critical theory and in a great deal of feminist sf literature. Nevertheless, the problematic aspects of the movement as it was in the mid-twentieth-century, which have also passed into contemporary feminist politics, mean that gender theory and analysis is only able to go so far within the framework that these political and philosophical works portray.

Returning to Agamben, I also intend to show that, despite the apparent bleakness of Agamben's philosophy, his work also has hopeful implications, particularly when applied to gender theory. I would argue that his paradigmatic method is not, as some critics might claim, a resignation to inevitability but rather a vital exposé of democratic complacency which can be read as a statement of potential. Agamben's optimism comes through in his essay, *On Potentiality*, where he opens with the example: "for everyone a moment comes in which she or he must utter this "I can", which does not refer to any certainty or specific capacity but is, nevertheless, absolutely demanding" (Agamben, 1999, p.178). Published between *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, this "absolutely demanding 'I can'" echoes the sense, highlighted by these texts, of responsibility to confront atrocity, and through the recognition of the processes that allow it to pass into actuality, prevent its repetition. This is the message of Agamben's statement that the city has been replaced by "the camp" as "the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the west" (Agamben, 1998, p.181). In *Remnants of Auschwitz* Agamben discusses the significance of bearing witness to catastrophes such as the holocaust, examining, in the final chapter, the *potentiality* released through testimony, describing it as "a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech; it is, moreover, an impossibility that gives itself existence through a possibility of speaking" (Agamben, 2002, p.146). This work contributes to Agamben's overall project of understanding the structures and circumstances that allow for the catastrophe of the camp to come to pass; moreover, through the potential released from that understanding comes the capacity to think beyond these structures.

By highlighting a zone of *indistinction* between the camp and the city, *potentiality* is released through the recognition of this *suspension*, and this *potentiality* can be described as *inoperativity*. This concept relies heavily on Agamben's Aristotelian understanding of *potentiality* as containing both a positive form – those *potentialities* that will become actualised – and a negative form: “an experience of potentiality as such is possible only if potentiality is always also potential not to (do or think something)” (Agamben, 1999, p.250). This negative form is *impotentiality*; this element does not exist in opposition to *potentiality*, but must rather be understood as a constitutive part of *potentiality* as a whole: “if potentiality is to have its own consistency and not always disappear immediately into actuality, it is necessary that potentiality be able *not* to pass over into actuality, that potentiality constitutively...be also im-potentiality” (Agamben, 1998, p.45). Without the possibility of something not coming into being, all potentialities, Agamben argues, would logically become actualities. *Inoperativity*, then, could be described as the latent potential of this *impotentiality* that exists within actualisation: “What *inoperative* stresses is the other side of potentiality: the possibility that a thing might not come to pass” (De la Durantaye, 2009, p.19).

Inoperativity is the potential released when a given system enters a state of *suspension*: “potentiality maintains itself in relation to actuality in the form of its suspension” (Agamben, 1998, p.45). *Inoperativity* is often used interchangeably with *indistinction*, and while being very similar to *indistinction*, the term also contains wider political and social implications relating to a fundamental human quality:

Politics is that which corresponds to the essential inoperativity of humankind...there is politics because human beings are *argos* – beings that cannot be defined by any proper operation – that is, beings of pure potentiality, that no identity or vocation can exhaust. (Agamben, 2000, p.140)

However, in order to harness our *inoperativity* we must first challenge our perception of potentiality to include “not simply non-being, simple privation, but rather the existence of non-being, the presence of an absence; that is, what we call ‘faculty’ or ‘power’” (Agamben, 1999, p.179).

In highlighting zones of *indiscernibility/indistinction/undecideability* (terms Agamben uses, almost interchangeably, and which therefore I will use and interpret as being very similar in meaning) his system uncovers the fragile and crucially *unsustainable* nature of the hierarchical oppositions that form the basis of fundamental constructions or *paradigms*: “it [the paradigm] is a singular object that, standing equally for all others of the same class defines the intelligibility of the group of which it is part and which, at the same time, it constitutes” (Agamben, 2009, p.17). These structures are composed of fundamental oppositions like *bios* and *zoe* which constitute the *paradigm* of the political subject. Another example is that of democracy and totalitarianism, which make up the *paradigm* of government; yet another would be the *paradigm* of human superiority founded on an opposition between man and animal. These binaries are governed by a much more ancient and pervasive dichotomy of general and particular, where the specific instance (animal, *zoe*, totalitarianism) can be seen as subordinate to what is understood as the founding principle or the universal case (man, *bios*, democracy).

However, “the paradigmatic case becomes such by suspending and, at the same time, exposing its belonging to the group so that it is never possible to separate its exemplarity from its singularity” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). The specific case shall always be defined by its belonging to the general, and the general determined by the myriad of individual instances of which it is composed. For example, animals can be seen as individual cases of living beings where the human is considered to be the general, the founding principle, the universal and dominant example of being at its greatest and most advanced. The same can be said of government – democracy is the founding principle, totalitarianism is constructed as the specific instance where government has failed and where the fundamental quality of politics has become corrupted.

However, as discussed above, these oppositional hierarchies are inherently unstable, prone to instances of *indistinction*. The existence of *bare life* reveals the *indiscernibility* between *bios* and *zoe*, “the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, *bios* and *zoe*, right and fact, enter a zone of indistinction” (Agamben, 1998, p.9). Furthermore, the structure of biopolitics is

such that *zoe* has always been included in the sphere of the *polis* (Agamben, 1998, p.4). The very fact that the subject is capable of losing *bios* and yet retaining a political identity reveals that *bare life*, rather than being the politicisation of *zoe*, is a fundamental component of modern politics reliant on the *indistinction* of *zoe* and *bios*.

In *The Coming Community*, Agamben, while discussing what he terms the ‘Whatever’ quality of a given object – that which distinguishes it as an individual – he relates that “whatever is constituted not by the indifference of common nature with respect to singularities, but by the indifference of the common and the proper, of the genus and the species, of the essential and the accidental” (Agamben, 1993, p.19). Thus, *indistinction* is not merely an undesirable structural problem within the paradigmatic instance, it is that which defines a given object as such: “indifference with respect to properties is what individuates and disseminates singularities, makes them lovable” (Agamben, 1993, p.19). *Indistinction*, then, is not a process that can be overcome. It would seem that the problem of *paradigms*, according to Agamben, is insurmountable because the process capable of creating chaos – *indistinction* – is precisely the process which adds value or quality to a particular object, and it is this *undecidable* quality of being that allows it to function as such. When applying this to the political sphere, we can see that modern politics is not ‘corrupted’, or disrupted, by zones of *indistinction*, but rather that this process is part of the ‘normal’ functioning of the political apparatus. Nevertheless, it is when specific sites of *suspension* are exposed through chaotic events, such as the holocaust, that certain *paradigms* may be potentially rendered *inoperative*, and this moment of *inoperativity* may lead to valuable change. As I will discuss later in this thesis, this aspect of Agamben’s philosophy would seem to offer hope for the political and social position of women, if gender is viewed as a *paradigm* that is inherently unstable and prone to an inevitable moment of *indistinction*.

Despite this tantalising possibility, the paradigmatic system itself appears as a universal and self-reviving system where individual constructions may be capable of shifting and altering but only within a larger framework where the paradigmatic case remains the universal method of epistemological organisation: “A paradigm is a form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but analogical. It moves from singularity to singularity” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). *Paradigms* are fluid and capable of change through time, of altering in nature while retaining essential qualities that

qualify them as *paradigms* – as a tool has many possible uses the *paradigm*, as an essence, survives historical transition.

While individual *paradigms* may enter a state of *suspension*, the paradigmatic itself survives this process of *indiscernibility* and endures. Here I must include another key term which Agamben employs, that of the *signature*. Like *paradigms*, *signatures* function as an epistemological mode of intelligibility. The distinction between the two terms is ill-defined by Agamben, perhaps because he considers these aspects of his wider system of *philosophical archaeology* to be themselves *suspended* in some way from *each other*. Despite this I will attempt to define the terms as separate entities.

Where a specific *paradigm* exists only as part of a specific historical moment, the *signature* refers to an entire spectrum of different *paradigms* grouped together throughout history. For example, we can see gender as a construct operating through time, a *signature* that has mutated and evolved as the words we have used over hundreds of years – male, female, masculine, feminine, etc. – take on different meanings and connotations from one historical moment to the next. There is some confusion here, of course, as Agamben also states that the *paradigm* is a construct capable of a similar change over time, as I discuss above. However, if we see the *signature* as an extension of the *paradigm* through language the overlap between the two concepts does not seem quite so confusing. The graph below represents the relationship between the *signature* and the *paradigm*.

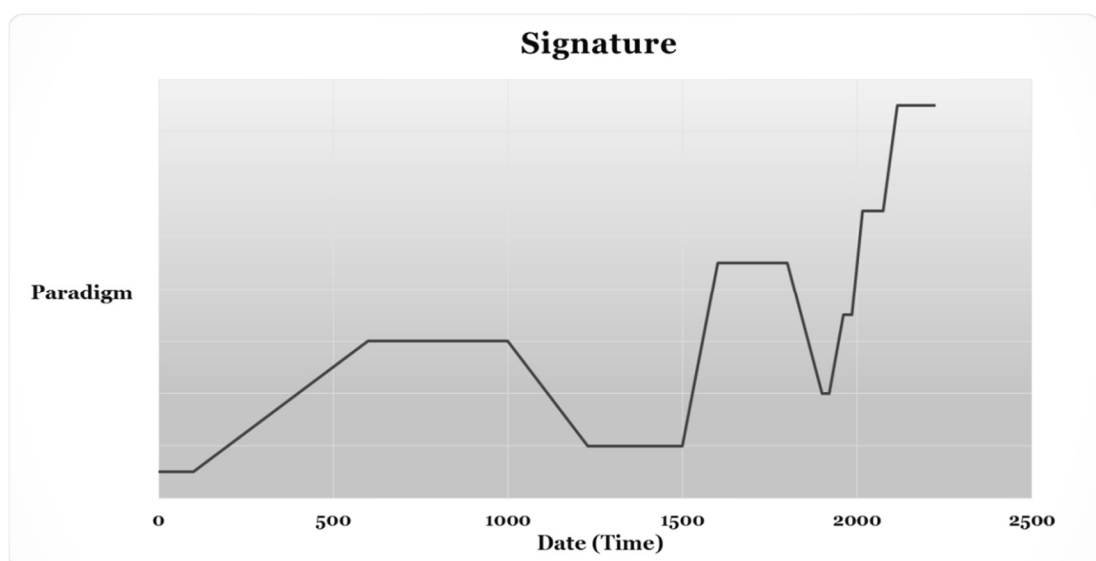


Figure 1 - a visual representation of the *signature*.

The horizontal lines represent a time period where a specific *paradigm* operates, the diagonal lines represent periods of flux where the *paradigm* is changing into another version of itself, another manifestation of the overall *signature* to which it belongs. As William Watkin describes: “Signature (*la segnatura*) describes the mode of the distribution of paradigms through time and across discourses and again has a specific nature in that it is suspended between signifier and signified” (Watkin, 2013, p.23). Thus, the other most crucial point about *signatures* is that they are language phenomena. Where *paradigms* function as a means of organising knowledge into intelligible systems on the conceptual level, *signatures* are the sum of a collection of *paradigms* as well as a link between the *paradigm* and the *sign*: “Signs do not speak unless signatures make them speak” (Agamben, 2009, p.61). *Signatures* are designed to “render thinkable the passage between the semiotic and the semantic” (Agamben 2009, p.61). That is, the *signature* exists throughout time as a mode of intelligibility marking meaning within a given sign, cementing the gap between signifier and signified. In this way, the *signature* “predetermines [the sign’s] interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules, practices and precepts that it is our task to recognise” (Agamben, 2009, p.64). However, the *signature* is also *suspended* between signifier and signified in the same way that all binaries are held together. Like the *paradigm*, the *signature* is maintained by this common/proper *indistinct* oppositional relationship.

This *indistinction* is, of course, problematic but it is also a crucial part of the process of manufacturing meaning. The nature of the *signature* as *suspended* is what makes the sign intelligible. Thus, rather than being a specific instance of meaning – this is a *paradigm* – it is more like the nature or process of meaning itself. The *signature* is the counterpart of the *paradigm* within language. For example, as linguistic devices survive a specific *paradigm* throughout history – our signifier, ‘woman’, does not necessarily change even if our conception, signified, of a woman does and thus language maintains paradigmatic meanings as *signatures*.

The *signature*, then, is what propels the paradigmatic system on. We cannot ever hope to have any other epistemological system because the mode of the *signature* is inherent in our manner of understanding and organising the world; it is rooted in the very manner in which we see, conceptualise, and name objects. The *paradigm* is

irrevocably linked to the *signature*, and the *signature* is rooted in the linguistic so that the system cannot be altered at any point.

I will argue that the system of patriarchy is predicated on the socially (and politically) *suspended* quality of femaleness. ‘Man’s’ synonymy with ‘human’, is demonstrative of the construction of maleness as the founding principle of ‘mankind’: “the masculine is not the masculine but the general” (Wittig, 1992, p.60); the linguistic sign ‘Man’, carries two *signatures*. This tells us not only that patriarchy forms the basis of constructed human superiority over other living beings, but furthermore that patriarchy is founded on perceived female inferiority, that is, on female exclusion. ‘Woman’ is included in the category of living, political human beings purely by virtue of her relationship to men, while also being systematically excluded by virtue of her supposed inferiority – the root of which, as I will show, lies in the accentuation of female biology over and above male biology. As Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex*:

The female, more than the male, is prey to the species; humanity has always tried to escape from its species’ destiny; with the invention of the tool, maintenance of life became activity and project for man, while motherhood left woman riveted to her body like the animal. (De Beauvoir, 1997, p.77)

Yet, perhaps it is not so much the fact of female biology, whose needs androcentric technological strides have historically failed to serve (or systematically ignored), that is the cause of female oppression. Perhaps, rather, even the biological ‘disadvantages’ of femaleness are also constructed socially and politically through a sophisticated biopolitical exaggeration of female *zoe* – as Judith Butler argues, “if the immutable construction of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender” (Butler, 2006a, p.9-10).

Women are defined by their *zoe*, rather than their political or social identity, and their *bios* is undermined by differences of physicality; these differences are exaggerated and distorted through *signatures* of femininity – e.g. makeup, feminine clothing, hairstyles (all designed to highlight female passivity) – so that they become the defining characteristics of constructed femaleness as ‘Man’s’ biological contrary: “Femininity becomes the mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification”

(Butler, 2006a p.72). As such ‘Woman’s’ position is *suspended* between the category of ‘Man’, which is the category of human, and that of ‘Woman’, an identity founded on ‘otherness’ in relation to an equally constructed male identity, a system Judith Butler terms the *Heterosexual Matrix*, which she uses to mean

that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised. I am drawing from Monique Wittig’s notion of the ‘heterosexual contract’ and, to a lesser extent, on Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to characterise a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, female expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 2006a, p.208)

Butler describes our current social and political organisation of male and female as a ‘matrix’ where heterosexual sexuality and its corresponding gender norms are mutually both imposed and secured.

The success of the process of female othering depends on a loss of *bios*, placing women in a situation akin to *bare life* on a fundamental social level if not, in all cases, politically. Women’s oppression is not as blatant as in the case of the concentration camp. Rather their agency is continuously undermined through an elaborate system of socially sanctioned bigotry, whose legitimacy is fabricated from bare facts of physicality, the realm of *zoe*. I will analyse how themes of feminist sf literature disclose the paradigmatic structure of gender, as a “form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but analogical [moving] from singularity to singularity” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). I will examine how feminist sf literature highlights female *suspension* by creating zones and gender *indistinction* in utopian/dystopian narratives.

In many works, male and female roles are exaggerated or distorted to highlight the *undecidability* of gender (e.g. Piercy’s *He She and It* and Russ’s *The Female Man*). These works highlight the aleatory and fluid nature of gender – thus exposing the unstable structure of actual gender constructions:

Masculinity or femininity come in many transient guises, all of them in some measure unfinished or incomplete. And this is as true *historically*, when one considers the range of competing definitions of what it has

meant to be a man or a woman, as it is true *individually*, when one remembers the difficulties in growing into and sustaining an identity. (Glover and Kaplan, 2000, p.xxvi-xxvii)

Feminist sf narratives often affirm that the gender *paradigm*, rather than being composed of fixed, rigid representations, operates as a network of *signatures* attached to signs that shift over time representing masculine and feminine, male and female: “the historicity of the paradigm lies in neither in diachrony nor synchrony but in a crossing of the two” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). There is no origin or *arché* from which one can cogently trace conceptions of male and female. Their perceived validity is generated through their paradigmatic structure where “every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). This process is elegantly portrayed through the alternate or future representations of gender, for example, in Russ’s *The Female Man*, where different versions of a single woman are portrayed living in four different realities; each one offers a different view of gender and the women, different versions of the author Joanna, all act very differently according to customs of the world’s they come from. In one reality portrayed in the novel gender is, largely, non-existent – or at least non-existent by our current cultural standards – suggesting not only the potential redundancy of gender, but perhaps more importantly its capacity to be modified or transformed. The *paradigm* shifts over time, and this shifting is part of what, in moments of crisis, renders existing *paradigms* of gender *inoperative*.

In many ways, Agamben’s philosophy seems rather despondent. Even the hopeful strain within his writing lacks continuity and a specific method for investigating potential change, even if we consider *inoperativity* and his nuanced understanding of *potentiality*, which are teasingly hinted at as the saviours of this seemingly never-ending process. Yet, despite the vagueness of Agamben’s project at this point, I argue that what his system does reveal to us is the, crucially, *malleable* nature of the world such that “we should not simply accept what *is* but look at how the world where we live came into being” (Ross, 2008, p.108). In the midst of a seemingly bleak understanding of social reality, Agamben’s paradigmatic structure allows us to “consider, once again, the coming into being of human life, its emergence into actuality from potentiality” (Ross, 2008, p.107). Agamben’s philosophy does not boast all-encompassing solutions; rather he scrutinises social and political concepts,

sometimes regarded as fixed and unchangeable, and emphasises their true complexity while revealing the urgency at the heart of these *paradigms*. Agamben provides an invaluable starting point for visualising a larger project for change, while insisting that we dare to imagine difference by accepting *impotentiality* as part of our political and social being. We must all engage in this process in order to understand the modes of becoming that brought the strands of our reality, which once existed only in potentiality, into actualisation.

For the sf component of my analysis, I have chosen to cover specific works from what is often termed the ‘golden age’ of sf through to what has been called the ‘new wave’, (which is in many ways exemplified by the sub-genre of feminist sf, dystopian and utopian writing). The first of these two eras of sf is characterised by a utopian desire to imagine ‘ideal’ future societies with writers such as Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke. This utopian trend within sf, “specifically devoted to the imagination of alternative social and economic forms”, (Jameson, 2005, p. xiv) became a cornerstone of ‘classic’ sf around the time when John W. Campbell, editor of *Astounding* magazine, described sf as an “effort to predict the future on the basis of known facts” in 1948 (Campbell, 1948 cited in James, 1995, p.56). As Edward James states, during the “‘classic’ years of sf...Campbell’s idea of sf was the dominant one” (James, 1995, p.62).

Narratives of this period in sf literature often portrayed a situation in which mankind, having overcome modern social/political problems currently faced by humanity, would encounter an alien world or scenario, where the dramatic ‘obstacle’ to be overcome by the characters is of an abstract, philosophical, even didactic nature. In other words, much sf of this period relied on allegory to express sentiments more in the vein of the gothic and scientific romances that came before them – the tale of the adventurer in a strange land, or of man’s destiny in the universe or the fearful prospect of the dominance of the machine.

There came a growing concern that the utopian trends of ‘classic’ sf had become stagnant and limited to allegory, “where the “future” device (usually only a device, for nearly always it is quite obviously contemporary society that is being written about) removes the ordinary tension” (Williams, 1999, p.307). As a result there was a growing demand for sf that could do more than simply idolise Mankind, vilify the

other and end with the mad scientist lamenting his arrogant misuse of science or the hero freeing a vapid populace from the tyranny of a mechanised society. There was a desire for sf that dealt more with the concrete concerns of real world issues while making use of the innovative potential of the genre – readers and critics wanted something ‘*half-real*’, so to speak: real enough to matter and unreal enough to offer creative and explorative alternatives to real world problems. In 1963 Michael Moorcock wrote in Britain’s leading sf magazine *New Worlds*:

Let us hope that there will always be writers only capable of helping us escape for a few hours – on the other hand there will always be writers who want to do more than this, who will want to appeal to all readers senses, to strip away as much illusion as possible, and to show things as they really are. (Moorcock 1963 cited in James, 1999, p.168)

This appeal announced the ‘new wave’ era of sf that examined new narrative pathways, veering away from classic narratives of extra-terrestrials, space exploration, and time travel, etc. The ‘new wave’ ushered in a more introspective sf that would further explore its existing innovative qualities – expanding its imaginative capabilities that are ultimately, and purely, transgressive, as Darko Suvin writes:

In SF...a transgression of the cultural norm is signified by the transgression of a more than merely cultural, of an ontological norm, by an ontic change in the character/agents reality either because of his/her displacement in space and/or time or because reality itself changes around him. (Suvin, 2010, p.75)

In many ways this shift within sf, in response to the alteration in the demands of its audience, mirrors the shift in feminism and gender theory that I argue is the necessary next step in feminist politics. Similarly to the way sf has evolved sf, rather than concentrating on the self/other dyad (aliens vs mankind or technology vs mankind, etc), feminist theory needs to move beyond the dichotomy of man and woman and begin viewing the two categories using far more nuanced and complex methods. Agamben’s philosophy solves the problem of identity-based, self/other conceptualisations of male and female and the sf works of the period I will discuss mimic this transition through their deliberate attention to ever more experimental ways of exploring sf narrative and subject matter.

The writings of Philip K. Dick, though often considered rather radical in terms of narrative and subject matter, span both periods or genres of sf discussed above, possessing a mixture of cautious ‘new wave’ scepticism and scrutiny while also maintaining the highly creative and even optimistic elements of golden age sf. Full of the fun and humour of what are now considered B-movie tropes – cheerful talking robots, ray guns and hover cars – while also tackling the ontological and philosophical uncertainties which were at the fore during the time of his writing, between the early 50s and late 70s. Beneath the rocket ships and Martian invasions (which led many to dismiss Dick’s work as mere derivative pulp sf at the time of he was publishing) were wise and insightful contemplations on subjects ranging from the nature of human consciousness, to questions about to the mysteries of the divine and the verisimilitude of reality itself. Dick did all this while maintaining the thread of almost optimistic wonder that ran through the majority of his writings; furthermore, it is this optimism and sense of wonder which has historically been the defining element of sf and remains the cornerstone of the genre. For this reason I have chosen to focus on several of Dick’s works in this thesis, as I consider Dick’s writings as in many ways representative of sf as a whole.

While Dick’s works do cannot be said to focus on gender itself, his works play with several other similar boundaries commonly considered to be held in opposition. As I will show in this thesis, the presumed dichotomies of man and machine, human and alien or even human and animal are by no means removed from that of male and female. In fact, I would argue that the male/female code of opposition acts as the originary form of binary conceptualisation which has historically informed our capacity to organise other forms of difference into similar binary relationships.

Similar to the transgressive quality of sf that Suvin discusses in *On the Poetics of Science Fiction* is this closely related aspect of sf: “the so-called sense of wonder has been considered one of the primary attributes of sf since the pulp era,” (Csicsery-Ronay, 2002, p.71) a sense that Dick and other ‘new wave’ sf writers of the time, despite their often dark and complex subject matter, maintained. Both the transgressive and more optimistic attributes, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter, are present in both ‘classic’ and ‘new wave’ sf; however, by the 1970s these elements were starting to be utilised in more diverse directions. For example, with writers such

as Joanna Russ and Marge Peirce, a new sub-genre of feminist sf emerged that placed earth society itself under the microscope, for example by imagining alternatives to current gender norms within future earth or earth-like societies, rather than limiting the sf perspective to the more fantastical or extra-terrestrial sub-genres of sf, which can be in danger of either shrinking into irrelevancy (the narrative has little to contribute to modern society) or mimesis (the narrative is limited to allegory).

'New wave' moving into contemporary as well as 'classic' sf deal with the virtual in relation to the real and the movement from virtuality to actuality. I believe this tendency is less apparent in the pre-1930s sf of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, etc., whose primary function appears to be to astound, to inspire awe, more than to invite the reader to engage analytically with the author's created world. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the sf of Dick as an exemplary author of the period of transition between golden age and new wave sf, as well as other authors of this same time period, writing between the '50s and '70s: where sf literature began to broaden its horizons and make more politically and socially radical concepts the chief subjects of its exploration. The central theme of the novels that I wish to explore is gender theory, and how sf's sometimes ambiguous and often ground-breaking contribution to the debates surrounding gender and sex not only offer valuable insights into the problems faced today but also offer a highly useful framework in which to analyse gender in relation to both Agambenian and Deleuzian theory.

These sometimes include works by Dick, however their main significance for this project is in illustrating the nature of Agamben's paradigmatic system, and specifically the power structures that are its inevitable conclusion: for it is these structures that are responsible for the oppression of many marginalised groups, including women. Moreover, Dick's works point to something more wide-ranging than the specific mistreatment of women; often they point to the way in which othering takes place, gesturing to a common apparatus responsible for the politically and socially sanctioned practices of marginalisation and exclusion that plague many groups within society, whether these groups be women, those of different ethnicities or religions or, maybe even one day, androids. Dick's works point to the universal problem of western politics that Agamben's philosophy outlines, and gender, I argue, is one of the

fundamental and ordinary structures of oppression within western politics, an archetypal example of *bare life*.

I have chosen, for my analysis, specific sf works whose narratives *suspend* fundamental constructions through specific characters or themes. Typical sf tropes of artificial intelligence, the increasing proximity of biology to technology, the blurring of gender norms and the obscuring of boundaries between the real and the virtual, produce zones of *indistinction*. The capacity to produce sites of *suspension* is a characteristic of what Suvin terms the *novum*; this is the innovative quality within sf that acts as a conduit through which to explore other worlds. “Validated by a cognitive logic” (Suvin, 2010, p.67), the *novum* is the result of an “historical estrangement” unique to sf, allowing an escape “from constrictive old norms into a different and alternative time-stream...an at least initial readiness for new norms of reality, for the *novum* of disalienating human history” (Suvin, 2010, p.89).

Dick’s work in particular contains a singular preoccupation with the dichotomies of machine versus human and simulation versus reality: “Manipulation of reality and appearance are surely the most prominent formal devices in Philip K. Dick’s science fiction” (Golumbia, 1996, p.83). Dick’s novels can also be read as metaphorical representations of more present zones of *indiscernibility* relating to problems of authenticity and the more fundamental issue of the passage from *potentiality* to *actuality* which can be seen as represented in Dick’s continuous focus on notions of reality and virtuality. These dichotomies in themselves are readily revealed as zones of *indistinction* in Dick’s work, as his protagonists continuously find themselves doubting and then proceeding to expose their realities as virtual or, at least, no longer ‘real’ under the original terms that the main character accepted his environment. As in the case of Bob/Fred Arctor in *A Scanner Darkly* (Dick, 1999a), Joe Chip in *Ubik* (Dick, 2000), or Ragle Gumm in *Time Out of Joint* (Dick, 2003), to name just a few examples, Dick’s characters find themselves exposing their reality as simulated or manufactured through drugs, lies, or technological simulation. Even in the cases where Dick’s protagonists are not themselves the victims of reality-altering, mass conspiracies, as in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 1999) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (Dick, 2012), I shall argue that the main characters are still nevertheless confronted with events that *suspend* the fabric of their social order.

Whether their primary experiences are those of our 'real' world or of a virtual nature, Dick's characters are all confronted with a surrealism that forces both them as well as the reader to question the validity of their reality in terms of its social and political construction.

Rick Deckard in *Androids* is forced to question the validity of "the traditional self-other dyad, which affirms a persistent human mastery over the mechanical landscape" (Galvan, 1997, p.414) through his interactions with androids and the conflicting ethical issues he encounters as a bounty hunter in charge of hunting down and killing those that escape human owners. Bob/Fred Arctor's schizophrenia, in *A Scanner Darkly*, has been interpreted as "an image of alienation and social contradiction...the outcome of the attempt to resolve class conflict through the rewriting of this opposition in terms of 'freaks' and 'straights'" (Fitting, 1983, p.232). An undercover cop living with drug users and pushers as a user himself, Bob/Fred's 'virtual' or 'unreal' world is not simply the result of drug abuse but rather the inevitable conclusion of a victim of a disconnected society. Eventually, Bob/Fred, despite his status as a police officer and like many of Dick's characters is reduced to the status of *bare life*, to merely a "doper" stripped of his political rights, spied upon, and then manipulated into becoming a vegetative tool of the state.

I shall argue that the focus of Dick's novels is not on the exploration of 'false' realities, but rather of realities that are neither 'real', nor entirely a product of simulation. Dick's characters are confronted with worlds whose natures are *undecideable* or even completely unknown – as in the case of the ambiguous ending of *Ubik*. Many of Dick's novels, I will argue, seem to end in tragic *indistinction* where characters are lost, *suspended* in disturbing virtual realities or the, just as warped, hazy 'real'-worlds which are partly of their own making, yet often mainly devised by some higher power (as in the case of *Scanner*, *Ubik*, *Eldritch*). The novels can be read as tragedies, but whose catharsis, I believe acts as a form of potential. We can understand catharsis as a constitutive component of what Agamben terms *inoperativity*. In hopelessness we find the necessary solace that provides the impetus to prevent the chaos we have witnessed, either in fiction or historical truth.

The characters in Dick's novels often experience this; as their fate is sealed they are themselves doomed yet also able to understand the potential latent in their tragic

circumstances. In *Scanner*, Bob/Fred, having suffered a mental collapse as a result of his drug addiction, ends up in a New Path drug rehabilitation centre. It turns out this was always the plan of the agency he worked for – to get a ‘spy’ into the centre which they suspected of manufacturing and distributing the highly destructive and addictive “Substance D”. While working in New Path owned fields, Bob/Fred finds and collects “one of the stubbed blue plants” (Dick, 1999a, p.217), from which Substance D is produced; the implication is that Arctor, somewhere in the recesses of his damaged brain retains an awareness of his former life as a cop, trying to bring down the pushers of Substance D, and will help to expose the conspiracy that is, in part, responsible for his fate and of those of his “doper” friends.

It is important to recognise that *indistinction*, or *indifference*, originated as a concept not in the work of Agamben but in an essay entitled “Bartleby; Or, the Formula” by Deleuze. He argues that Bartleby’s famous words, “I would prefer not to”, create a linguistic zone of “indetermination”: “the formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any non-preferred...in fact, it renders them *indistinct*. It hollows out a zone of indiscernibility” (Deleuze, 1997, p.71) (italics mine). Deleuze’s analysis would later be further developed by Agamben in relation to his work on the nature of *potentiality* and *inoperativity* in his own essay written on the same work: *Bartleby, or On Contingency* (Agamben, 1999). It seems they both worked along very similar lines when theorising about the ‘gap’ between categories, though Agamben would go on to develop his concept into a more extensive framework in which *indistinction* becomes part of a much larger paradigmatic system. Both thinkers understood *indistinction* as a process by which categories dissolve and a space of linguistic *indeterminacy* that can be charged with pure *potential*. It is on this plane of *indifference* and *potentiality* that Agamben and Deleuze connect with each other. For Agamben, it is the pit of *inoperativity* that yields the rewards of humanity’s pure potentiality. The “I prefer not to” opens a chasm between action and inaction – a place of *suspension* characterised by *impotentiality* that gives true power to raw *potentiality*. This shared aspect of both Agamben and Deleuze’s philosophy forms the basis of the second part of my thesis. The last two chapters of my work will focus on how Deleuze’s philosophy can be said to continue Agamben’s own ideas about undecidability/inoperativity and imagines the next step in the process – elaborating further on the processes that bring possibilities into reality: as I will show in the

coming chapters, delving into this process offers new avenues for imagining how biopolitical constructs like gender might evolve in the future as well as providing a deeper understanding of how our current gender frameworks came into being. Combining this philosophical enquiry with sf works that similarly imagine new possible futures forms an ideal pairing whereby sf imagines potentialities, tracking a specific instance in which the virtual has passed into an (albeit fictional) actuality.

Both Deleuze and Agamben imagine reality as a network of ‘apparatuses’ of a kind that fluctuate both temporally and spatially – that is, their *modus operandi* shifts over time and within each given society in which it functions – and can be disrupted. For Agamben the network is made up of *paradigms*, for Deleuze they are *assemblages* – arrangements (agencement) (Livesey, 2010, p.18). Divided into two axes, the horizontal component of the *assemblage* is a “machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another, on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.102-3). The vertical component includes “both territorial sides, or *reterritorialised* sides, which stabilise it, and cutting edges of *detrterritorialisation*, which carry it away” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.103). These *assemblages* are not fixed entities, rather they are constantly in a process of reformation; they restructure themselves continuously as reality alters in its construction over time. Agamben’s *paradigms* are similarly fluid. Having “no origin, or arche...every phenomenon is the origin, very image archaic” (Agamben, 2009, p.31). The eternal altering of these *assemblages*, forever producing new combinations, new ontological and epistemological machines is Deleuze’s system of difference and repetition, where the virtual is understood as an inexhaustible engine of difference capable of producing endless methods of becoming.

Deleuze’s *virtual*, as I will demonstrate, is very similar to Agamben’s *potentiality* – as consisting of *potentiality and impotentiality*. However, these terms are by no means synonymous; I will argue, in fact, that Agamben’s *potentiality* can be seen as merely the beginning, the setting in motion, of Deleuze’s more concrete blueprint for actual change – where Agamben’s vision is, by comparison, very vague. Deleuze’s rhizomatic univocity can provide the necessary guide out of the instability Agamben’s paradigmatic system appears to leave our social reality *permanently* in. Agamben’s

philosophy exposes instability as the core of social construction that creates our reality; his system of *paradigms* as a never-ending struggle for supremacy between the general and the particular provides unique insight into the fundamental bankruptcy behind our reality. It warns us of our impending doom yet offers no concrete alternative to the current system, dealing in unstable oppositions, where all things linger in a void of *indeterminacy*.

However, I will demonstrate how Agamben and Deleuze's philosophy can be viewed, broadly speaking, as a kind of two stage process producing first disillusionment and *indistinction* followed by restoration through a process of *reterritorialisation*. However, we cannot view these stages as confined to rigid sections in a linear process. *Reterritorialisation* is heavily inclined to give way to *detrterritorialisation*, creating a circular process; given this, Agamben's system can perhaps more accurately be seen as facilitating this process through *suspension*. Agamben's philosophy offers new insight into the process of *detrterritorialisation*, how *assemblages* (or *paradigms*) are broken down leaving in their ruins the foundation, the potential, for the new or, more accurately, pure difference.

For Deleuze, an infinite number of possibilities exist in the sphere of the virtual at any given moment. A constant tendency towards difference fends off stagnation and channels the potential of the *virtual*, allowing new and diverse organisations of reality to emerge in the form of *assemblages*. This process of continuous difference reveals the aleatory nature of our constructed reality when we consider our current reality in comparison to the unfathomable number of possible worlds and ideas that may have taken hold in the past and may still take hold in the future. In Agamben our reality is bankrupt and on the verge of necessary collapse, in Deleuze our future is ready to rise out of the rubble, out of the virtual 'soup', to produce new intensities. These intensities are capable of forming new connections of their own, relationships that have the potential to break free of paradigmatic hierarchies and become rhizomatic – that is, non-conforming and capable of producing change through a series of differences, repeated over time. As a result, Deleuze's ontology can be used to augment Agamben's theory of paradigmatic *suspension* and *indiscernibility*.

In this way, both Deleuze and Agamben not only reveal the unstable nature of the *paradigms* or *assemblages* that govern our reality but also provide nuanced ways of

theorising alternatives to our current state unburdened by the frameworks that have previously governed our ability to imagine possibilities outside our present. This visualisation of what Deleuze calls the virtual, or *pure immanence*, and what Agamben understands as the *potentiality* that stems from *inoperativity*, can be found in sf literature. This genre has a unique capacity to act as a site of *suspension* from which new potential modes of becoming can emerge; it is a space of immanence where virtual realities find a testing-ground, a place of ‘pre-actualisation’ similar to Deleuze’s intensive world, the *spatium* – “space as pure intuition” (Deleuze, 2004a, p.291) – where intensities mingle and combine before some are selected and pass from *virtuality* into a concretised *actuality*. Sf is a unique literary space, enabling the writer to create and envision that which exists in the realm of the potential or *virtual*. Furthermore, for the reader/critic, it is also perhaps the most valuable site for analysis as it is a literary form that lends itself to exposing the flaws in existing systems of thought through its ability to construct difference in a realm almost entirely devoid of preconception. Sf literature is

one that works by way of a readerly delight in the thoughtful and thought-provoking activity of imagining the elsewhere of a given text, of filling in, co-creating, the imagined...paradigm of a society that does not exist but that nevertheless supplies a cognitive map of what does exist. Such world-building is both the deepest pleasure of reading sf and the source of its most powerfully subversive potential. (Moylan, 2000, p.5)

Above, Moylan highlights sf’s uniquely interactive quality: an otherness demanding a readerly support to supplement the efforts of the writer. The strangeness of the text requires the reader’s constant questioning, engagement and wonder in order for the story to take full form. What Moylan is describing is similar to what Darko Suvin terms *cognitive estrangement*, the reader encounters a uniquely innovative and imaginative literary experience as a result of the *strangeness* or alterity of the world he/she encounters. Here, Moylan expands upon Suvin by adding the concept of interactivity between author and reader – or more specifically between the author’s created literary world and the reader, having to make sense out of the chaos of the unknown presented to them, not as a visitor to a foreign place but rather as a world-builder, creating – based on the blue-print of the text – an order that is intelligible to him/her. The sf novel provides a fictional space where ideas can freely mingle; it is an

intensive space of creativity where current structures may be dismantled or re-imagined in new forms. This intensive space is characteristic of the examples of ‘new wave’ and ‘classic’ sf I have discussed above. I argued earlier that ‘classic’ sf preoccupied itself with utopian visions of mankind, where humanity’s future is often imagined as highly advanced in almost every possible way. Utopia, however, is too complex a trend to be dismissed as merely a tendency towards the more ‘positive’ conceptualisations of the future. There is the darker side of the utopian (sometimes described as the dystopian) to consider which is, in many ways embodied in the ‘new wave’ sf examples included in my analysis. Tom Moylan describes both kinds of sf, as

produced through the fantasising powers of the imagination, utopia opposes the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideology. Utopia negates the contradictions in a social system by forging visions of what is not yet realised in either theory or practice. (Moylan, 1986, p.1)

For Moylan, sf is characterised by a tendency that, I argue, cements the differences between ‘classic’ and ‘new wave’ – it provides a space of pure possibility where alternatives to current reality can be freely explored so as to disrupt even the genre divisions of sf itself. As such, sf is as much a place of the virtual, of *intensity*, as it is a place of *indistinction*, confusion, and *inoperativity*. Sf is the fictional manifestation of Agamben and Deleuze’s philosophy intertwined: of their synchronous functioning.

Furthermore, for Deleuze, the book (in this case the sf novel) can be considered in itself an *assemblage*:

As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages... We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.2)

The book, the *assemblage*, can only be understood in relation to other *assemblages*, and thus it is only within the wider context of our reality, composed of a vast network of *assemblages*, that the individual ‘machine’ becomes intelligible. It is only through

our knowledge of other book machines – of the linguistic machine, that constructs literary and linguistic conventions – that we can comprehend the text of the book and come to form an interpretation and understand its purpose as a machine. Of course, this purpose, this interpretation, fluctuates from person to person depending on the book (or other) contextual *assemblages* the reader has already encountered. Thus the book *assemblage* never contains a single meaning; in fact, it means nothing when considered in isolation: “when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.3). It is this characteristic of the *assemblage* that relates to the other side of this machine that encourages change and resists homogeneity – a term developed by Deleuze and Guattari called the Body without Organs (BwO). This element of the *assemblage* faces away from “the strata, which doubtless make it a kind of organism, or signifying totality” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.2) and acts to “[dismantle] the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.2). The *BwO* continually forces the *assemblage* to alter and reform such that all the ‘machines’ that make up our reality are constantly and repeatedly shifting, dismantling and reforming to produce perpetual difference.

The *BwO* is the manifestation, the machinic functioning of desire (the “plane of consistency specific to desire,” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.178) the force that Deleuze and Guattari describe as “a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.178). Contrary to the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of desire, as based on oedipal lack, Deleuze and Guattari developed the concept of the *BwO* as a way of viewing desire as a “productive machine” (Message, 2010, p.37) capable of producing valuable and necessary disruption of existing institutions as well as new methods of becoming: “the order of desire is the order of *production*; all production is at once desiring-production and social production. We therefore reproach psychoanalysis for having stifled this order of production, for having shunted it into representation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.326). However, the term becomes more convoluted as Deleuze and Guattari also divulge that the *BwO* is also “always swinging between the surfaces that stratify it and the plane that sets it free” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.187). The stratified, unified section of the

assemblage grounds the *BwO*, preventing unbridled, gratuitous *destratification*. Thus the *BwO*, like the *assemblage*, is related to the establishment while also acting as a transgressive force - an engine for creating difference.

Returning to the novel as the specific example of an *assemblage/BwO*, let us consider this: "what is the *BwO* of a book?" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.2). Having established that all books, like all 'machines', at least contain elements of the *BwO* is it possible to say what would constitute the optimal *BwO* in the form of a book? For the purposes of this study I will limit this enquiry to novels only. Deleuze and Guattari state that "the ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.8). Deleuze and Guattari understand the recurring manifestation of difference emanating from the *virtual* into actuality as the coming together of various 'lines' that are constituted and traversed by *assemblages*. Some lines produce rigid segmentarity and others, the *lines of flight*, encourage an abundance of *detritorialisation*.

Unlike the *line of flight*, the *BwO* encourages a balance of *detritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation* and this is the ideal functioning of the book (novel) - to reveal everything on a plane without a bias towards either destroying or reinforcing the current order:

[T]he book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the detrterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn detrterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.10)

The final parentheses here are crucial as they reveal that the book is not certain to produce *detrterritorialisation* and productive *reterritorialisation* - rather it depends on the consistency of the book, how much of a *BwO* it is. A book can be reactionary - lying on the molar line of segmentarity, or it can traverse the molecular line, as Deleuze and Gautarri describe above: *detrterritorialising* and *reterritorialising* in a symbiotic relationship between book and reader, book and world, and this is the ideal function of the book *assemblage*. Is there then a kind of book that can encompass a *line of flight*? Perhaps not as the *line of flight* is characteristically destructive whereas

the book's potential is not so limited. Furthermore, its effect on the world – its outcome as a book-world composite machine – is dependent on so many external factors. The book cannot retain its structural integrity. It is a uniquely fluid and malleable 'machine'.

In particular, I argue, that the science fiction novel is perhaps the most uniquely fluid of the book-machines, as it relies – as discussed earlier – so heavily on the composite, co-world-building endeavour of the book and reader. As a result, the sf novel lies somewhere between the *molecular line* and the *line of flight*. It perfectly carries out the pattern of *deterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation* between itself and reader and yet bends towards *deterritorialisation*, for in the alien world of the sf novel, each *reterritorialisation*, each new understanding, produces yet another *deterritorialisation*. There is no end to the questions, the intensities it produces.

However, given the complexity of the reader-novel relationship – particularly the reader-sf novel relationship – perhaps it is more helpful to think of *lines of flight* running through the sf novel (as a means of analysis) rather than viewing specific novels themselves as potential *lines of flight*. In line with this reasoning, a particular *line of flight* I intend to analyse in this dissertation that recurrently runs through sf is a phenomenon that Deleuze and Guattari term *becoming-woman*. This process originates with the figure of a "girl", the focal point of the process of *becoming-woman*, the strangeness of the female situation in a masculine world. Deleuze and Guattari examine the disruptive and curious position of the girl/woman as an incongruous element *suspended* in a patriarchal world:

Thus girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce n molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.322-323)

In Agamben's terms, the girl is the concrete manifestation of the *suspended* state of Woman as an *indistinct* category within the binary construction of gender as a *paradigm*.

I believe *becoming-woman* functions, typically, along two pathways within the context of sf. The first is perhaps the most obvious, that of the girl/woman acting as a

disruptive influence within a feminist narrative – a subgenre of the ‘new wave’ of sf – against a patriarchal world. The other is where the presence of the girl/woman disrupts, in a very different way, a traditionally ‘masculine’ sf narrative space: “traditionally, sf has been considered a predominantly masculine field which, through its focus on science and technology, “naturally” excludes women” (Merrick, 2003, p.241). The technological sublime of these narratives serves, in many ways, to glorify mankind. However, as discussed earlier, ‘man’ stands linguistically not only for the human male of the species, but for the species itself (Man). The glory of humanity championed in these stories is in fact the glory of exclusively male endeavour that has historically become synonymous with human achievement. Thus, the presence of the female character in these novels is invariably disruptive: “‘Woman’ – whether actual, threatened or symbolically represented (through the alien, or ‘mother Earth’ for example) – reflects cultural anxieties about a range of ‘others’ immanent in even the most scientifically pore, technically focussed sf” (Merrick, 2003, p.241). The ‘woman’ in sf traditionally has a disquieting influence; her presence and/or participation in the ‘masculine’, cold, technological environment is often a symbol of loss – that the traditionally ‘feminine’ aspects of society have fallen away. This is a recurring theme in Dick’s novels – in *Time out of Joint*, when Ragel Gumm finally enters the ‘real’ world outside his simulated environment the bleakness of his reality is cemented by the appearance of this world’s women who dress as men with shaved heads (Dick, 2003).

However, it is this highly stereotypical, and even offensive, *paradigm* of woman as universal other that makes the female presence unexpectedly powerful in an anti-patriarchal sense. Even if she, ‘Woman’, appears to blend into the ‘background’ of the setting, she can never – it would appear – remain entirely a set piece in what is often a man’s journey of discovery for the girl/woman is a question in and of herself: what are women in this age? Does the code, ‘woman’, mean the same in this narrative world as it does in our reality? The innovative quality of the sf genre encourages other, more nuanced interpretations of the female body in this sphere. As such, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *becoming-woman* perfectly describes the position of Woman in sf. They are double agents in an invariably patriarchal setting – bound by the gender constructions/expectations placed upon them by both reader and author and yet unpredictable.

Andrew Wiggin, in *Ender's Game*, early on meets “Petra Arkanian. The only girl in Salamander Army. With more balls than anyone else in the room” (Card, 2013, p. 45). Her presence, as she moves through the masculine space of Battle School, is *undecideable*. She is in some way marked by the difference of her gender, and thus by an unknown significance (otherwise why should Orson Scott Card choose to make her a female character?). Despite this, the author goes to great lengths to portray her as no different than the other male members of Battle School – to show her as *more* ‘masculine’ than the others, in fact; it is an emphasis that adds to her characterlessness and yet her presence remains charged with seemingly unrealised potential. However, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, “the girl and the child do not become; it is becoming itself that is a child or a girl” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.323). Petra is a conduit of pure becoming in the novel, though her presence may be intended as a conventional device signifying otherness – the dehumanising effect of the Battle School, the unknown of the alien Formic race by which humanity is beset in the novel – the girl/woman is not a stable symbol as such. She is far more powerful and erratic a signifier.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* the *becoming-woman* operation is more complicated – the ‘girl’ figure of this novel is, in fact, an android. I argue that she is closer to the ‘girl’ figure than that of the ‘woman’ as she, like Petra, as an android – a simulacrum of a woman – is in a constant state of *becoming*, *becoming-woman*, or perhaps even something else entirely. As such she, like the ‘girl’, acts as a “block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.323) or even human, machine, and animal – the focal ‘others’ of the narrative that complicate and expand upon more ‘traditional oppositions’ of man and woman, adult and child, etc.

Like Deleuze and Guattari’s “girl”, the female android acts in a complex manner as a cultural figure of mainstream sf media. Feminised machines are a powerful and pervasive trope in sf literature and film, from Maria in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* to *Star Trek: Voyager*’s Seven of Nine or the Caprica Six Cylon from *Battlestar Galactica*. Consider also more mainstream and far-reaching gynoid cultural icons such as the female AI, Cortana, from Microsoft’s *Halo* video games series whose name was also given to Microsoft’s intelligent personal assistant. The trope of the gynoid/female

cyborg or female AI is characterised by a seductive ambiguity; not only, as in the case of male androids, do the usual ontological questions apply to these ‘women’ (are these gynoids ‘alive’, sentient, etc.?) further, more immediate uncertainties demand clarification: do these ‘women’ experience emotion? Can these women have sex? Can they reproduce? And if the answer to any of these questions is no, then in what sense can the gynoid be considered a woman at all? Furthermore, what do possible answers to these questions suggest about the nature of human women (in the biological sense)³? Despite their often hyper-sexualised appearance, they cannot, I argue, be dismissed as mere figures of male fantasy. Rather, the uncertainty and *undecidable* nature of this classic sf figure has many startling implications, not only in terms of gender and the social and political position of women but also in relation to our understanding of the posthuman and how the introduction of women affects the classically masculine ideals associated with posthumanism. In order to explore the full significance of the gynoid in sf and popular culture I will look at several key examples of gynoids in literature, film and video games in conjunction with the philosophy of both Agamben and Deleuze, with an emphasis on Agamben’s concept of *inoperativity* as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s *becoming-woman*; from this I shall develop my own term: *becoming-gynoid*.

The philosophical projects of both Agamben and Deleuze find several points of intersection, particularly in their method of exposing the unsustainable nature of our current modes of social and political being; additionally both philosophers examine the process through which these modes came into actualisation and gained permanence as accepted traditions within society. In turn, their work helps us to speculate as to how these structures might be overcome. An analysis of the figure of the gynoid using both men’s philosophy can illustrate this. Agamben’s understanding of the way power is organised and maintained fits extremely well with the sf genre as a medium of analysis, given that sf, and sf literature in particular, has a historic tendency to critique and satirise established power dynamics while also providing

³ Of course one could expand on this line of argumentation to examine the nature of women who have lost their reproductive capacity or have decided to have this capacity removed surgically, those who choose not to engage in some or all sexual acts, non-heterosexual women, those biologically defined as women but who do not self-identify as such, intersex people, women who have had mastectomies, etc. These are areas into which I hope to expand my research in the future; however, here I will be focussing on a more general, socially and politically created ‘idea’ of a woman as a basis for comparison with the ambiguous nature of the gynoid.

possible alternatives to these current actualities. One specific consequence of the political system we currently inhabit is phenomenon of *bare life* discussed earlier, of which I believe women to be a primary, perhaps even originary exemplar. For this reason, I will devote a significant portion of this thesis to exploring the structure of gender and sex as political and social apparatuses from the perspective of both as founding instances of the *homo sacer paradigm*.

The more creative, exploratory aspect of sf chimes more with Deleuzian thought, however. Though Agamben offers unparalleled insights into the nature of our modern biopolitical situation, Deleuze provides a radical platform for considering possibilities outside of the rigid structures that currently bind us; Agamben warns us of the dangers immanent in our current system while Deleuze philosophy follows on naturally from Agamben's, offering a framework for dismantling these apparatuses and moving forward. Where the paradigm of gender and the position of women are considered as central evidences and victims of a crumbling biopolitical system, Deleuze's philosophy can contribute much to current debates surrounding gender. For example, through his concept of *becoming-woman*, his work offers a means of channelling the othering process that has historically marginalised women into a means of valuable change. However, what is perhaps the most significant aspect of this thesis is the exploration of the *paradigms* or *assemblages* that make power possible and maintain it under certain, specific conditions. Furthermore, another chief concern of this dissertation is the victims of these power formations: the *bare life* sacrificed on its altar. Women have been among the longest standing casualties of biopolitics, and form an archaic example of the *homo sacer* figure. As a result, I argue that to consider *bare life* is also in a sense to consider the position of women politically and socially, just as to truly understand the situation of womankind one must understand this group as an example of *bare life*.

However, sf literature, film and TV can only go so far in allowing the student of Agamben and Deleuze to engage with the possibilities of their work. The novel – even the sf novel – offers what is still an invariably one-way experience that unfortunately leaves certain avenues of creative exploration closed off. Engaging with these philosophers through the use of fiction is in some ways better suited to the medium of video games, which offer a broader range of interactive opportunities, particularly for

the discerning player. Sf video games are once again the ideal choice of genre here, for many of the same reasons that I have chosen sf literature as one of the central focuses of this thesis. Sf video games have the advantage of being situated within the uniquely creative space of the sf genre, but they also have a wealth of established sf literature and pop culture tropes to draw upon, creating a referential space that brings the historically important topics within sf as a whole ‘to life’ within an interactive setting: in many ways making sf ‘tangible’ through the interactive component of video games in a way that has never previously been accessible.

Many video games exhibit a preponderance of sf tropes: for example, the *Mass Effect* series was heavily influenced by popular sf film and TV franchises like *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, etc. However, the *Fallout* series of games, set in the post-apocalyptic US of an alternative history where America maintained 1950s aesthetics and ideologies, is possibly the best example of this referential quality: “the central plot exists alongside the numerous others drawn from the world of atomic age science fiction cinema. One quest entitled ‘Those!’ pits a player against an army of giant fire ants that have overrun a town outside the city in a parody of the 1954 movie *Them!*” (Chandler, 2015, p.57). The *Fallout* games offer a simulated world which is a paradise of pulp and golden age sf references brought together in an open world RPG that is host to numerous side quests which episodically catalogue sf tropes. While literature, film and TV held their robots, space rockets, and ray guns up for the reader/viewer’s inspection the player of the sf game has the opportunity not only to observe but in many cases to directly engage with these artefacts and thus explore them more fully, play with them in new and unexpected ways, pushing their boundaries and in doing so allow hidden qualities to emerge.

The points of intersection between Agamben and Deleuze highlight their mutual usefulness in understanding the complexities of gender and particularly the political and social situation of women. Bringing these threads of philosophy, gender theory and science fiction together reinforces the highly biopolitical nature of our conceptualisation of Woman, her political existence and her relationship with the technological as well as what we traditionally understand as human.

In order to offer a thorough understanding of the way Agamben and Deleuze can be placed together with the aim of unravelling the mysteries of gender and biopolitics I

must first outline and explore in depth the nature of these philosophers' systems. For this reason the chapters of this thesis have been ordered in the manner that I believe Agamben and Deleuze's philosophies can be most valuably paired; that is – as I argued above – as a two-step process, beginning with Agamben and continuing with Deleuze where Agamben leaves off. As a consequence my first chapter will offer a detailed analysis of Agamben's philosophy, with an emphasis on his understanding of *bare life*. I will focus here on the work of Philip K. Dick as a means of showcasing how Agamben's overall system applies to *bare life* in a broad sense, whether one is discussing certain groups of humans or other kinds of sentient being not recognised as possessing political life, e.g. androids.

Having discussed, in depth, the more general concept of *bare life* I will then move on, in chapter 2, to a more specific instance of this form of being that particularly interests me and which is the chief subject of this thesis: the *bare lives* of women. In order to examine this understanding of women's existence and socialisation under patriarchy I will look at several feminist dystopian/utopian texts. While doing so I shall attempt to evaluate how successfully the authors of these texts have been in disrupting gender in order to overcome the problem of viewing gender through the lens of patriarchy. By extension, I shall also analyse the gender and feminist theory that has informed the creation of these feminist sf texts in relation to Agamben's philosophy.

In order to expand upon the nature of women in sf, and how these representations speak to the constructed nature of women in reality, I will devote my third chapter to an analysis of Deleuze's philosophy with a specific emphasis on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming-woman*; from this starting point I will then explore a further form of becoming that I argue is linked inextricably with the strangeness and otherness imbued in the female. I will argue that the female machine is a destabilising force that disrupts as much as it reveals unsettling truths about the social and political conceptualisation of women in society. Further, I will demonstrate that the mechanical woman acts as a focal point of otherness within sf lit and wider sf popular culture. As such, though her presence is profoundly unsettling, she acts as a conduit of difference and is representative of a unique *potentiality*: as I mention above I will examine this potentiality using the term *becoming-gynoid*.

The final chapter of this thesis will look at the *Fallout* series of video games as a prime example of games that allow the player a great deal of agency as well as potential for emergent gameplay, harnessing the interactive and creative potential of sf as a genre as a whole. Furthermore, as a result of the sf genre of video games access to the well-established sf tropes of other media, the sf video game has the opportunity to bring these tropes to life in a new and exciting way. I will examine how opportunities for creative play in vast, expansive, open world games, like those offered by the *Fallout* games, often offer the most potential for players. At the same time I will examine the way in which the *Deus Ex* series of games provides a platform for the kinds of becoming that Deleuze's philosophy implies in relation to gender theory and the possibilities available in the game avatar. I will examine how my theory of *becoming-gynoid* also relates to this and describes the manner in which the avatar can function as a means of *becoming-other* within the game space. I will discuss the value of this process particularly in a game whose subject matter – a cyberpunk future where humans have access to fantastic abilities through the use of bionic implants – itself offers a dream of a world where gender disparity is equalised through the innovations of science and technology: a world populated by gynoids.

Chapter 1: *Inoperative Simulations: Potentiality and Bare Life in the Works of Philip K. Dick*

This is why I love SF. I love to read it; I love to write it. The SF writer sees not just possibilities but *wild* possibilities. It's not just 'What if...' It's 'My God; what if...' In frenzy and hysteria. The Martians are always coming. (Dick, 1997, p.92)

As outlined in my introduction, this chapter will elaborate on the value of Agamben's central philosophical concepts to the project of science fiction in imagining alternative realities. Here I will discuss Agamben's insights into biopolitics and, further, his more wide-ranging analyses of political and social constructions as fundamentally unstable – *inoperative* – institutions, whose nature is constantly in danger of being discovered through exposure: a process which Agamben terms *suspension*. As previously discussed, for Agamben our epistemological reality is composed of a system of *paradigms* that determine our political and social being as well as the hierarchical structures of authority to which we are beholden. As a result Agamben's philosophy aligns closely with the subversive aspects of sf literature, which have historically made this genre so significant: as Edward James argued in his famous work *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* "sf (and to a lesser extent fantasy), because they deal with imaginative alternatives to the real world, also frequently offer criticism of that world – and thus may, in short, be more subversive than anything else that is marketed as 'popular fiction'" (James, 1994, p.3). Sf has the capacity to satirise real world truths through the representation of alternative realities and possible futures and thus not only critique but also expose the unseen paradigmatic mechanisms that govern our own reality.

Many critics have noted the potential of sf to critique, or even to offer critical alternatives to, actual political and social realities. This trend perhaps began with Darko Suvin and his seminal essay *On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre*: "In the 20th century, SF has moved into the sphere of the anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and – most important – a mapping of possible alternatives" (Suvin, 1972, p.378). Sf, though it is fictional and in some ways similar to its sister genre, fantasy, is nevertheless bound by a certain readerly expectation of plausibility, of deference to the real world in some

sense – which is of course necessary when portraying the possible. As a result, sf inevitably draws upon the same *paradigms* that function in the real world when constructing alternative worlds and, through the fictional, fantastical context of the sf narrative, often exposes the systems that organise our own reality.

However, despite sf's tendency to expose, critique and demolish real world *paradigms* through satire, it possesses an equally strong and competing creative drive: “the aliens – utopians, monsters or simply differing strangers – are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for this world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one” (Suvin, 1972, p.374). In many cases this serves as a way not only of indirectly mocking the current status quo (by presenting a warped, critical version of real world society), but also of truly envisioning potential futures. In doing so sf is able to consider possible solutions to actual or imagined problems as well as engage in many other forms of creative exploration. For this reason I have chosen to focus on the work of Philip K. Dick in this chapter for, as I shall argue, I believe his work exemplifies the dual tendency within sf which, in turn, resonates with Agamben's own philosophical system, particularly his theory of *inoperativity*.

Agamben's term (together with its 'sister' terms *indifference/undecidability/inoperativity*, which are used almost interchangeably by him) refers to a state that occurs when a given *paradigm* becomes *suspended*. A *paradigm* is composed of two elements: the *common* (general) and the *proper* (particular). The *common* is constructed as superior as it is seen as the foundation of the *proper* which is understood as a comparably insignificant individual instance, a mere shadow of the original common: “[t]hat which precedes in rank and dignity derives from that which is inferior” (Agamben, 2010, p.5). For Agamben, this system is an utter pretence. The truth is that these two categories contained within the *paradigm* bleed into one another so that they are, in fact, impossible to accurately distinguish. Furthermore, the two supposedly opposing categories of *common* and *proper* will inevitably continue to deteriorate into one another over time until their *indiscernible* nature becomes more and more obvious, or at least more capable of being easily exposed. Eventually, Agamben theorises, the *paradigm* ceases to function entirely, and the moment at which this happens is what Agamben terms *inoperativity*, a moment of potential where a void

is created where the *paradigm* ceased to function, a moment at which, Agamben hints, there is the possibility for valuable change:

It is possible to consider an undecidable [an instance of inoperativity] as a purely negative *limit*...such that one then invokes strategies...to avoid running up against it. Or one can consider it as a *threshold*...which opens onto an exteriority and transforms and dislocates all the elements of the system. (Agamben, 1999, p.214) (italics his)

It is possible to see Agamben's paradigmatic system as an inescapable one, as for him the system is self-renewing. Where one *paradigm* collapses, a 'new' one takes its place, bound by the same restrictions and limitations of the overall paradigmatic system, anchored by a relentless system of hierarchy and oppositional political and social systems. This would seem to suggest that no genuinely new conceptualisations of reality can ever be realised. However, quotations such as the one above inspire at a more optimistic reading of Agamben's work. As I will further explain later in this chapter, *inoperativity*, for Agamben, entails more than the destruction of an old oppressive system in order to make way for a new, equally oppressive one. Rather, *inoperativity* has the capacity to inspire a certain creativity, to afford an opportunity for reconsidering the systems that govern us and even, as Agamben suggests in some of his works, to instigate valuable change.

Dick's unstable fictional worlds are very similar to Agamben's understanding of reality as composed of *paradigms* that are equally unstable and, furthermore, inherently degenerative. For both men, reality is a fragile construct full of underlying mechanisms that function in a manner that is largely conspiratorial – for both Dick and Agamben the system is broken and, though no one knows it yet, a costly reveal of the truth is imminent. In *We Can Remember it for you Wholesale* (Dick, 2001b), the protagonist, Douglas Quail, visits what is known in this future time as a "Rekal" facility (pronounced 'recall') to have false memories implanted of a trip to Mars that he cannot afford to take in real life. However, the reader soon discovers – in the first of many plot twists – that Quail *has* in fact been to Mars before when he worked as a secret agent, the experience of which was subsequently suppressed by the government organisation "Interplan" that he was working for. This is a classic example of how Dick continually pulls the rug out from underneath the reader in his fiction, presenting them with a brief picture of his narrative before proceeding to disassemble the

principles upon which it apparently functions. In this way, Dick's stories often resemble the journey of the *paradigm* as it is established, then gradually *suspended*, exposed and eventually rendered *indistinct*.

In this short story, readers begin with a clear understanding of the plot before them, then suddenly a previously unknown truth is revealed – the fact of Quail being a secret agent with actual, albeit suppressed, memories of Mars – which fundamentally alters the presumed course of the story. For a moment the narrative is *suspended* as readers scramble to reorient themselves, and then no sooner has a new order been established than a new form of *suspension* occurs so that we are unable to accurately distinguish between Douglas Quail's perceived reality, based on false implanted memories (and the suppression of real ones) and the actual reality presented in narrative. Many lines of dialogue in the short story reflect this confusion and growing indeterminacy of real and fake in the story: “he wants a false memory implanted of a trip he actually took. And a false reason which is the real reason. He's telling the truth” (Dick, 2001b, p.310). When Quail discovers the truth about his previous experiences on Mars, Interplan realise they cannot simply repeat the original process of suppressing his memories because Quail will be just as likely to rediscover his true past once again, driven by the same instinct that caused him to patronise Rekal at the beginning of the story.

Discovering that Interplan intends to simply kill him, Quail begs for his life, asking that they suppress his old memories *and* use Rekal's facilities to implant another set of memories based on a deep-set psychological fantasy of Quail's: “‘Suppose,’ Quail said, ‘once my authentic memories have been cancelled, something more vital than standard memories are implanted. Something which would act to satisfy my craving [for Mars]’” (Dick, 2001b, p.318). Interplan's psychologists analyse him and discover a “wish-fulfilment dream” from his childhood, one in which he is the only one to encounter an alien spacecraft that has landed in a secluded area and is thus the first and only human to meet the small aliens that emerge. Finding Quail uniquely kind and merciful, they decide to call off their imminent invasion of earth and promise never to attack so long as Quail is alive. As this story ends we discover that this ‘false’ memory pattern that Interplan was going to implant into Quail's brain is also, in fact, a real event from his life. This final plot twist underscores the story's unstable oppositions

between reality and illusion, truth and deception, real and fake, memory and imagination. These categories are *suspended* continually throughout the story as Quail searches for the truth about his past, and this is often achieved through Dick's clever use of objects in the story.

For example, part of the service Rekal provides is to plant in the customer's home various souvenirs of the trip the customers believe they have taken after their memories have been implanted (Dick, 2001b, p.315). These souvenirs are painstakingly made to appear as real as possible and, it is noted, are often difficult to distinguish from real such objects – ironically, these pieces of paraphernalia are kept in what Rekal calls “proof packets” (Dick, 2001b, p.309). These ersatz objects are juxtaposed in the narrative with ‘real’ objects that can also be found in Quail's apartment from his *actual* trip to Mars and later from his encounter with the aliens, but which – were the reader to second guess the apparent narrative closure of the ending – could just as well have come from Rekal proof packets or have been planted there by Interplan for some nefarious purpose. This intentional confusion of established oppositions of various forms of real and unreal call several paradigmatic notions into question and forces them to be exposed to the reader, to bleed, undecidably into one another, becoming *suspended*. For much of Dick's work, the very idea of narrative itself might be understood as *suspended*, where the notion of a coherent plot, a founding fictional reality established by an all-knowing author, is drawn into question as one narrative twist after another leaves the reader floating in a sea of indistinct categories, and general uncertainty as to which elements of the story may or may not be trusted.

The focus of many ‘traditional’ sf writers popular during much of Dick's career was the elaborate construction of vast and detailed fictional worlds, whose creation often relied on the author's own knowledge of *real* science – in other words ‘hard-fi’. “Dick was, during his lifetime, severely marked down by the majority...of science fiction fans...he was not considered a ‘hard’ science-fiction writer who actually knew anything about physics or biochemistry or genetics” (Sutin, 2006, p.xii). Dick was unusual in his time (and to an extent still is today) as a writer who actively sabotaged his fictional realities. Unlike many writers from Asimov and Arthur C. Clark to Iain M. Banks and Orson Scott Card, all part of the proud tradition of alternative world-

building, Dick sets up his characters, and by extension the reader, to gradually discover the surreal and absurd nature of their environment, whose apparent nature is constantly in flux.

Because of this Dick's unique brand of sf is in some ways more conducive to philosophical analysis than more conventional varieties of sf such as space opera or dystopia/utopia. Unlike many *strict* narratives about stable futures or alternative worlds, Dick's works are not nearly so self-assured. "As the years went on he knew damn well he was writing brilliant books that no one else could about his two obsessions: 'What is Real?' and its frightening corollary, 'What is Human?'" (Sutin, 2006, p.3). Dick's novels are wonderfully fluid, constantly questioning perceived truths through their constant undermining of concepts such as authenticity and their exposition of the pervasive power of illusion. These qualities make his work an idea analytical companion to the philosophy of Agamben.

The crumbling realities of Dick can be read as exposés of failing ideological constructs in the real world – many of his novels function as dystopic critiques of current social norms or political institutions, for example in *Free Radio Ablemuth* and *A Scanner Darkly* – nightmare depictions of future societies, highlighting social dysfunction through bleak hyperbole. However, while this dystopic strain in Dick's writing deserves analysis it is by no means the most interesting aspect of his work. Despite the cheerlessness of Dick's worlds, the *potentiality* that persists throughout his novels is perhaps the more intriguing aspect of his writings; furthermore, this *potentiality* is what makes Dick particularly compatible with Agamben, and his theory of *inoperativity*. Despite the fact that Dick could not have been influenced by Agamben's philosophy, as Dick's works predate most of Agamben's, their respective works are highly and surprisingly compatible despite these writers' temporal as well as geographical separation from one another. The remarkable compatibility between Dick and Agamben is most obvious when we consider that both writers view the idea of a collapse of consensus-reality with an air of resignation but, at the same time – I will argue – a hint of anticipation and even optimism.

As with Agamben's philosophy of *inoperativity*, Dick did not include in his novels tangible solutions to real-world or imagined potential societal dilemmas; however, I will argue that his work did include a great deal of cathartic optimism, always

focussing on the potential of human compassion to do better in the future, regardless of the failures of his characters or societies in his novels. Dick also had a remarkable talent for exposing what we can now interpret as the paradigmatic case; although Dick could not have been inspired by Agamben, Dick's continual preoccupation with problems of the metaphysical and the ontological, reflected in his novels and in some of his surreal and inexplicable life experiences, are remarkable in their sympathy with key elements of Agamben's philosophical archaeology. Particularly, Dick's novels describe the dissolution of false (simulated) realities which can be read as symbolic of the destruction, as a result of Agambenian *indistinction*, of equally false (*inoperative* or defunct) social constructions or institutions of power.

Another factor that brings Dick's work in close proximity with the writings of Agamben is the series of paranormal events that Dick experienced between February and March of 1974: "The 2-3-74 experiences posed, one might say, the ultimate startling 'What if?' – or rather a new and infinite range of them" (Sutin, 2006, p.6). Explaining and personally coming to terms with these events became an obsession in his life and work, and account for many of the explorations of the nature of the divine and, by extension, the nature of life and identity in novels such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (2012), *Ubik* (2000), and the semi-autobiographical novels *Valis* (2001c) and *Radio Free Albemuth* (1999c). The last two novels from this list are fictional retellings of Dick's life-changing 'divine' experiences. Unable to explain these 'interventions' in his life, Dick could never bring himself to attribute the events to any single, distinct source whether divine, alien, or of some other supernatural or paranormal origin. However, his preoccupation with the nature of the divine led him to explore the nature of religion, as well as intertwined concepts such as the nature of power, authority, and government, in many of his works, which make his writing doubly suited to a joint analysis with Agamben whose work was similarly preoccupied with elucidating the nature of these power structures; the sacred and juridical forms of these systems of power have been and continue to be at the heart of his philosophical project, and are, according to Agamben, founded in the managerial apparatus of *oikonomia* (economy): "political theology grounds the transcendence of sovereign power in its juridical (or juridico-political) form in the doctrine of one God" (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84). Fully explaining the nature of this, one of Agamben's most intricate concepts, will require its own section later in this chapter. However, the

central point here is that Agamben understood the deep set connection between the divine management of human beings through political power structures on earth “as an immanent...order of both human and divine life” (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84).

Agamben would eventually elaborate in his later writings, e.g. his 2008 book *The Signature of all Things: On Method*, the full nature of the pervasive power structures which organise the *paradigms* specific to each period of history:

The signature, our common, is actualised across a variety of different discourses through time, place and peoples but is kept consistent by each discourse or period sharing in common a series of terms all of which are meaningfully operative due to their commonality of signatory ‘origin’ and continued activity. (Watkin, 2013, p.xv)

That is, a given *paradigm* is merely an expression of a much larger and older *signature* specific to a given historical moment. Dick’s novels can be read as novels essentially about specific Agambenian *signatures*. In exploring *signatures*, or power structures, Dick succeeds in exposing what can be understood from an Agambenian perspective as the paradigmatic (that partially constitute these *signatures*). As Dick’s worlds begin to dissolve, the accepted ‘rules’ of the reality are *suspended*, producing a new world out of what appears as *indistinction* given fictional form. As in Agamben, however, these chaotic realities are not entirely pessimistic ones. They rather describe, as I shall argue, a pleasurable void into which the reader is invited, and asked to co-explore, and imagine.

Dick’s fiction shows such an astonishing resonance with Agamben’s work that it is challenging to choose a single strain of argumentation on which to focus. For this reason I have decided to divide this chapter into three sections, and so attempt to cover the three key areas of Agamben’s work which I believe are uniquely relatable to the novels of Dick. The first section will examine contrasting examples of *bare life* in the work of Dick, using Agamben’s paradigmatic system as a framework through which to view the binary oppositions explored in Dick’s novels such as public/private life, man/machine, democracy/police state, and how these various conceptualisations inform identity. For this portion of my analysis I will focus on Dick’s novels *A Scanner Darkly*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Radio Free Albemuth*. The second section will examine the *signature* as it appears within Dick’s novels, with specific attention to Agamben’s work on the *signature* of *oikonomia*, an apparatus pertaining

to the nature of the divine, of government and of the nature of authority and power. Several of Dick's novels combine all these elements but for the purpose of my analysis I will focus on *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

Additionally, it is important to remember that *signature* does not only describe the temporal distribution of *paradigms* but also describes the core operation of intelligibility; that is the operativity of meaning as a *suspension* between signifier and signified. *Time Out of Joint*, deals with this fundamental aspect of the *signature*, detailing a man's journey through psychosis as he discovers his '50s suburban town is a constructed reality designed to deceive him; he starts to realise his world is fake when objects start to transform into pieces of paper with that object's signifier written upon them. The final section will include an analysis of *Man in the High Castle* and *Ubik* in relation to Agamben's *potentiality* and *inoperativity*. Here I shall discuss the aspects of this somewhat nebulous term that go beyond the cyclical system of *paradigms* implied in Agamben's work; furthermore, I will discuss the potential this concept may denote in terms of possible change, in line with the possibility inherent in the sf genre as a whole and exemplified by the work of Dick as a writer of unstable narratives (which also include a cautious but vibrant enthusiasm for alternative realities).

***Bare Life* and Madness: Identity and Schizophrenia**

In *The State of Exception* Agamben continues the project begun in his 1995 publication, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, further outlining his understanding of the operativity of government power in the West as founded on the *suspension* of a biopolitical *paradigm*: “[t]he state of exception is a device that must ultimately articulate and hold together the two aspects of the juridico-political machine by instituting a threshold of *undecidability* between...life and law” (Agamben, 2005, p.86). The fiction of the state of exception (an example of which would be a military coup) is that it is invoked only in exceptional circumstances in order to maintain what Agamben describes in later works as another fiction of government: order. However, the truth is that the state of exception is not an exceptional case at all but the founding principle upon which the *paradigm* of Western government is based – that is, a *suspension* of that which produces and maintains government: law. This is what

enables the dual, schizophrenic identity of power capable of existing in the realms of both the democratic and the police state.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, *bare life* is an expression of the operativity of the state of exception, and as such resembles its mode of *suspension*, fulfilling seemingly distinct yet inseparable political functions. *Bare life* denigrates *zoe* (biological, personal, life) and in doing so reinforces the superiority of *bios*. Yet, *bare life* dehumanises and in doing so enters the realm of *zoe*, for it is our private lives – our emotions and desires – that we often associate most with our humanity, and therefore with our political *human* rights. *Bare life* appears when the *zoe/bios* double life at the heart of social identity is *suspended* in such a way that the strangeness of this dual existence is exposed. In *State of Exception*, Agamben writes that “World War One (and the years following it) appear as a laboratory for testing and honing the functional mechanisms and apparatuses of the state of exception as a paradigm of government” (Agamben, 2005, p.7). Similarly, the novels of Dick function as a laboratory in which to analyse the operation (as well as the *inoperativity*) of those *paradigms* of government, such as *bare life*, that have permeated not only the *polis* but our understanding of self, our conception of identity and being in the world. Some of these themes are central to many of Dick’s works, but they can all be seen most clearly in the novels discussed below.

Dick’s novels describe many examples of *bare life*, from artificial life forms in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, to drug addicts spied on by the state in *A Scanner Darkly*, and further to the average American citizen in *Man in the High Castle* and *Radio Free Albemuth*. The former of these last two examples is an alternative history in which the axis powers have won WWII, and depict life in Nazi/Japanese occupied America. In this society American citizens are stripped of their political *bios* directly by virtue of their national/biological identity: being neither German/Aryan nor Japanese, their oppression is both political (in the sense that they are consistently under the scrutiny of the authorities which can suspend their political *bios* at any time) and social, in that they are treated as second class citizens by both the Germans and the Japanese.

This systematic denudation of a conquered people is relatively straightforward, and quite familiar as a practice of invading powers. However, *Radio Free Albemuth*,

describes an alternative universe in which a totalitarian America has the power to exclude *any* individual from the *polis* (political sphere); it is a hyperbolic, almost parody-like, narrative detailing (among other things) of the rapid rise to power of Ferris F. Fremont and his gradual conversion of a democratic America into what Agamben would describe as a *state of exception*, a totalitarian state where “*Being-outside, and yet belonging...*is the topological structure of the state of exception, and only because the sovereign, who decides on the exception, is, in truth, logically defined in his being by the exception” (Agamben, 2005, p.35). What Ferris F. Fremont and the Nazi/Japanese regime have in common is that their sovereign power is “defined by the oxymoron *ecstasy-belonging*” (Agamben, 2005, p.35), by an *exclusion*. This fact is somewhat comforting, for it reveals that the inherent contradiction within a state of exception (and the democratic state that is founded upon it) guides it towards eventual *inoperativity*. This *potentiality* is symbolised by *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* – the subversive novel-within-a-novel in which the allies win WWII, that inspires many of the characters of *The Man in the High Castle* (Dick, 2001a) – and the lyrics of the subversive pop song aired at the very end of *Radio Free Ablemuth* (Dick, 1999c). These concepts of inoperative power structures and potentiality I will discuss in the later sections of this chapter: the first section will deal with identity and its relationship to government which constitutes it as a facet of *bare life*, the second will deal with power and the last with resistance to that power in the human faculty of *potentiality* found in *inoperativity*.

What is most striking about the examples of *bare life*, outlined above in all these novels taken together, is the seemingly random selection of those groups of people who become victims of the *homo sacer paradigm*. Dick’s work accentuates the bluntness of this particular signatory apparatus, where almost any given social group would seem to contain a *potentiality* towards *bare life*. This fact also exposes the biopolitical suspension at the heart of the democratic state that allows the rapid overturn of democracy into totalitarianism, and sanctions the conversion of citizenship into *bare life*. “At once excluding bare life and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (Agamben, 1998, p.9). These novels confirm Agamben’s contention that the biopolitical is the foundation of modern

democracy, and is capable of authorising the stripping of any particular individual's political being at any moment.

The novels I reference above profoundly articulate the very broad criteria for a candidate for *bare life*; to be stripped of their *bios* (political life) all that is required is that an individual possess *bios* in the first place, at least symbolically. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the “andys” (androids) are intelligent and self-aware beings who, should they escape the captivity of their masters, are hunted down and killed. As such, they are *bare life* despite having never been a part of the polis. They are treated as that which has been stripped of their *bios* and yet, in theory, there was never anything to be stripped away in the first place. However, I think this can be explained by delving into the *signature* of clothing and the *paradigm* of Christian grace as Agamben does in his collection of essays *Nudities*: “Nudity in our culture, is inseparable from a theological signature” (Agamben, 2010, p.57). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the ancient Roman figure of the *homo sacer* is a *paradigm* that assimilated Christian connotations over time, to such an extent that the process of denudation is now inseparable from a theological conception of nudity: “Though they were not covered by any human clothing before the Fall, Adam and Eve were not naked; rather, they were covered by clothing of grace, which clung to them as a garment of glory” (Agamben, 2010, p.57). In Christianity, humans are God's creations who become denuded, losing the clothing of grace during the Fall. When exiled from the Garden of Eden, they become (in a sense) *bare life*.

A parallel can be drawn here between the humans and the andys. These androids are humanity's creation, made in their image (they appear exactly like humans), created to facilitate life in the human colonies of other planets. However, the andys rebel and flee the colonies and escape to earth where they are hunted down by bounty hunters like the protagonist Rick Deckard. It is only once the andys leave their colony – their Eden – that they are considered for the first time as something other than a machine (they have, in a sense, lost their innocence). Suddenly the andys have autonomy and thus, logically, something akin to human *zoe* and *bios*, if only for an instant before this hypothetical *bios* is stripped from them and they become *bare life*. As Jill Galvan argues, these androids are *bare life* as a matter of political necessity, accentuating the *suspended* nature of the polis as a coherent sphere; it is

In the best interest of the political authorities to ostracise the android, since the android—a fully animated and thoroughly intelligent creature—directly challenges the individual’s perceived biological mastery over the machines that surround her. ... [A] community in which humans and androids freely coexist would resurrect the ultimate threat to a totalitarian state: that its diverse numbers, joined by mutual affinities and demands, will rise up against the powers that dominate them. (Galvan, 1997, p.418-19)

As such, an andy is a momentarily political being whose immediate destiny is to become oppressed in the very instant that they are recognised as having the faculty to possess political agency. Furthermore, the andys are represented as having sacred or theological connections: early on in the novel Deckard describes the religious solace he finds in his work as a bounty hunter for “retiring” andys. A worshipper of a popular quasi-messianic cult known as “Mercerism”, Deckard relates how “[i]n retiring – i.e. killing – an andy he did not violate the rule of life laid down by Mercer. *You shall only kill the killers*...a concept of...an absolute evil...but it was never clear who or what this evil presence was” (Dick, 1999b, p.28). So, one of the tenants of Mercerism is that each follower has a limited right to murder: “Put another way, a Mercerite was free to locate the nebulous presence of The Killers wherever he saw fit. For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot...epitomised The Killers” (Dick, 1999b, p.28). Deckard’s interpretation of Mercerism is strikingly similar to Agamben’s description of the practice of *homo sacer*, which “while it confirms the sacredness of a person, [in this case, a “Killer”/an Andy] it authorises (or more precisely renders unpunishable) his killing” (Agamben, 1998, p.72). As such, andys appear as an archetypal paradigmatic instance of the *homo sacer*.

Furthermore, an andy’s very validity as a subject without *bios* is based on a test that confirms a lack of *zoe*. The “Voigt-Kampff” test, designed to distinguish humans from androids, works on the principle that humans feel empathy and emotion where andys do not. However, as Deckard observes, we cannot know what the andys do and do not feel, only what their physical reactions reveal:

Rick said, ‘This’—he held up a flat adhesive disk with its trailing wires—“measures capillary dilation in the facial area. We know this to be a primary autonomic response, the so called ‘shame’ or ‘blushing’ reaction to a morally shocking stimulus...’

‘And these can’t be found in androids,’ Rachael said.

‘They’re not engendered by the stimuli-questions; no. Although biologically they exist. Potentially.’ (Dick, 1999b, p.40-41)

Though Rick points out that an android would not respond to the test the way a human would, he does feel the need to suggest the *potentiality* surrounding an andy’s emotions. He also uses the word “biologically” in reference to something that he considers a machine, which is strange given his seemingly uncomplicated feelings towards his line of work. All this reveals the nature, not only of the androids status as *bare life* in this society, but of the nature of *bare life* itself: that is, that *bare life* in this case as in all cases is founded on a *suspension* between *zoe* and *bios* that functions on many social and mental levels, relying on a complicated network of self-deceptions both institutionally – for example in the sphere of religion (Mercerism) – and personally. Mercerism reinforces in humans the importance of empathy and emotion by means of the “empathy box” that allows all humans to share a joint experience *as* Mercer himself, enduring his trials. It is a religion that also teaches that humans should own and care for animals, which has developed into an almost manic desire to possess pets of various kinds, particularly in Deckard who, unable to afford a *real* animal, would rather pretend to care for an electric sheep than no animal at all: “Mercerism and the ideology of empathy that is its mainstay, far for appealing to innate human characteristics, function as the means by which the government controls an otherwise unwieldy populace” (Galvan, 1997, p.416). This accentuated indulgence in human emotions reinforces the master/slave relationship between andys and humans, so that humans continually reinforce their own sense of superiority as a species capable of empathy, capable of experiencing emotion through becoming one with Mercer, capable of feeling affection, and caring for a pet.

Yet this apparent difference between humans and andys is inherently unstable. The Voigt-Kampff test is not infallible, and even at the end of the novel it remains unresolved whether andys can or cannot experience emotion. Yet it is ironic that their political right to autonomy as conscious beings should be reliant on a purely biological phenomenon – facial dilation – and by extension the ability to feel. This fact reveals the highly confused nature of how we view political life as humans. It also highlights the interchange that exists between those of *bare life* and those without *bare life* that validates and consolidates both as such. *Bare life*, it would seem, as a concept if not as an actuality in society, is integral and necessary to the concept of identity itself.

In the essay “Identity Without the Person” (included in the collection, *Nudities*) Agamben describes the governmental conflation of criminal and citizen cemented in the late nineteenth century through new methods of criminal record keeping such as the ‘mug-shot’ etc:

Nevertheless, by the rule that stipulates that what was invented for criminals, foreigners, or Jews will sooner or later be invariably applied to all human beings as such, techniques that had been developed for recidivist criminals began to extend in the course of the twentieth century to all citizens. (Agamben, 2010, p.50)

Of course this is not to say that this particular moment can be seen as the origin of the complicated relationship between *zoe* and *bios*; nevertheless it is a significant point in history that brought the two aspects of being into a new chapter of *indistinction*. Dick’s novels illustrate this process of *suspension* and, perhaps more pertinently, its horrifying potential political consequences. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* we see andys as a hypothetical future expression of the earlier paradigmatic example of the *homo sacer*. However, what is clear is that there is a wider *signature* spanning several ages of history, of which the *homo sacer* and (theoretically) the andys are specific instances punctuating an overall historical trend, a *signature* composed of the included set against the excluded. Furthermore, many other excluded parties, or *homo sacer* figures, can be found in Dick’s work; sometimes these are mutated or genetically damaged humans, victims of a war-torn future; at other times Dick portrays those criminalised sub-sections of society that can be found in our own present-day world – the lower classes, or those that simply choose to live differently from the majority.

Dick’s novels are littered with many tragic heroes who are split into an unstable binary; this is often the result of a split-personality or an identity crisis of some kind, for example Bob/Fred Arctor, in *A Scanner Darkly*, Horselover Fat/Philip K. Dick in *Valis*, and Jason Taverner in *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. These unstable binaries often assume a *common/proper* relationship where one side is superior (*common*) to, or in some sense “shaping” and controlling, the other (*proper*). As discussed earlier, the *common/proper* dynamic is at the centre of all paradigmatic examples, forming a hierarchical relationship in which the *common*, which is the founding exemplar, dominates the *proper*, the specific instance of the common case. In *A Scanner Darkly* “Fred” is the on-duty alias of undercover cop, Bob Arctor. He

leads two lives: one is a respected citizen working to root out drug crime but whose true ‘identity’ is kept secret from his co-workers. His other self, in many ways his ‘true’ identity, is Bob Arctor – a brain-addled junkie who spends his time with equally brain-damaged or deranged drug users and dealers with whom he shares a house.

As his friends – and Bob Arctor himself – draw the attention of the authorities, his personal life and routine become an extension of his undercover work and Fred/Bob is ordered to begin a surveillance operation of his own household:

Fred said, ‘Does this mean you’ll be bugging Arctor’s house and car?’

‘Yes, with the new holographic system...’...

Across from him the other formless blur wrote and wrote, filling in all the inventory ident numbers for all the technological gadgetry that would...soon be available to him, by which to set up a constant monitoring system of the latest design, on his own house, on himself. (Dick, 1999a, p.46)

The boundaries between the two facets of Fred/Bob’s personality become blurred from this point on as it becomes clear that Fred/Bob has no idea where the two elements of his personality begin or end. At times he cannot even understand that the Bob Arctor he observes through the secret surveillance scanners planted around his house, is in fact himself:

And then he thought, what the hell am I talking about? I must be nuts. I know Bob Arctor; he’s a good person. He’s up to nothing. At least nothing unsavory. In fact, he thought, he works for the Orange County Sherriff’s Office, covertly...

But, he thought, that wouldn’t explain why the Orange County Sherriff’s office is after him—especially to the extent of installing all those holos and assigning a full-time agent to watch and report on him. That wouldn’t account for that. (Dick, 1999a, p.145)

Following the classic tradition of a tragic figure, Arctor descends into a madness (which plays a key part in his eventual downfall) such that he can no longer distinguish between reality and drug-induced illusion, and likewise between his private self, Bob Arctor, and his “scrambled” self, known only as Fred. The madness that he succumbs to, however, is not so much his personal fatal flaw as it is a flaw at the heart of identity itself as a *paradigm*, as I shall explain.

Like Dick's protagonists, the *paradigm* itself has much in common with the archetypal tragic hero; each *paradigm* that forms part of consensus reality contains a 'fatal flaw': it has the capacity to become *suspended* and *indistinct*. This fact defines as well as dooms a *paradigm*, as it eventually becomes unintelligible and evolves/transforms in some way, taking on new codes of meaning. In other words, *suspension*, or rather, the process of *indifference* that results from *suspension*, is that which constitutes a *paradigm*, and thus that which establishes reality. *Indifference* establishes what Agamben describes as a "whatever" quality, an indefinable essence singular to a given *paradigm*: this "whatever" quality "is constituted... by the indifference of the common and the proper, of the genus and the species, of the essential and the accidental. Whatever is the thing *with all its properties*, none of which, however, constitutes difference" (Agamben, 1993, p.26). However, *indifference* is also the process by which the *paradigm* that makes up reality becomes, paradoxically, unreal in the sense that it will eventually mutate into something indistinct; thus, the *paradigm* is (if indirectly) doomed by its singularity. As such, identity as a *paradigm* constituted by a *suspension* of *zoe* and *bios* is made singular, and valuable, by virtue of its very capacity to become *undecideable*, to fall prey to that *indistinction* that makes *bare life* possible.

This points to another mode of *indistinction* central to a problem historically cited by philosophers, the problem of how any given thing might be considered singular when there are several singularities that are said to exist simultaneously. One might argue that all individuals are unique, yet this would unite all beings through their uniqueness thwarting their claim to singularity. By the same logic, the "whatever" quality which is central to identity is an *indistinct* one that, while it represents something that is some sense singular to every person or object, also confounds its own claim to uniqueness simply by existing. However, this only compounds the *indistinction* that the term "whatever" denotes in Agamben's work and serves as further evidence for the nature of the *paradigm* as a fundamentally unstable formation, dependent on an opposition (separate from its founding opposition) of unique versus universal. This is of course the opposition of *common* and *proper*, the categories which all paradigmatic oppositions are reduced to.

Dick's work in many ways catalogues this journey through the characters of his novels. Often in his work, a protagonist will reveal his "whateverness", the singular

quality that defines him as a person, by becoming *indistinct*. Bob/Fred's private and tangible self (Bob Arctor), his *zoe*, becomes *other* to him as he is constantly required to inform on himself to other agents. Meanwhile his second public self, his *bios*, becomes defined by the identity-obscuring garment known as a "scramble suit" worn by all undercover agents. The suit itself can be seen as a metaphor for *indistinction* of identity in its purest form, as it electronically displays the images of thousands of different people on its surface. It consists of

...a multifaced quartz lens hooked to a miniaturised computer whose memory banks held up to a million and a half physiognomic fraction-representations of various people: men and women, children, with every variant encoded and then projected outward in all directions equally onto a superthin shroud-like membrane large enough to fit around an average human. (Dick, 1999a, p.16)

The suit is an analogy for how identity in this future society has become literally scrambled to the point of total *suspension* – as government cracks down more and more on "dopers", all citizens become potential criminals and all identity is subject to a potential sudden loss of *bios*, of being denuded of their political rights as a citizen and thus becoming *bare life*. However, it is important to note here that, for Agamben, *indistinction* always occurs between two concepts that form an opposition. The scramble suit, however, denotes a different kind of *indistinction* more in line with Deleuze's understanding of the term where an institution becomes *indifferent* as a result of its multiplicity, whereas in Agambenian terms, the scramble suit serves to further complicate Bob/Fred's already fractured identity, and to reinforce this to the reader by further confounding the opposition at the heart of Bob/Fred's identity, and indeed identity itself.

As with all of us, it is the *suspension* between these two elements of Bob/Fred's self that constitute him as a person; the *indistinction* between *zoe* and *bios*, between the private and public facets of our lives that define us as individuals, as Agamben writes: "the moral person constitutes himself, then, through, at once, an adhesion to, and a distancing from, the social mask: he accepts it without reservation and, at the same time, almost imperceptibly distances himself from it" (Agamben, 2010, p.48). That is, individuals maintain a continuous *suspension* between themselves (their *bios*) and their *zoe*, which is always held aloft. It is no accident that Bob/Fred's last name is linguistically similar to the word 'actor' which I believe cements this character's

connection even further with Agamben's "mask" allegory. He follows the above quotation with this:

Perhaps nowhere does this ambivalent gesture...appear with such evidence as in Roman Paintings and mosaics that represent a silent dialogue between the actor and his mask. ... The actor's idealised posture and engrossed expression, as he fixes his gaze on the blind eyes of the mask, are a testimony to the special significance of their relationship. (Agamben, 2010, p.48)

This "special relationship" is surely the "whatever" of which Agamben speaks in *The Coming Community*, here applied in relation to the person. We can perhaps understand Agamben's work in *Nudities* as an expansion of his "whatever" concept but in relation specifically to identity. If this is so, the "special relationship", like the "whatever" concept must be read as both a blessing and a curse on the conceptualisation of self; that is, the *suspension* of private and public life is not an entirely negative concept leading to atrocity. Nevertheless, it forms a highly precarious balance capable of being exploited by government power and this tenuous balance of identity has become complicated by a modern conflation of *zoe* and *bios*; it has always been the case that *bios* depends in many ways on *zoe* – often it is our biological attributes (race, gender, sexuality) that determine our social and political standing. However, these two facets become even harder to separate in a modern world where DNA and fingerprinting increasingly define our and identify us politically (consider how we identify criminals).

In *A Scanner Darkly*, as in many other of Dick's works, the psychological crisis of the protagonist mirrors the 'crisis of identity' which the reality the individual inhabits seems to be also experiencing. This link reflects the schizophrenia inherent in the dual nature of identity not only as a result of the suspension of the *zoe/bios* relationship (which is a much older signatory problem) but as a consequence of a more modern conflation of citizen and criminal. *A Scanner Darkly* exemplifies the proximity of these two elements by depicting a totalitarian state where identity appears as a pure object of biopolitical power. The scene where Bob/Fred is faced with the technical difficulty of using holocameras to spy on himself reveals the bizarre inclusion/exclusion relationship with the state that he, and in fact all citizens in this society, now face:

So you will have to include yourself from time to time in the holo-tapes you turn over to us, because if you systematically edit yourself out then we can deduce who you are by a process of elimination, whether we want to or not. What you must do, really, is edit yourself out in—what should I call it?—an inventive, artistic...Hell, the word is *creative way*. (Dick, 1999a, p.82-3)

Bob/Fred must include and exclude himself from his own surveillance tapes in order to throw off suspicion from himself, an agent of the state. This process he must go through mimics his status as simultaneously individual and police agent, *zoe* and *bios*, citizen and criminal. The hyperbolic level of police surveillance in this novel forces the protagonist into a schizophrenic state, highlighting the incomprehensible nature of identity as a product of the state of exception.

Dick's *Radio Free Ablemuth* also contains themes of identity, presented in a similarly schizophrenic context where the main character divides himself into an *indistinct* dualism. The main characters consist of Dick himself and his close friend Nicholas Brady, who confides in Dick continuously about his divine/extra-terrestrial encounters; the narrative is divided into two halves, the first narrated by Dick, and the other by Nicholas Brady. The experiences of Brady (as well as other aspects of his life) resemble very closely those of Dick's own life in reality. As Brady relates his incredible stories, the Dick of the novel listens in wonder and devises one complex convoluted theory after another to explain them:

A figure stood silently beside the bed, gazing down at him. The figure and Nicholas regarded each other... At once Rachael awoke and began to scream.

'Ich bin's!' Nicholas told her reassuringly (he had taken German in high school). What he had meant to tell her was that the figure was himself...

'... Was it time travel? Is there such a thing as time travel? Or maybe an alternate universe.'

I told him it was himself from an alternate universe. The proof was that he recognised himself. Had it been a future self he would not have recognised it, since it would have been altered from the features he saw in the mirror. No one could ever recognise his own future self. I had written about that in a story, once. (Dick, 1999c, p.20-22)

The effect is disorientating for the reader and leaves one with the sense that one if not both of them are not entirely sane (at least at the beginning of the book). The fact that

the novel is semi-autobiographical, that Dick himself is a character, and that the autobiographical references occur chiefly in relation to the *fictional* character Brady, rather than Dick, would perhaps encourage the reader to assume that Brady and Dick are in fact one and the same person, and – like Bob/Fred in *A Scanner Darkly* – that he is experiencing some form of mental disorder or dissonance. *Radio Free Ablemuth* was Dick's first attempt at his later work *Valis*, though *Radio Free Ablemuth* was published later and posthumously (having initially been rejected by his publisher). Like the earlier work, *Valis* contains a Dick character and an alter ego named "Horselover Fat", which suggests that Brady and Dick in *Free Radio Ablemuth* are intended to be taken as representing, in the same way, different facets of a fictional representation of Dick himself.

Given this, and the detailed exploration of Dick's real life paranormal experiences, I believe the novel's central theme is, as with *A Scanner Darkly*, the madness inherent in the western conceptualisation of identity. The backdrop of the novel is another police state where a corrupt senator, Ferris F. Freemont, rises rapidly to the presidency by assassinating all his competitors. Whatever inner madness is being experienced by the protagonist(s) is complemented and mirrored in the equally 'insane' totalitarian society created by Ferris F. Freemont, who is driven by a paranoid search for the non-existent organisation "Aramchek" that is, in his mind, responsible for all society's evils:

Senator Freemont claimed in his speech that...the CP-USA, the Communist Party of America, was itself merely a front, one among many, cannon fodder as it were, to mask the real enemy...Aramchek. There was no membership roll in Aramchek; it did not function in any normal way. Its members espoused no particular philosophy, either publicly or privately. Yet it was Aramchek that was stealthily taking over these United States. (Dick, 1999c, p.28)

Suddenly the state sounds just as delusional as one of Brady and Dick's bizarre conspiracy theories. The protagonist(s) plight, as well as the society in which he/they live, is based on paranoid delusion, and the paranoia in one seems to mirror that in the other. The word Aramchek turns out to be no more than a relic from Freemont's past; he has developed a crazed fantasy founded on an obscure mystery name, unconsciously dredged up from a childhood memory:

Bending down, Nicholas examined a word incised in the cement of the sidewalk, a very old word put there some time ago, when the sidewalk had been wet. It was professionally printed.

‘Look,’ Nicholas said.

I bent down and read the word.

ARAMCHEK

(Dick, 1999c, p.65)

And while the mystical experiences of Brady are never confirmed as completely or partially an illusion of some kind, Brady’s belief that he is a conduit for the power of Valis (Vast Active Living Intelligence System) in the fight against Freemont’s regime makes him all the more paranoid and fearful of the authorities.

So, the ‘madness’ (or potential madness) of Brady and Dick adds to the overall surreal quality of the narrative, where everyone is a potential informer and the “Friends of the American People” (“FAPers”), “agents out of uniform who went around and checked up on anyone suspected of being a threat to security, either for what he had once done...or what he was doing now...or what he might do in the future” (Dick, 1999c, p.70), are always watching. Thus in this society, though *bare life* is not a concrete actuality, it is a spectre that haunts. It is a constant tangible potentiality always on the verge of being actualised. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *A Scanner Darkly*, *bare life* existed for those on the fringes of the law – i.e. androids and suspected criminals or members of criminalised groups, “dopers”. However in this novel, all subjects are guilty until proven innocent. Since every citizen is under suspicion it is as if every individual is required to work for and maintain their *bios* rather than simply possessing it by default. This is exemplified in the scene where Dick is required by the FAPers to inform on his friend, Brady by filling out a complicated and detailed form regarding Brady’s loyalties and activities:

Dear American,

You have been invited to write on a subject well known to you: a close friend! It is entirely up to you what matters you consider pertinent and what you feel should be left out. However, you will benefit your friend by the greatest inclusion. ...

I recognised the red-white-and-blue plastic kit; it was the notorious ‘voluntary information’ kit, the first step in drawing a citizen into the active intelligence system of the government. (Dick, 1999c, 88-9)

Once again identity and the state are juxtaposed in this novel to portray truths about the nature of identity within the polis as a vehicle for biopolitical power, constantly haunted by and held together through the conceptual proximity of *bare life*. Though Agamben himself never discusses madness in his work, Dick's use of madness in his novels accentuates and highlights the *indistinction* of identity as a *paradigm*. Dick achieves this by using the paranoia and dissonance of a fragmented mind as a model for the nature of identity itself as equally fragmented, *suspended*, uncertain. The concrete separation of the different facets of Dick's personality as separate individuals in *Radio Free Albemuth* makes the suspension of private and public selves complete; the public facing author, Dick, and the crazed paranormal-obsessed private self of Nicolas Brady brings the dichotomy of self into alarming focus as illustrated by the protagonist demonstrating schizophrenic tendencies. Furthermore, this points to yet another aspect of *bare life* which applies often to the mentally ill, who are often ostracised, feared or even institutionalised as a result of their behaviour: they are often forced to drive their feelings/experiences/oddities beneath the surface of their public self into the sphere of *zoe*. This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that Nicholas Brady discusses his paranormal experiences and his fears that he may be mad only with the Dick character, suggesting that those suffering from mental disorders have only themselves to confide in. If we read this novel (bearing in mind the context of his other fiction) as an exposé of identity itself we might understand the conversations between Nicholas Brady and Dick as a further indictment of the nature of the public/private self dichotomy that can often force the individual to keep so much hidden from public view for fear of being ridiculed or worse.

Oikonomia, Signature, and the Invasion of Divine Power

Dick utilised the theme of madness or delusion in many of his works, shrewdly drawing on altered perceptions of reality as a means of creatively exploring the nature of that reality, perception and the pitfalls of the power structures that bind us with a presumed certainty that there are no alternatives. While his treatment of this theme constitutes an exploration of the nature of mental illnesses in their own right, it also frequently highlights the mechanisms of power structures that exist beneath the surface of everyday life, accentuated and exposed by the lens of a delusional mind's narrative. Frequently, as in the case of the protagonist Ragle Gumm in *Time out of*

Joint, Dick's characters are able to gain a paradoxically discerning and clear understanding of the world around them as a result of having a warped conception of reality. Many of his novels, as we have already seen, can be read as explications of Agamben's paradigmatic system; furthermore, they elucidate the system of *signatures* which are composed of *paradigms*.

The *signature* in Agamben is one that his critics have often struggled to distinguish from the *paradigm*; and since Agamben himself did not always succeed in making a clear distinction this is understandable. In spite of this I argue that what does emerge clearly from Agamben's work is that *paradigms* make up *signatures*: that is, that *paradigms* are historically contingent apparatuses that can be grouped together under a particular *signature*. The *signature* refers to a structure that is much older and more pervasive, and which encompasses whole sets of *paradigms* throughout history. As the *paradigm* is composed of common (universal case) and proper (individual instance), so can the *signature* itself be considered to be the universal, archaic principle upon which all its constituent *paradigms* are based:

All statements are included in every signature, but those which belong, paradigms, are controlled by the signature. That is indeed all the signature does: control which of its included elements, statements, can be said to belong at any one time or discursive place, paradigms. (Watkin, 2013, p.44)

Here, William Watkin describes the interactivity between *paradigm* and *signature* where the *signature* can be understood to be a common thread that runs through several *paradigms*, connecting them as they evolve through time as they are inscribed in history. This operation is made possible by the fundamentally discursive operation of the *signature*, which through the operation of signs, creates the conditions from which *paradigms* arise: "The paradigm plate is made up of elements which are said to belong to the signatory situation, underneath which of course are all signs which at any point can belong to a situation" (Watkin, 2013, p.44). Here, Watkin draws on Agamben's discussion of Warburg's plates, in *The Signature of All Things*, to which I referred in my introduction. To frame his explanation of *paradigms*, Agamben discusses Warburg's art piece, *Mnemosyne* which collated various images – artworks, photographs etc – and grouped them according to different themes, where each individual grouping formed a "plate". Though Agamben does not explicitly say this,

for Watkin, each individual plate can be understood as a *signature* and the individual images contained within the plate must therefore represent individual *paradigms*.

The plate which Agamben discusses most is the “nymph” plate, containing twenty-seven images of different nymphs all of whom belong to the same group – the same *signature* of nymph. To elaborate, the idea of a nymph has existed for many ages and the ideas associated with the word/idea/*signature* “nymph” are many and varied, and might bring to mind several differing images (much like the images on Warburg’s plate) all relating to different historical/cultural periods – these are the nymph *paradigms* – which cannot be separated from the central *signature* of the nymph.

That the fictional experiences of Ragle Gumm, the protagonist of a (what was then considered pulp) sf novel published in ‘50s America, should resonate so closely with the work of an Italian philosopher whose complete study of the *signature* would not materialise until some 50 years later perhaps goes some way in showing the validity of Agamben’s philosophical system and its relevance to the insights of sf. In *Time Out of Joint*, Gumm lives in a simulated approximation of an American 1950s suburb. He believes that he is making his living by playing, and always, miraculously winning, a newspaper contest every day. It unfolds that Gumm’s fabricated existence has been designed by a 1990s totalitarian government, known as “One Happy World”, to support a delusional mental state that Gumm experiences, brought on by his questioning of his military role in Earth’s war with the Lunar colony (Dick, 2003). Before his imprisonment in the town, Gumm was in charge of choosing military targets on the surface of the Lunar colony – having a unique talent for it. However, after falling into a delusional state, he was placed into a re-creation of the town in which he grew up, to support his “withdrawal psychosis” (Dick, 2003, p.200). The contest he enters every day, “Where Will the Little Green Men Land Next?”, is an elaborate means of allowing him to continue his military work without experiencing any of the ethical qualms that previously made him question his role in the war between Earth and Lunar, and which caused him to consider defecting to join the “Lunatics”.

However, despite the government’s best laid plans, Gumm’s simulated world begins to fall apart when he discovers evidence of his ‘real’ self, and of the real world of the 1990s. Gumm’s experience of reality becomes increasingly fragmented as he slowly

gains access to the real world through paraphernalia that accidentally finds its way into his hands, such as a magazine containing an article about Marilyn Monroe – an actress Gumm has never heard of (Dick, 2003, p.54). Perceived reality becomes more obviously false the more Gumm comes into contact with the reality outside his ersatz town. Gradually Gumm's world appears to him as paper thin, and two-dimensional as the pieces of paper he collects in the wake of disappearing objects: as Gumm's belief in his surroundings begins to waver he perceives objects evaporating in front of his eyes, each transforming into a piece of paper with the name of the object that was there printed on it.

Not again, he thought.

Not again!

It's happening to me again.

The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules. He saw the molecules, colorless, without qualities, that made it up. Then he saw through, into the space beyond it, he saw the hill behind and the space beyond it, he saw the hill behind and the trees and the sky. He saw the soft-drink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, the cash register, the big dispenser of orange drink, the taps for Coke and root beer, the ice chests and bottles, the hot dog broiler, the jars of mustard, the shelves of cones, the row of heavy round metal lids under which were different ice creams.

In its place was a slip of paper. He reached out his hand and took hold of the slip of paper. On it was printing, block letters,

SOFT-DRINK STAND

(Dick, 2003, p.40-41)

How exactly to interpret the pieces of paper that Gumm collects has puzzled many critics of Dick's work. However, when viewed through the perspective of Agamben's system of *signatures* it becomes clear that, whether the object-into-paper transformation experiences can be considered real or merely a figment of Gumm's delusional mind, what Gumm is witnessing or intuiting is the *indistinct* nature of the *signature*. More specifically, Gumm comes face to face with the originary *signature* of language:

Since language is the archetype of the signature, the signatory art par excellence, we are obliged to understand this similarity not as something physical, but according to an analogical and immaterial

model. Language, then, which preserves the archive of immaterial similarities, is also the reliquary of signatures. (Agamben, 2009, p.36)

Language is the first *signature* that would define and constitute all *signatures* since as language and the process signing/naming is what fundamentally defines all objects and ideas. They are, according to Agamben, inscribed somewhere in a complex relation between, *signam* (signifier), *signatum* (signified) and the *signature* itself, which is that which makes the operation of language possible: “signatures find their own locus in the gap and disconnection between semiology and hermeneutics.” (Agamben, 2009, p.59) The best way to explain this is perhaps to imagine the *signature* as the name of a process that designates the way in which ideas and words become interrelated, how a word not only designates a thing but also leaves a discursive mark on the world, thus inseparably connecting itself with other concepts which “depend on one another in an irreducible game of oscillating logical priority” (Attell, 2011, p.179). this process bridges the gap between meaning and interpretation, but in a manner that makes the *signature indistinct*, difficult to locate, *suspended*.

Agamben uses the example of the herb “Euphrasia” or Eyebright, in the context of the medical writings of Paracelsus, whose work illustrates the historic notion that all things in themselves possess a quality that “speaks” to the object’s observer and determines its name. However, it is more than just its *signam* that is decided; rather the *signature* determines the object’s relational position within language as well as its wider epistemological situation:

The signature puts the plant in relationship with the eye, displacing it into the eye, and only in this way does it reveal its hidden virtue. The relation is not between a signifier and a signified (*signans* and *signatum*). Instead, it entails at least four terms; the figure in the plant, which Paracelsus often calls *signatum*; the part of the human body; the therapeutic virtue; and the disease — to which one has to add the *signator* as a fifth term. (Agamben, 2009, p.37)

The cluster of relationships (as outlined above in the example of Euphrasia) responsible for meaning and which make interpretation possible cause the *signature* of language to become *suspended* between the signifier and the signified, with the result that concept and word become *indistinct* and inevitably merge. “Signatures, which according to the theory of signs should appear as signifiers, always already slide into the position of the signified, so that *signum* and *signatum* exchange roles and seem

to enter into a zone of undecideability” (Agamben, 2009, p.37). This is the process that Gumm symbolically witnesses as his acceptance of his surroundings begins to break down. The soft-drink stand disappears because he finally cannot bring himself to engage in the fantasy his delusional state originally supported and made possible. In the same way, it is our faith in the self-ratifying logic of the *signature* that allows us to communicate concepts and assume relationships that may in fact exist only in the minds of humans. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that the Euphrasia plant does in fact cure diseases of the eye, and so many of the signatory principles upon which its healing properties are based most likely have no basis in fact or, more correctly, are based entirely on the *indistinct* logic of the *signature* that binds the ideas surrounding Euphrasia to eyes, eye diseases, and so forth.

In line with this reading it makes perfect sense that the government creators of Gumm’s fake 50s world describe his delusional experiences as evidence of his “becoming sane again” (Dick, 2003, p.59). Gumm is not going mad but rather rising up from the *suspended* reality of his current existence, coming face to face with that which supports it:

All in all, Dick’s novel shows that our real world is made of words; and that words are necessary to give sense to it. Words have a strange substantiality, which is particularly evident in some recent historical events. If the world of the 1950s is made of words, and this may hint at the undeniable fact that the fifties are also a myth of the fifties, made of words, images, icons, such as Montgomery Clift maybe, Marilyn Monroe. (Rossi, 2011, p.75)

Gumm originally entered a delusional state in order to escape the ethical questions he was facing regarding the war between the totalitarian One Happy World regime on earth and the separatist colony on Lunar. As he gains sympathy for the Lunatics and sees through the barbarous regime he works for, his mind cannot adjust itself to this new world-view and so retreats into an imaginary facsimile of 1950s America which is supported by the government he works for in order to keep him working for them. Presumably then, before Gumm’s defection to the Lunatics, he was originally convinced by One Happy World’s propaganda and believed the Lunatics were evil, though all they truly desired was independence from a cruel totalitarian state. Thus, as Gumm regains his memories of his former self, he not only sees through the world around him but is also, crucially, returning to a state in which he saw through the

structures that maintained his government's power and the propaganda it spun about its enemies.

We can read Gumm's growing realisation that his world is fake through Agamben, as Gumm's becoming aware that his world is composed of a series of *suspensions* between *signam* and *signatum*, illustrated through the image of things disintegrating, before his very eyes, into mere words. In many ways this comes across to the student of Agamben as a near perfect 'visual' portrayal of the *signatum* trading places with the *signam* (Agamben, 2009, p.37), and through this *suspension* leaving the semiotic framework that makes the *signature* of "drinking fountain" intelligible and which similarly lends credence to the name of Earth's government (One Happy World) and all that this slogan points too. Like an advertising slogan from Gumm's fake '50s world it aims to manipulate the reader through association, to transform a tyrannical regime into an image of peace, prosperity and unity.

The drinking fountain in the park where Gumm is walking makes sense, is intelligible at first, but once it disappears and transforms into a printed word, without context or a relational foundation which would make the *signature* of drinking fountain understandable it becomes a floating, insubstantial word precariously placed on a thin slip of paper. This moment in the novel reflects the tenuous position of the *signature*, so pervasive and powerful and yet, like Gumm's piece of paper, flimsy. This reading of Gumm's things-into-words-on-paper incidents offers a narrative example with which to frame the *suspended* nature of reality as constructed through the *signature*, and through language specifically as the archetypal *signature*.

Gumm's experiences denote his growing distrust of the fake world around him and, although the experiences are unintelligible and not easily attributable to reality, the shifting of the world around him into mere words on paper reveals a growing understanding that the reality he is presented with is based on a presumption of meaning, an agreement that things as they are make sense, that the nature of the *signature* makes sense. As it happens this is as true of his own fake 1950s town as it is of the real world. Ragle's psychosis allows him to experience and examine the functioning of the *signature* as the human reality-producing engine:

Ragle reached into his pocket and brought out the small metal box that he carried with him. Opening it he presented it to Vic.

‘What’s this?’ Vic said.

‘Reality,’ Ragle said. ‘I give you the real.’

Vic took one of the slips of paper out and read it. ‘This says “drinking fountain”.’ (Dick, 2003, p.156)

In the previous section of this chapter I examined the function of *bare life* and the state of exception as founding elements of government power, laying the groundwork for a discussion of the nature of *signatures* as a deeper level of discursive power. The *signature* is a model that organises all things into *undecidable*, yet relentless epistemological structures. However, it is the nature of the central *signature* that defines and supports government power, and its corollary, divine authority, that is of particular interest, both as a central thesis of Agamben’s work and also as a central theme in Dick’s novels.

In *State of Exception* Agamben explores how *bare life* and the state of exception are consequences of the “two aspects of the juridico-political machine...instituting a threshold of undecidability...between life and law, between *auctoritas* [power of authorisation] and *potestas* [power granted by the people]” (Agamben, 2005, p.86). The *suspension* of *potestas* reveals the real supremacy of *auctoritas* which reveals the operativity of the state of exception as a founding principle of government. This “double structure” is characterised by a *suspension* that places *auctoritas* as the superior expression of power; this is power that arises from authority, from law, rather than *potestas* – power bestowed by the will of the people upon government. The *indistinction* between the two elements is painfully obvious: where *auctoritas* is the primary element of our conception of power, *potestas* is undermined meaning that power, rather than arising from an outside source (democratic election, for example), becomes its own contradiction and fiction by authorising itself.

This is the argument outlined in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and *State of Exception*, but these texts reveal only one aspect of the operativity of power, in the context of extreme circumstances leading to totalitarian tendencies. In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, however, Agamben completes his narrative of the genealogy of power as founded on the *signature* of *oikonomia* and its theological relationship with glory:

The double structure of the governmental machine, which in *State of Exception* (2003) appeared in the correlation between *auctoritas* and *potestas*, here takes the form of the articulation between Kingdom and Government and, ultimately, interrogates the very relation...between *oikonomia* and Glory, between power as government and effective management, and power as ceremonial and liturgical reality. (Agamben, 2011, p.xi-xii)

As in the case of *auctoritas*, Agamben maintains his argument that the dangerous fiction at the heart of power in the West is, once again, that it is self-authorising. *Auctoritas* is a self-ratifying *signature* of power that appears, according to *Homo Sacer*, to be founded on the inclusion/exclusion properties of life and law. However, Agamben claims that this self-ratification is even more deeply embedded within the *signatures* that constitute power in the West. As William Watkin observes,

If it appears in *Homo Sacer* that the double articulation of inside and outside produces power which then grounds the political, *The Kingdom and the Glory* radically modifies this claim by showing how government effectively produces the power which grounds it, making the kingdom (sovereign power) operative through the inoperativity of the power of glory. (Watkin, 2013, p.210-211)

Agamben's understanding of power in the West evolves in *The Kingdom and the Glory* into a broader conceptualisation: not only that power in an oppressive Western government is self-ratifying, but also modern government (even one which is not oppressive) is founded on a *signature* of power that is self-ratifying at its core through its theological grounding: *oikonomia*. Agamben argues that that the *signature* of *oikonomia*, once adopted by Christian doctrine as an organisational *paradigm* for the holy trinity, became fundamentally entwined with the conception of divine power: "Oikonomia is conceived in the early Greek and later Christian theological sense as a paradigm of management" (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84). This is proof that the merging of church and state is not only archetypal but, for Agamben, inescapable as the authority of government is one assumed in the *signature* of divine *oikonomia* which binds the archae of government with the uncertain relationship of *auctoritas* and *potestas*. The divine roots of government authority are shirked by modern attempts towards secularisation; but for Agamben the democratic model is a pretence designed to hide the fictional nature of citizen-held power, and the fact that government *auctoritas* comes from nowhere, is truly sanctioned by no one, and certainly not its citizens. Instead power oscillates *undecidably* between *auctoritas* and *potestas* in order to

bolster a regime that, though its authority no longer comes even ostensibly from God it might as well do for the hierarchical structure of power remains in place, and government seems to authorise its own right to rule.

Dick's *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* unites all of these themes that Agamben explores, elaborating on the functioning of these forms of power. The novel, in many ways, explicitly outlines the connection between authority, and the divine, as intertwined expressions of power. The novel has essentially two components: the first follows a large corporation, called "Perky Pat Layouts", which sells miniature 'dolls' houses' and miniaturised accessories which aid in the simulation of group hallucinations induced by the consumption of a drug known as "Can-D". The UN of this future have influence over the distribution of Can-D – allowing its commercialisation through a secret subsidiary of P. P. Layouts in exchange for "squeeze money", but cracking down on its production at a whim:

It was idiotic, in view of the fact that P. P. Layouts paid an enormous yearly tribute to the UN for immunity, but idiotic or not a UN Narcotics Control Bureau warship had seized an entire load of Can-D near the north polar cap of Mars... Obviously the squeeze money was not reaching the right people within the complicated UN hierarchy. (Dick, 2012, p.15)

Essentially the UN regulates the distribution of the officially 'illegal' Can-D substance for its own purposes. The Earth's surface has become increasingly and dangerously hot, and so the government decides to conscript citizens at random to immigrate to off-world colonies. Life on the colony planets is even more difficult and unpleasant than on Earth, however, and the Can-D fantasy makes life easier on Earth and bearable in the even harsher environments on the colony planets by creating a simulated experience of an old, idyllic earth where people enjoy a shared experience as "Perky Pat" and her boyfriend "Walt" – essentially Barbie and Ken in a California, 'plastic' house.

There is also a profound spiritual element of the "translation" experience into the dolls:

He himself was a believer; he affirmed the miracle of translation – the near sacred moment in which the miniature artefacts of the layout no longer merely represented Earth but *became* Earth. And he and the others, joined together in the fusion of doll-inhabitation by means of

the Can-D, were transported outside of time and local space. (Dick, 2012, p.37)

Here we see the Can-D drug as a pacifying shared experience that many take religious fulfilment from, believing that the drug truly does transport them to an earth from the past. Thus, the UN's manipulation of this drug as a form of control and as an illicit source of divine experience, portrays the power of a government as a supplier, or pusher, of divine communion and cements the link between government and divine authority. This sets up a potential analysis of *oikonomic* power in the novel:

[T]he thesis according to which the economy could be a secularised theological paradigm acts retroactively on theology itself, since it implies that from the beginning theology conceives divine life and the history of humanity as an *oikonomia*, that is, that theology is itself “economic” [*oikonomic*] and did simply become so at a later time through secularisation. From this perspective, the fact that the living being who was created in the image of God in the end reveals himself to be capable only of economy, not politics, or, in other words, that history is ultimately not a political but an “administrative” and “governmental” problem, is nothing but a logical consequence of economic theology. (Agamben, 2011, p.3)

Here “economy” refers to the division of power (rather than economy in the modern sense), that Agamben claims has always been a facet of theology and that theological *oikonomics* has always been a constituent of the *polis*, so that politics has always been, really, a managerial apparatus rather than something truly distinct from the economic sphere of theological conceptualisation of divine power. We can take Marx's comment that religion is “the opium of the people” (Marx, 1997, p.131) as an instance exposing government reliance on its own theological signatory existence for validation and self-ratification. Government and Christian Glory are not distinct categories, but rather feed into one another within the paradigmatic instance – for example modern democratic western government. “If we now call ‘glory’ the uncertain zone in which acclamations, ceremonies, liturgies, and insignia operate, we will see a field of research open before us that is equally relevant and, at least in part, as yet unexplored.” (Agamben, 2011, p.188) However, Christian Glory as a fundamental component of government is not something unique to modernity, rather the current situation of power in the West is merely one of many ‘pit-stops’ along the (temporal) journey of the wider *signature* of *oikonomic* division of power, a *signature* that is itself both

managerial and divine in nature, a sphere “where the juridical and the religious become truly indistinguishable” (Agamben, 2011, p.188).

As a result, we can imagine the UN of Dick’s *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* as a potential regime resulting from our own current situation of government, as the next evolution of *oikonomic* politics where divine power is utilised through the purveying of religious experience. While the UN maintains its secular identity, in the future the novel portrays, it mediates and profits from the selling of spiritual fulfilment as a means of control (Dick, 2012). Here the divine not only authorises government power in the guise of secular democracy but is also utilised – though covertly – as a central apparatus of its *auctoritas*, the central way it maintains power over the people. As such, the novel’s UN administration can be seen as a new chapter in government reliance on the theological and the illusory, a new chapter in that founding fiction that supports government today. Thus, we can interpret genuine fantasy as the new mode of operation for this world’s government – that is, fantasy produced, more concretely, through drugs rather than more abstractly through impressions, ideologies and spin.

The UN’s control over the public is threatened, however, when a new drug, known as Chew-Z, becomes available. This development introduces the second central portion of the story, which centres on Palmer Eldritch, a businessman returned from a ten year space trip. Having brought the strange substance that is sold as Chew-Z back from his voyage, he introduces it to Earth and the colonies. This competing product claims to offer a whole new experience to Can-D. No layouts are required and the hallucination is, in theory, whatever you might choose it to be. As Palmer Eldritch, himself says: “Can-D is obsolete, because what does it do? Provides a few moments of escape, nothing but fantasy. Who wants it? Who needs that when they can get the genuine thing from me?” (Dick, 2012, p.90). And this is not all. Eldritch claims that the world produced by Chew-Z is “a genuine new universe” (Dick, 2012 p.93). But his new product is not catch free, as becomes clear when the users of Chew-Z find themselves inhabiting Eldritch’s fantasies, rather than their own, and certain distinguishing features of Palmer Eldritch start manifesting themselves on the bodies of other people, both in and out of the Chew-Z simulated reality; these are the stigmata of Palmer Eldritch: metal teeth, luxvid eyes, and a mechanical hand.

Palmer Eldritch, it unfolds, has been invaded by an alien presence picked up from the “proxima system”. This is revealed to be in some way linked to his new found drug and the powers he possesses over the world it creates. This world is ruled by Eldritch as a god, but what kind of ‘god’ he is, benevolent or evil, alien or divine, real or a strange side-effect of an untested hallucinogenic substance, remains ambiguous to the novel’s end. But what is *really* happening in the novel is less important than the way Palmer Eldritch becomes a fixation and a towering influence in the lives of the takers of Chew-Z and how their experiences of the drug are shaped by and through Eldritch (Dick, 2012).

The stigmata of Palmer Eldritch can be read as representing the manifestation of divine power in the sphere of the polis, the visual representation of the *oikonomic* division of power, a “modern biopolitics, up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life” (Agamben, 2011, p.1). Chew-Z is a real alternate reality at least inasmuch as the divine quality of governing power and its hold over consensus reality is real, and in this novel it takes the form of a new world dominated and controlled by a single *auctor*, whose power is self-authorised through drug-induced fantasy. The slogan for the Chew-Z drug perfectly elucidates the nature of government control (here in the form of drug distribution) as fundamentally based on a divine *signature*: “GOD PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE. WE CAN DELIVER IT” (Dick, 2012, p.159).

In fact we can read Chew-Z as itself a representation of the operation of the *signature* as reality-constructing and -defining: it is also a portrayal of how malleable reality can be. Eldritch describes the sheer flexibility of his Chew-Z world to Leo Bullero, manager of P. P. Layouts, making clear that whoever designs the Chew-Z drug experience has complete control over it:

In the air before Leo a small section shimmered; out of it emerged a black book, which he accepted. ...

‘What’s that?’ Eldritch asked

‘A King James Bible. I thought it might help protect me.’

‘Not here,’ Eldritch said. ‘This is my domain.’ He gestured at the Bible and it vanished. ‘You could have your own, though, and fill it with Bibles. As can everyone. As soon as our operations are underway.’ (Dick, 2012, p.93)

But the burning question is, who gets to have control over the Chew-Z world? How is it achieved? These questions are never fully, or satisfactorily answered, however I think this is quite deliberate on Dick's part, so as to comment on the ambiguous nature of power. The truth is that the Chew-Z world is not a messianic paradise, but a world, like ours, composed of quasi-dictators, whose power is founded on complex *signatures* that are *indistinct* and confused. Chew-Z is thus both a *paradigm* – a current manifestation of Glory and Kingdom operating through the *oikonomic signature* as its next step – and the *signature*, an unreal place where new *paradigms* can arise – a place of terror and opportunity.

The fact that one of the central characters, Leo, decides to create a bible, instead of any other object, in this world and is then invited to make an environment “full of Bibles” suggests that even if Leo were in charge of this fantasy world, he would still only be able to create things he is familiar with, e.g. a Bible; humanity is thus limited by the *signatures* that bind it. Nevertheless, Eldritch makes Leo's Bible vanish. This suggests that there is potential latent in the new world(s) shaped by Chew-Z (both the fantasy world and the ‘real’ world – if that can be said to still exist). The potential may not originate from Eldritch, but perhaps from the changes he has brought about, opening the eyes of the (until now) passive consumers and regulators of a dead-end system of government: drug-induced brain-washing. The change in reality, the shift in power from the UN to Eldritch inspires Leo to fight for something, where before he only perpetuated the existing system through his work at P. P. Layouts:

I know it; I know myself now and what I can do. It's all up to me. Which is just fine. I saw enough in the future not to ever give up, even if I'm the only one who doesn't succumb, who's still keeping the old way alive, the pre-Palmer Eldritch way. It's nothing more than faith in powers implanted in me from the start which I can – in the end – draw on and beat him with. So in a sense it isn't me; it's something *in* me that even that thing Palmer Eldritch can't reach and consume because since it's not me it's not mine to lose. (Dick, 2012, p.242)

This “something in me” speaks once again to the “whatever” quality discussed earlier in the chapter – that which is unique to all individuals and things and yet which is also the source of their *indistinction*, illustrating that suspension within a *paradigm* is in fact what makes that *paradigm* ‘special’. This is also perhaps what Agamben refers to when he says “[s]igns do not speak unless signatures make them speak. ... [They]

render thinkable the passage between the semiotic and the semantic” (Agamben, 2009, p.61). The *signature* is perhaps a source of potential then, its *undecidable* nature filling a gap, joining but also specifying, making unique. The *undecidable* contains *potentiality* in its relationship to the “whatever”, to the “something in me” that offers a glimmer of possibility.

Ubiquity in *Inoperativity*: Finding Potential in the *Indiscernible*

In previous sections I have described how many of Dick’s characters can be seen as tragic figures and how this relates to the tragic element within Agamben’s *paradigms*. I used this reading of both Dick and Agamben as a way of elucidating the function of the *paradigm* as a construct that is predisposed to eventual *inoperativity* just as Dick’s narratives communicate a similar sense of inevitability when the world around his characters is irrevocably revealed to be false – *inoperative* – in same way. While this is a useful way of bridging the gap between Agamben and Dick initially, it is not the most interesting comparison between them in terms of the paradigmatic. What is key to both Dick’s writings and Agamben’s philosophy is not only their mutual sense of tragedy but also, I will argue, their mutual sense of optimism.

Out of the chaotic relationship between Dick’s characters and their worlds (or simulated worlds) as they are dismantled before their eyes, comes a sense of catharsis, a mourning for what has been lost, combined with a sense of liberation and even optimism as a space of *inoperativity* forms. The falling apart of reality (or established/consensus reality) creates a void that can be filled with new possibilities and *potentiality/impotentiality* can be harnessed. The tragedy is *indistinction* for the characters in Dick’s novels, the gradual realisation that their world is not real and what they once knew has been lost. Yet, like the final downfall of so many tragic heroes, the process is both disturbing and yet undeniably triumphant, as the protagonists accept their fate with stubbornness and zeal – going down, but going down fighting.

Bob Arctor is destroyed by his drug abuse, his reality and his brain seemingly irreparably damaged. However, one of the final scenes of the novel implies hope for other victims of his affliction as he discovers the small “blue flowers” growing in the fields he tends at a New-Path rehabilitation institution.

'I saw,' Bruce said. He thought, I knew. That was it: I saw Substance D growing. I saw death rising from the earth from the ground itself, in one blue field, in stubbled color. ...

Stooping down, Bruce picked up one of the stubbled blue plants, then placed it in his right shoe, slipping it down out of sight. A present for my friends, he thought, and looked forward inside his mind, where no one could see, to Thanksgiving. (Dick, 1999a, p.216-17)

He collects a flower as proof that the New-Path drug rehabilitation organisation is in fact growing and distributing the drug Substance D. Out of the void of Arctor's mind comes a glimmer of remembrance of his former life's work as an enforcer of the law, fostering a positive action that implies hope for a better future. Similarly, in *Time Out of Joint*, Gumm is able to escape his false world, and out of this unpleasant struggle with reality he finds the strength to follow his convictions and join the Lunatics against the One Happy World regime.

Dick's *Ubik* involves a similarly tragic storyline in which the protagonist, Joe Chip, actually dies less than half way through the novel, continuing his existence in a partial form of living known as "half-life", an alternate world where people who have not yet reached total brain death remain before they completely expire. Joe Chip gradually discovers this but still finds the courage to fight a malevolent force within the half-life world and maintain his new, albeit limited, existence. As I shall demonstrate, this feeds into a plot line within the novel that deals deeply with human *potentiality* in the face of an unstable or *inoperative* reality.

In *Ubik*, Joe Chip works for a "Prudence Organisation" run by Glen Runciter which employs "Anti-Psis", who have the power to counteract the effects of those with psychic abilities. When Runciter and Chip accompany several Anti-Psis on a mission that goes awry, Runciter is killed and placed in the cryogenically induced state known as "half-life": a form of consciousness experienced by all those placed in what is colloquially known as "cold-pac".

However, immediately the team of Anti-Psis experience vast alterations in reality, such as the rapid decay of perishable substances and their surroundings into objects from the past. Next, the team begin to die inexplicably, their bodies found in a state of accelerated decay. Chip then discovers, via graffiti on a men's room wall that Glen Runciter is in fact alive: "LEAN OVER THE BOWL AND THEN TAKE A DIVE.

ALL OF YOU ARE DEAD. I AM ALIVE” (Dick, 2000, p.130). Chip and the team begin to realise that it is actually they who are dead and living in half-life, while Runciter was the only actual survivor of the mission.

It becomes clear that Runciter is trying to help the team fight the strange regressive force that is gradually killing them off; this turns out to be Jory, another half-lifer, who has managed to prolong his existence by feeding off the energy of others in cold-pac, killing them. There is only one way to escape Jory’s power and that is by spraying oneself with a can of “Ubik”. One of the ways Runciter is able to help Joe is by pointing him in the direction of Ubik when he (Runciter) appears in a TV commercial:

‘One invisible puff-puff whisk of economically priced Ubik banishes compulsive obsessive fears that the entire world is turning into clotted milk, worn out tape-recorders and obsolete iron-cage elevators, plus other, further, as-yet-unglimpsed manifestations of decay. ...

So look for it, Joe. Don’t just sit there; go out and buy a can of Ubik and spray it all around you night and day.’ (Dick, 2000, p.134-5)

The novel can be read as a kind of (if extremely literal) metaphor for *bare life*. The characters inhabit an existence that is literally described as other to ‘normal’ human existence. The characters exist in a *suspended*, coma-like state, where they are subject to attacks from an often unseen and indefinable force. Like actual coma patients – who can also be described as possessing a form of *bare life* – their lives are at the mercy of those who care for them and maintain their *suspended* state, having no physical or political power of their own with which to make autonomous decisions in the physical world. The horrifying state of decay that Jory’s victims are found in serves as a striking visual metaphor for the stagnant conditions of *bare life*. Whatever existence the half-lifers in cold-pac can be said to possess is forfeit, capable of being destroyed at any moment by Jory, the spectre of sudden death – a killing rendered unpunishable as Jory destroys with impunity, impossible to catch.

Still in line with Agamben, and as Peter Fitting observes “in metaphysical terms, the thing Ubik is also an analogue to Christian ‘grace,’ the divine assistance given man to help him through the earthly vale of tears into which he is fallen, towards the afterlife and his heavenly reward” (Fitting, 1975, p.49). Following this reading, we can understand the layering of the Ubik spray as like process of being ‘clothed’ in heavenly grace. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Agamben argues that clothing is closely

associated with Christian grace and also the concept of being politically ‘clothed’ through one’s *bios*. The Ubik spray allows users to protect themselves from Jory’s *bare life* entropy: to layer themselves with political significance, to gain recognition from *themselves* without the necessity of recognition from the state or any other authoritative body. In this way, Ubik becomes a symbol of that which ought not to be impossible in Agamben’s system: a means of adorning oneself in the robes of political being, removing the need for government or its corollary in authority: the *oikonomic* distribution of God’s power. Man himself thus becomes the sole *auctor* of his being, capable of defining his own existence.

As a result, Ubik can be understood as the ultimate representation of human endeavour and can be read as a representation of what Agamben terms *potentiality/impotentiality*:

For everyone a moment comes in which she or he must utter this ‘I can,’ which does not refer to any certainty or specific capacity but is, nevertheless, absolutely demanding. Beyond all faculties, this ‘I can’ does not mean anything—yet it marks what is, for each of us, perhaps the hardest and bitterest experience possible: the experience of potentiality. (Agamben, 1999, p.178)

The other Anti-Psis are eventually destroyed by Jory, but Chip keeps fighting against Jory’s power of entropy, seeking Ubik. Chip does not unequivocally defeat Jory in the end, but he, and others have the potential to do so. He may not succeed in defeating Jory, but he will keep trying to find new sources of Ubik, sources of *potentiality* capable of changing the course of the future. It is important to remember that *potentiality* is not simply a positive faculty; it does not infer success or even the endeavour to succeed: “[w]hat is essential is that potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence; this is what we call ‘faculty’ or ‘power’” (Agamben, 1999, p.179). Unlike a child, Agamben continues, whose potential to grow and learn carries a level of certitude, a person already possessing knowledge or talent

is not obliged to suffer an alteration; he is instead potential...on the basis of which he can also *not* bring his knowledge into actuality...by not making a work, for example. Thus the architect is potential insofar as he has the potential to not-build, the poet the potential to not-write poems. (Agamben, 1999, p.179)

This is the facet of *potentiality* known as *impotentiality*. Ubik ultimately represents human *potentiality*, concentrated in concretised, spray-can form; it is the unique human moment of the “I can” that Agamben describes. Ubik is not a certainty, it is in short supply and its effects dwindle over time, it isn’t certain that you will be able to get it, but it is, nevertheless, possible, tangible and real. Like the concept of clothing and its signatory counterparts heavenly grace, or political life, Ubik is a man-made construct, developed by the half-lifers who resist Jory’s power (Dick, 2000, p.220-21). It is a metaphor for and a testament to the power of humanity to bestow meaning where it decides to, to seek and find his own validation independent of centralised and tyrannous power structures. Finally, it assures that, though our control may be limited, we still have the potential to guide how the *signature* evolves and how we choose to construct our reality. Ubik is the pure “whatever” quality that gives value to something; it is the kernel of meaning that is the beginning of human epistemological construction and from which we construct networks of knowledge:

I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be. (Dick, 2000, p.223)

Ubik is God, in the sense that God is an idealised representation of the human capacity to create, to strive for better systems of understanding the universe and devising the best structures for organising it into systems of knowledge. God is the universal human striving for a better model through which to understand ‘reality’, or perhaps rather to construct the best reality based on that which we perceive around us. Thus, if Ubik can be said to represent humanity’s own capacity to endow itself with its own brand of heavenly grace, then, more specifically, God is not so much Ubik, as Ubik is a facet of the *oikonomia* of divine power that is being realised and used by mankind. Humanity begins to replace God as master and sovereign of mankind’s destiny and mode of being. Humanity is God and Ubik is a facet of humanity’s divine power. Jory, by contrast, represents a power far more complex than the Devil, but not completely dissimilar to it. Jory is the force of decay and degradation, the ‘negative’ aspect of the *paradigm* or *signature*, prone to decay through *suspension* resulting in the *indistinction* that can breed such horrific extremes as *bare life*.

Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, is another excellent portrayal of the nature of *potentiality*. This novel describes an alternate future in which the axis powers win WWII, and Germany and Japan divide America between themselves with a buffer zone in between. However, within this buffer zone a novelist, Hawthorne Abendsen, writes a subversive novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, describing a version of history where the allies win WWII, bringing hope to the novel's stifled and oppressed main characters. Dick's alternative history is a suffocating one, where the Japanese control the "Pacific States of America", and the Nazis occupy the remaining territories including Washington D.C. and New York.

In the former the domination is mainly cultural, where Japanese philosophy and culture has almost completely subsumed American society. This cultural domination extends to the Japanese fetishizing of pieces of Americana, artefacts of pre-war society which are exoticised and have become an obsession of the wealthy Japanese fashionable elite. The demand for Americana has become so great that there are whole factories engaged in the production of fabricated 'antiques', such as Wyndom Matson Inc., which supply antiques businesses, such as American Artistic Handcrafts run by Robert Childan, with exceptional forgeries that cannot be distinguished from the real artefacts.

Robert believes his antiques are real until an unfortunate business, in which an 1860 Colt .44 is exposed as a fake, reveals the real situation to him. Meanwhile a factory worker for Wyndom Matson, Frank Frink, decides to go into business for himself, making custom jewellery, using new, authentic designs:

In other words, an entire new world is pointed to, by this. The name for it is neither art, for it has no form, nor religion. What is it? I have pondered this pin unceasingly, yet cannot fathom it. We evidently lack the word for an object like this. ... It is authentically a new thing on the face of this world. (Dick, 2001a, p.171)

Robert Childan agrees to sell Frank's pieces, and muses that eventually the antiques forgeries racket will tumble and be exposed, and then, he might actually be ahead of the market, having procured some of Frank's merchandise, the one thing in his shop that can truly be said to be authentic. The current *paradigm* of authenticity is becoming *inoperative* as the 'real' and the 'fake' become indistinct:

With these there's no problem of authenticity. And that problem may someday wreck the historic American artefacts industry. Not today or tomorrow – but after that, who knows.

Better not to have all irons in one fire. (Dick, 2001a, p.145)

The jewellery represents not only artistic merit but the possibility of something authentic coming from a race of people whose cultural value had been consigned to the past, to an illusory perception of the American culture where civil war artefacts are lumped together with clichéd pieces of pop culture. One of Robert Childan's best clients, Mr Tagomi, purchases a "Mickey Mouse Wristwatch" (Dick, 2001a, p.48) from him as a gift to a high ranking client. Mr Tagomi describes the object: "[t]his is most authentic of dying old U.S. culture, a rare retained artefact carrying flavour of bygone halcyon day" (Dick, 2001a, p.47-8). The Japanese have no conception of the value of the items they collect for they have no real understanding of American culture. Thus, it is no wonder that, as all these many and various artefacts temporarily have great value, it will not be long before they are all considered worthless.

The new designs by EdFrank Jewellers are a sign of hope for this society, the sense that there is still *potentiality* to be harnessed in this world for positive outcomes. That *potentiality* truly means that there is always hope because that is the structure of *inoperativity*, since out of the realisation that something is unreal, is false, is *indistinct*, a space is made for genuine creativity. On the other hand, the novel also draws into question the very concept of authenticity, asking why it truly matters whether the artefacts collected by the Japanese are 'real' or 'fake'.

A similar question of authenticity is raised when another of the novel's main character's, Julia – Frank Frink's ex-wife – decides to seek out the author of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. Sensing that the novel has an extra-fictional significance, she questions him to find out the true nature of the book. It has become a craze in this society to use the Chinese I-Ching, book of changes, in everyday life as a means of divination and decision making, and so she asks him if he wrote his book using the I-Ching. Hawthorn's wife eventually answers her: "One by one Hawth made the choices. Thousands of them. By means of the lines. Historical period. Characters. Plot. It took years. Hawth even asked the oracle what sort of a success it would be" (Dick, 2001a, p.245). Having discovered this fact – something she suspected all along –

Julianna asks the “oracle” why it decided to write *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* through Abendsen. The answer it gives is the following:

‘It’s Chung Fu,’ Julianna said. ‘Inner Truth. I know without using the chart, too. And I know what it means.’

Raising his head Hawthorne scrutinised her. He had now an almost savage expression. ‘It means, does it, that my book is true?’

‘Yes,’ she said.

With anger he said, ‘Germany and Japan lost the war?’ ‘Yes.’ (Dick, 2001a, p.247)

This reveals the arbitrary nature of reality, given that this novel posits at least the possibility that there are other realities with dramatic historical differences to our own. If we read this suggestion in the novel less literally, however, we can understand it as implying the latent potential in every moment of human history or human decision. What this moment in the novel communicates is that, like the American artefacts or the EdFrank Jewellery, no event, historical moment, or version of reality is intrinsically more authentic than another. The ‘authenticity’ of any concept or object is derived entirely from the value we impose on it, from the *signature* that relates to it and inscribes it with meaning. An individual always has the *potentiality* to do something, just as they always have to *impotentiality* to not take action; nothing is inevitable but that positive *potentiality* is what gives us hope and reminds us that simply because history has unfolded a certain way, it was not inevitably bound to do so. The past is an uncertainty, and just as much bound by the rules of *potentiality* as the future.

In this chapter I examined Dick’s works viewed through the lens of Agamben’s philosophy, and more broadly the ideal pairing that Agamben’s philosophy forms with some of the central aspects of the sf genre. This chapter elucidates some of the key themes within Agamben’s work in relation to the structure of power and its maintenance, as well as the frightening consequences of its *suspended* nature: the western biopolitical *paradigm* of the concentration camp. Dick’s work serves to illustrate the nature of these power structures and their victims: *homines sacri*. I will now go on to explore these aspects of Agamben’s philosophy in the following chapter, this time with specific reference to gender theory and sf. Here I will look at specific examples of sf – and specifically feminist sf – to explore the nature of gender sf as a

reflection of the representation of real world men and women. Further, I will argue from the position that women constitute a central facet and key exemplar of Agamben's concept of *bare life*.

Chapter 2: The *Suspended Woman*: Sex, Science Fiction, and the Possibility of *Bare Life*

Philip K. Dick's highly unique and unusual body of work illustrates the full capacity of science fiction to engage with the complexities and pit-falls inherent in our tendency to organise reality into binary knowledge systems: human and machine; human and alien; state and subject; criminal and law enforcer. These dualisms are representative of our overall spectrum of understanding, from the way we understand our own identity and the identities of others, to the manner in which governments utilise and maintain these conceptualisations as a means of control. In other words, sf is often able to illustrate and expose the ancient and enduring bonds between identity, politics, and the body – where the last of these is the central subject of the former two.

Biopolitics is a key subject of sf literature and as such it is complemented by Agamben's philosophical system, particularly his key concepts of *indistinction*, and its nightmarish artefact *bare life*. Agamben has written numerous works on identity, sovereignty and politics, and even the body as chief subject of both self and government; yet, he has almost entirely neglected what I consider the most central mutual aspect of all three facets of the biopolitical sphere: gender. So pervasive is this *signature* of gender, so entrenched is the discourse that produces and maintains it, that it seems incredible to discuss the body and the powers that govern it without reference to this highest of regulating forces implemented from birth: what Judith Butler describes as the Heterosexual Matrix of compulsory gender and sexuality (Butler, 2006a). We cannot begin to understand the intricacies of biopolitical power without understanding the nature of the social and political organisation of those bodies upon which this power is exercised. We must foreground our analysis with a systematic examination of what may be the *arche* of all binary power structures, that which has been assumed historically, and constructed socially, as the derivation of fundamental difference: the dichotomous structures of sex and gender.

Furthermore, in order to understand the functioning of this binary we must delve into the mysterious nature of the specific sex and gender that has become the face of these constructions, a fundamental *signature* within a *signature*, the archetypal

symbol of biology, body and essential physical otherness: Woman. Woman is, of course, an essential part of the gender binary but she also forms a *signature* all of her own. Given Woman's historic lack of political legitimacy and social autonomy, of marginalised identity inscribed with an otherness predicated on biological characteristics, Agamben's term *bare life* would seem a highly appropriate description of the political position of womankind. Megan Ruxton has also approached gender politics from a similar point of view, considering women as *femina sacra*, in relation to GamerGate and the violent threats made towards women who spoke out about unequal representation of women in video games (Ruxton, in press); earlier, in 2003 (soon after Agamben's *Homo Sacer* was published), Andrew Asibong also wrote an article questioning whether it is possible to associate *bare life* with a particular sex or sexualisation (Asibong, 2003)¹. In this thesis, I will argue further that gender, women and *bare life* are not only related conceptually but rather than Woman's fashioning as fundamentally physically and mentally other throughout history can be considered as the foremost example of the state of *bare life*: making her an archetypal *homo sacer* figure, perhaps even the original incarnation of Agamben's definition of this *paradigm*.

Though Agamben has done no work specifically on gender studies, I will show that his philosophical system is highly compatible with gender and feminist theory, where both are bridged by a mutual propensity towards the biopolitical. Agamben's system allows us to consider the social constructs of sex and gender from a paradigmatic perspective where male and female form a binary opposition within the overall *signature* of gender; thus, following this logic through, we can understand the most prevalent and pervasive expression of this *signature* unique to our historical moment (the *paradigm*), as patriarchy.

Furthermore, Agamben's paradigmatic model is in many ways comparable with Foucault's discursive understanding of power as dispersed among systems and institutions rather than lying with a single group or individual. His method has been indispensable as a means of exposing systems of female subordination: "the material

¹ In this thesis I have chosen to focus primarily on gender and representations of women in relation to Agamben. However there is much further work to be done on sex and sexuality in the way that Asibong does the article I reference here. I hope to look in more detail at sexuality as well as the interplay of gender and sexual relationships and use this research as the basis for future works.

existence of women is seen to be borne through different, often competing discursive strategies which in naming, classifying, or speaking the truth of women, also bring her into being” (Fenton, 2001, p.88). Agamben’s interest in Foucault is perhaps part of what makes his own work so compatible with feminist thought. He is perhaps the most valuable a source for Agambenian and feminist thought, as the father of biopolitics, cementing the link between government and the regulation of populations and bodies, (Foucault, 1991). However, though the philosophers’ systems agree in many ways, Agamben’s discerns a means through which the apparatuses that make up social reality, (i.e. gender) may not only be revealed, but through that exposition eventually become unravelled.

Foucault’s philosophy has been revolutionary for the movements that utilised his system in conjunction with other disciplines, such as gender and feminist theory. However, Foucault’s work does not escape the binary, self/other conceptualisation of social and political power dynamics that inform the identity politics adopted by feminism among other political movements. I believe this self/other dyad that has long defined feminist scholarship and feminist political thought is deeply limiting and reductionist because it ultimately cannot avoid separating male and female into two fundamentally opposed camps, obscuring the true complexity of the actual relationship between men and women in the social and political sphere. Because Agamben’s system does not rely on such binary frameworks, his system can be used to transcend identity politics, providing a more nuanced framework for examining the intricacies of what are traditionally viewed as opposing categories, for example the established binary of male and female.

Many critics perceive Agamben as pessimistic about the capacity of the *paradigm* to be overcome as a form of epistemological organisation. It is certainly undeniable that, for Agamben, in the wake of one disused *paradigm* another, equally problematic one takes its place; this is very similar to Foucault’s understanding of discursive power as a system that is self-renewing. Agamben’s work is heavily influenced by Foucault, particularly his development of his concept of *paradigms*²

² See Agamben’s chapter “What is a Paradigm?” in *The Signature Of All Things* where he explains the nature of the *paradigm* in detail with reference to Foucault.

and *signatures*³. This is perhaps partly why Agamben's philosophy works so well with gender theory and, though the utilisation of Agamben's philosophy offers a new approach to gender theory, Foucault's inherent resonance should not be forgotten or dismissed in favour of Agamben; however I argue it is Agamben's ability to go, in many ways, beyond Foucault (in terms of the self/other dyad embraced by so many disciplines) that makes the combination of Agamben with gender so innovative.

As discussed in the previous chapter, though some critics have been quick to label Agamben's work pessimistic, I see a robust strain of optimism in his work that counteracts this apparent cynicism; though Agamben's system implies a likely repetition of the previous oppressive model, it does not insist upon it, and it certainly does not preclude the possibility of valuable change: it even fosters the possibility that we might escape the existing paradigmatic pattern through his concepts of *inoperativity* and *potentiality*. As a result, Agamben's work not only aids in elucidating the manner of female oppression and the construction of gender identity, but also suggests the possibility of moving beyond existing *paradigms*: thwarting their operations by exposing the nature of their functioning.

This chapter will investigate to what extent classic works of feminist sf literature fail or succeed in undermining the dichotomous relationship of the sexes through the lens of Agamben's philosophy. I shall analyse examples of the feminist sf cannon in relation to how they attempt to complicate established *paradigms* of masculinity/maleness and femininity/femaleness. For example, many of the feminist (often all-female) societies depicted in these novels are strong and efficient; impotent, passive, weak-minded femaleness is thus re-imagined to assume vastly different connotations. However, many of these societies achieve this by simultaneously appropriating constructions of femininity. In Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*, the Jewish 'Free Town' of Tikva (one of the few areas of this future society not controlled by a corporation) is characterised by its unusual (compared to the rest of this future world) concern for gender equality as well as its highly feminised aspects: it is a small agricultural society focused on values of community and family,

³ Foucault also used to term 'signature' in his work and though Agamben's own use of this term has undoubtedly been informed by Foucault, Agamben's own understanding of the *signature* should be viewed as distinct from Foucault's.

dominated by the masculine corporate dystopian landscape that surrounds it (Piercy, 1993). Similarly, the all-female planet of Whileaway, in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, though not without violence or aggression, is characterised by a preoccupation with farming and cultivation and a deference towards nature and the pastoral. The planet's name, Whileaway (reminiscent of the phrase "to while away the time") suggests a passive acceptance of the passage of time; the women of this planet are not explorers, seekers, or pursuers of improved efficiency, rather they amble through life with a feminine air of resignation, never wishing for more than they have (Russ, 2010). Lastly, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* includes the all-female society of Beulah, composed of strong, violent, warrior-women inspired by a terrifying 'goddess' figure called 'Mother' to violently retaliate against men. They plan to castrate men and forcibly turn them into women in order position themselves mythically as creators rather than simply the creations of the supreme masculine mythic figure: God (Carter, 1982). This society's strength is founded on the realisation of classically masculine fears – castration, female sexuality, and female volatility. Their plan to destroy mankind in order to raise Woman out of oppression is a tacit acceptance of the biological determinism that fuels and empowers patriarchal discourse; that is, that women are biologically, physically, inferior to men who are their biologically determined masters. The brutal and disturbing notion that only the destruction of the male and the masculine can bring about female emancipation merely reinforces the perceived inferiority of womankind and further entrenches the perceived divide between the sexes created and maintained by patriarchal dichotomous values of power and domination.

Each of these novels attempt to reappropriate the female/feminine by imbuing it with signifiers of power. Yet each of these emancipating gestures is complicated by their proximity to the original *paradigm* of patriarchy. The myths of womanhood that these novels, in part, perpetuate are components of the oppressive patriarchal *paradigm* they seek to condemn. It is a contradiction to imply an essentialist gender binarism while vying for equality of the sexes; essentialism is the language of patriarchy, and feminist opposition politics is capitulation to the same dichotomous reasoning that consolidates male domination and privilege. Attempts to reclaim femininity for the purposes of women as a whole can suggest merely an inversion of

the patriarchal *paradigm*, rather than a means of looking beyond it, placing men in positions of subordination under dominant women.

The inadequate attempts to grapple with the complexities of gender in these novels reflects a much greater deficiency within the core of feminist thought; that is, the influence of second-wave, twentieth-century feminist politics whose legitimacy relied vastly on an adversarial narrative; sometimes referred to as ‘radical feminism’ the activist culture of this chapter in feminist history sort to group women together under the banner of virtuous victims turned rebels (women) who must battle against tyrannous male oppressors.⁴ Of course there is some truth to this narrative – for centuries women have been oppressed, largely, by a system (patriarchy) that favours men and puts them in positions of power over women who have historically been treated as something less than human/man. However, this stripped down narrative of women’s oppression, and the binary logic on which it rests, does not offer the nuance necessary to truly overcome patriarchal cultural norms and political injustices. Rather, placing men and women into opposing camps and using this as the basis for cultural change can only ultimately play into the hands of the patriarchy or at least the paradigmatic instance that allowed it to gain prominence, as I will explain in this chapter⁵. The binary logic of male and female has endured within modern feminist thought (both in the academic sphere and popular culture) and it is this apparent animosity towards men that has led to many young women today feeling compelled to reject the term ‘feminist’, assuming that the word is synonymous with misandry⁶.

⁴ Examples of the kind of divisive isolationist feminism I am describing can be found among writers like Jill Johnson who wrote *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* which called on women to reject men and male society while also suggesting that sexual relationships with men were a form of collusion with the patriarchy. Another famous example is Mary Daly who, in her famous work *Gyn/Ecology*, wrote about women as having a separate inherently female nature that sets them apart from male culture and patriarchy – further she argued that traditional philosophy should be rejected on the grounds that, because it has largely been created by men, it is part of the same patriarchal structure that inevitably oppresses women.

⁵ It should be noted here that the rallying cry of early radical feminism was not entirely successful in uniting women under a unified banner as second-wave feminism rapidly splintered off into many separate groups with very different ideas of what feminism and women’s liberation should consist. During this period these groups consisted of lesbian feminism, separatist feminism, liberal feminism, ecofeminism and many more. Today the feminist movement is just as diverse and increasingly atomised, see for example: trans-feminism, TERF (Trans-Exclusory Radical Feminism), SWERF (Sex-Worker Exclusory Radical Feminism).

⁶ See, for example, the recent Women Against Feminism campaign and movement where women take pictures of themselves with placards stating various reasons they reject feminism; the twitter hashtag #antifeminism; a recent survey of men and women by The Fawcett Society in 2016 that showed only 9 percent of women Britons would describe themselves as feminists (though 74 percent believed in

This modern suspicion and even antipathy with which feminism is viewed is understandable given the way public figures within feminism are often seen to offer their views. During the 2016 US election primaries celebrated feminist figures Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright both called on young women Bernie Sanders supporters to rally round Hillary Clinton instead as it emerged that Sanders was more popular with this demographic than Clinton. Albright chastised women who did not support Clinton by saying at a Clinton rally: “there is a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other” while Steinem suggested in an interview with Bill Mayer that women Sanders backers were only supporting him in the hope of having opportunities to meet young men (Rappeport, 2017). This kind of gender based men versus women mentality that views women who do not confine their support to members of their own gender as traitors is the kind of divisive discourse within feminism that I hope to challenge and explore in this thesis.

With this chapter I hope to attempt to unpack some of the problematic logic within feminist discourse while simultaneously filling the gap which Agamben’s work has left around the sphere of gender. I believe Agamben’s philosophy and feminist theory are uniquely complementary so that gender theory can be advanced through the insights of Agamben’s paradigmatic system while the larger sphere of biopolitical studies can be furthered by cementing its link with gender and feminist theory.

Agamben’s work can be utilised to analyse gender as a *paradigm* that exposes itself through the *suspended* nature of the categories of Man/male/masculine and Woman/female/feminine. This exposition manifests through instances of *indistinction* where the two sets become momentarily, obviously erroneous. However, there is another more complex layer to the functioning of the gender *paradigm*. For within that construction of gender is the equally pervasive apparatus of Woman. Second-wave feminism is responsible not only for an antagonistic binarism between the sexes but also for subscribing to a long-standing tradition within patriarchal discourse, entrenching the *paradigm* of Woman understood as a

gender equality) – and while younger women were more likely to adopt the term, women aged 18-24 were also most likely to oppose feminism – see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/only-7-percent-of-britons-consider-themselves-feminists/> for more information.

homogenous group with mutual experiences and interests. This *paradigm* is also prey to the doomed dichotomous logic of the universal and the specific case: the individual woman and the larger party she is said to represent.

Woman or Womankind? The Feminine in the Ether

I have described Agamben's *paradigms* as allowing for the organisation of knowledge: "it is a singular object that, standing equally for all others of the same class, defines the intelligibility of the group of which it is part and which, at the same time, it constitutes" (Agamben, 2009, p.17). The *paradigm* creates and fosters intelligibility and in doing so aids in creating the reality it seeks to make fathomable. As such, *paradigms* stand for the examples of which they are composed and even supersede that which they represent. Furthermore, *paradigms* are not only a means of intelligibility but also a discursive code that enables and constitutes power structures, "the paradigm is never already given, but is generated and produced" (Agamben, 2009, p.17), forming a network of 'myths' that simultaneously elucidate and distort reality. In *The Signature of all Things*, Agamben describes the particulars of this process through the example set by Warburg's *Mnemosyne* plate collection, specifically his plate 46 which includes many visual representations of a nymph:

Every photograph is the original; every image constitutes the arche and is, in this sense, 'archaic.' But the nymph herself is neither archaic nor contemporary; she is undecidable in regards to diachrony and synchrony, unicity and multiplicity. This means that the nymph is the paradigm of which individual nymphs are the exemplars. Or to be more precise...the nymph is the paradigm of the single images, and the single images are the paradigms of the nymph. (Agamben, 2009, p.29)

Warburg's plate offers a visual map of the paradigmatic in operation. Every image in the plate's collection is both an individual representation and an exemplar of the broader concept of a nymph. This figure in each is simultaneously representative of the specific example of a nymph as well as the 'general' nymph that stands for all members of the 'nymph' *paradigm*.

Agamben's consideration of the *paradigm* "calls into question the dichotomous opposition between the particular and the universal...and presents instead a

singularity irreducible to any of the dichotomy's two terms" (Agamben, 2009, p.19). As already discussed, his analysis implies an inherent instability within our method of understanding and the way we organise knowledge, whereby general and specific instances within the paradigmatic become blurred so that there can be no origin: in other words, there is no fixed notion or origin of a 'nymph', rather her existence is predicated on a fluctuation of collated concepts that all oscillate *between* the general and particular in that the common contains properties of the proper and vice versa, thus, producing what Agamben calls an *indistinction* within the nymph *paradigm*.

I argue that the *paradigm* of Woman functions in exactly this same manner. The nymph is an image of a woman just as every woman and nymph is an image of Womankind. Woman is both singular and universal, but crucially, uniquely *suspended* due to her position in a broader *paradigm* of gender as a whole, that envelops all female exemplars as subordinate entities. Literature has a long history of utilising female characters as a means of creating an atmosphere of ambiguity, anxiety, fear or unrest, from Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth* to *Jane Eyre's* crazed, ghost-like Bertha to the psychotic Annie Wilkes of Stephen King's *Misery*. Sf literature, betraying its gothic origins, uses this trope to particular effect, however, personifying those anxieties and uncertainties peculiar to the sf genre through the figure of a woman:

[T]he problematic spaces signalled by 'gender' are crucial to sf imaginings. The presence of 'Woman' – whether actual, threatened or symbolically represented (through the alien, or 'mother earth' for example) – reflects cultural anxieties about a range of 'Others' immanent in even the most scientifically pure, technically focused sf. (Merrick, 2003, p.241)

That this, "the series of self/other' dichotomies suggested by gender, such as human/alien, nature/technology...", etc. are encapsulated in the figure of the female character or presence in the sf novel. In this way Woman comes to represent that universal sense of the unknown characteristic of sf – one that does not necessarily specifically point to any real-world social or political anxiety, but rather a wide-reaching meta-unknown – what Darko Suvin might call the *novum* – that is at once deeply internal to the human psyche and yet utterly divorced from the anthropocentric; it is the extra-terrestrial or the extra-human, the alien both literally

and figuratively, the monstrous other that is both central to human understanding and yet also perhaps outside the limits of human comprehension.

Stanislaw Lem's famous work, *Solaris*, contains one of the most sophisticated portrayals of this supreme otherness that foregrounds mankind's understanding of itself and its place in the universe; it is also a profound and highly effective use of the female as otherness given physical form. In the novel, the psychologist, Kris Kelvin, boards the research station hovering above the mysterious planet of Solaris, to join the research team observing the huge ocean-like being that covers most of the planet's surface. A recent bombardment of high-energy X-rays on the surface of Solaris, in an attempt to communicate with the lifeform, results in the appearance of several 'visitors' who haunt each of the characters aboard the station. Kelvin's visitor is an exact (and apparently also self-aware) duplicate of his dead wife, Rheya, who committed suicide years ago. Like all the visitors, Rheya does not know why or how she came to exist aboard the research station, her being is completely defined and constituted by the thoughts and memories of Kelvin. She is only as real as he remembers her to be, her movements, actions and words only as 'real' and distinct as Kelvin can conjure from his mind: "my terror was gradually overcome by my conviction that it was the real Rheya there in the room with me, even though my reason told me that she seemed somehow stylised, reduced to certain characteristic expressions, gestures and movements" (Lem, 2003, p.60). The reader is never offered any meaningful information about Rheya or Kelvin's relationship with her; rather, she is described only in terms of certain extreme characteristics which appear to the reader to be as "stylised", exaggerated, and inauthentic as Rheya appears to Kelvin. She appears as a caricature of uncontrollable womanhood while remaining herself characterless, indistinct, demarcated by descriptors of ambiguity, 'vague'. This allows her to maintain that universality that exposes her *suspended* state – like the nymph – between universal and particular figure of Woman.

However, Rheya's female otherness portrays far more than the merely female, the nature of her character is not, I argue, merely the result of Lem's clumsy attempt and failure to produce a plausible female character of substance. Rather, I believe Rheya stands for a universal ambiguity, an incredible insurmountable unknown, an entirely alien, extra-terrestrial force: finally, Rheya represents the human failure to

conceptualise the other; reduced as she is to a paltry facsimile of the actual, deceased Rheya: she represents the limits of the human capacity to make the unfamiliar intelligible. Even when the unknown presents itself in the guise of the familiar, the human mind interprets only a profound sense of the uncanny, the psychological horror of *indistinction*. Thus, the novel is haunted by a complicated and profound sense of loss, a simultaneous anxiety and sorrow for man's ineptitude when confronted by his most tantalising obsession, the fundamental unknown that is the cornerstone of sf: "space, the final frontier". The Rheya visitor encapsulates not only this unknown but also all the fear and regret associated with the notion of human impotence. In other words, human inability, human lack, is female.

To put it another way, Woman is a caricature of human powerlessness; the Rheya visitor's character displays a myriad of feminine clichés, all monikers of passivity and unhinged emotion. She is suicidal, displaying a volatile, child-like emotionality combined with an unsettling, desperate neediness revealed by her constant compulsion to remain in Kelvin's presence and her violent reaction when separated from him:

The panel, made of some plastic material, caved in as though an invisible person at my side had tried to break into the room. The steel frame bent further and further inwards and the paint was cracking. Suddenly I understood: instead of pushing the door, which opened outwards, Rheya was trying to open it by pulling it towards her. ...[t]here was a resounding crack and the panel, forced beyond its limits, gave way. Simultaneously the handle vanished, torn from its mounting. Two bloodstained hands appeared, thrusting through the opening and smearing the white paint with blood. The door split in two, the broken halves hanging askew on their hinges. First a face appeared, deathly pale, then a wild-looking apparition, dressed in an orange and black bathrobe, flung itself sobbing upon my chest." (Lem, 2003, p.98)

It becomes clear later in the novel that Rheya, like all the visitors, *must* remain in the presence of the person who conjured her in order to remain extant. This moment in the novel, when Kelvin first begins to realise this fact, exposes the larger *paradigm* of gender (where the *paradigm* of Woman is a separate but related apparatus), or more specifically gender under the western conceptualisation of patriarchy. Like universal Woman, Rheya's very being is predicated on the imagination of Man, and

his ability to envision her. Composed of moments of identity (common) and difference (proper), the founding principal and the specific instance which arises from it (and therefore can be seen as subordinate to it), the *paradigm* can be said to consist of both the example and the exclusion. We can extrapolate from his system that gender is a *paradigm* where masculinity/Man/maleness and femininity/Woman/femaleness exist as the common and proper respectively. Broadly speaking, we can see how man is socially and politically constructed as the founding subject within gender, whereas woman is constructed as the ‘other’, subordinate to her binary opposite. Thus, without male being, which is *common* being, female existence is merely *proper* in isolation – a floating example without an exemplar, pure non-being. In Lem’s novel, Man (Kelvin) imagines Woman (Rheya), and his image is profoundly imperfect – a reflection so horrifying that it abhors itself and chooses destruction: Rheya eventually finds she is unable to live, knowing she is a mere shadow of another deceased woman and, just like the original Rheya, ends her life. This novel exemplifies why I have chosen sf literature as the stage for my analysis of gender in relation to Agamben’s philosophy. I believe sf literature concerned with gender – whether explicitly feminist or not – reveals the unique compatibility and intersection of biopolitics, gender theory, and Agamben’s philosophy.

The application of Agamben to gender theory is highly compatible with the work of feminist writer Monique Wittig and her famous analysis of language as foregrounding our ingrained assumption of the supremacy of Man over Woman. Wittig’s understanding of gender as primarily a linguistic apparatus is immediately revealed through the common phrase ‘mankind’, where the exemplar of Man stands for all humans, obscuring the very existence of Woman through blunt absence (Wittig, 1990b, p.55)⁷. In her later essay, *Homo Sum*, Wittig’s words are comparable to Agamben as she also seeks to disrupt the established oppositional structure of traditional philosophical thought:

⁷ It should be noted that as a French feminist, Wittig’s work was concerned with the linguistic practice of gendering of the French language primarily – as a result, though her work is certainly applicable to other languages including English the issue of translatability should be considered. For example, in French all nouns are gendered and, furthermore, French contains the indeterminate pronoun “on” which does not indicate a gender and thus can describe either a “he” or a “she” (Wittig makes great use of this linguistic aspect as a means of exploring gender in her novel *L’Opoponax*).

If we consider the first table of opposites which history has handed down to us, as it has been recorded by Aristotle (Metaphysics, Book I, 5, 6)

Limited	Unlimited
Odd	Even
One	Many
Right	Left
Male	Female
Rest	Motion
Straight	Curved
Light	Dark
Good	Bad
Square	Oblong ...

... Thus under the series of the 'One' (the absolute being nondivided, divinity itself) we have 'male' (and 'light') that were from then on never dislodged from their dominant position. Under the other series appear the unrestful: the common people, the females, the 'slaves of the poor,' the 'dark' (barbarians who cannot distinguish between slaves and women), all reduced to the parameter of non-Being. For Being is being good, male, straight, one, in other words, godlike, while non-Being is being anything else (many), female: it means discord, unrest, dark, and bad. (Wittig, 1990, p.5-6)

Thus, whatever else the *paradigm* of Woman may represent (as a *paradigm* separate from gender as a whole), she is foremost an archetypal example of non-being, constructed as an exemplar and universal symbol of a void. Where Man stands for the common, the prime example of everything good in human experience, Woman has come to stand for something much more all-encompassing and sinister, a lack that stands for all absence, a non-existence made flesh.

Agamben's paradigmatic method and Wittig's work on the linguistic foundations of gender constructions are highly compatible models. A paradigmatic understanding of gender goes beyond the dichotomous logic that Wittig describes and critiques above, revealing that gender is not only a product of patriarchal bigotry, but that the narrative opposition at the heart of this fiction does not even possess internal consistency. Wittig's assessment concludes that language as part of an oppressive patriarchal system that imposes an artificial divide between women from men: "the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are defined as asymmetrical or hierarchical from the outset. Language plays a key role in sustaining this imbalance, for by learning to

call oneself a woman one is also implicitly deferring to the privileges enjoyed by men” (Kaplan and Glover, 2000, p.xxx). Women are created in relation to men through language such that the categories do not exist outside of heteronormative patriarchal order that has been founded on the fiction of oppositional discourse. Similarly to Wittig, Agamben’s philosophy (when applied to gender) reveals the very impossibility of a true binary relationship such as that of Man and Woman, or any of the other numerous dichotomies that Wittig describes, which underpin human conceptualisation and fall into the unstable categories of universal and particular. The *inoperative* nature of Woman is founded on a fundamental contradiction that can be traced through Agamben’s analysis of the functioning of the *paradigm*: “the example is excluded from the rule not because it does not belong to the normal case but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its belonging to it” (Agamben, 2009, p.24). Woman is not simply confined to her status as other, rather her marginalised status is produced through her being caught between her position as *proper* (the exclusion from the rule) and, as an exact reflection of Man’s desires, the *common* (Man): “the example...is the symmetrical opposite of the exception” (Agamben, 2009, p.24). Though considered inferior, and thus holding the position of the *excluded* within the gender *paradigm* of patriarchy, ‘Woman’ is also, in some sense, *included* in the rule by virtue of her dichotomous position. This contradiction represents the inherent instability within the *paradigm* that produces the “non-being” of Woman which Wittig writes about. However, this non-being is not produced purely as a result of otherness, rather the strangeness of Woman is the result of her *suspension* between male/masculine and female/feminine qualities; this is because the two categories are incapable of remaining confined to their own spheres.

Once again, Lem’s *Solaris* offers a profound illustration of this *suspension*; returning to the scene where Rheyra breaks through Kelvin’s door, the reader observes a conflicting cocktail of both masculine and feminine imagery that contributes to the surreal and jarring quality of the passage. Rheyra’s is a classically deranged female mind, yet the expression of her constant distress consistently evokes a sense of terror in both Kelvin and the reader. Her erratic nature is more than a manifestation of stereotypical male anxiety over female emotion and sexuality: Rheyra constitutes a perpetual threat that is both sinister and, given her highly destructive powers, also masculine in quality. She penetrates the door, violently with a display of brute

strength in order to reach Kelvin, revealing that at least a part of her (or perhaps the Solaris intelligence that helped to create her) is deeply destructive and powerful, willing to injure herself out of necessity. This suggests that the feminine aspect of the Rheya, that we see “sobbing upon [Kelvin’s] chest,” (Lem, 2003, p.98) horrified at the damage she caused, may be no more than a guise or controlled simulation behind which a far more complex entity lurks – the alien intelligence of the Solaris, ocean-like creature. Rheya is an off-shoot of a larger organism, just as Woman is a component of the larger apparatus of gender. Woman, like Rheya, is caught between exemplarity and specificity. Is Rheya merely an expression of the single consciousness of the Solaris creature, or could she have broken free of this distinction to become her own person? It is impossible to say; her *indiscernibility* from a wider homogeneity can be read as a disturbing reflection of the individual woman’s absorption into the wider collective of Womankind, leaving her suspended between two false opposites of singular entity and collective unit.

Returning to Wittig, while we have established that Woman is not only an expression of non-being, but is rather *suspended* between categories of subordinate and dominant, we must remember that Agamben would see this *suspension* as leading to an *indistinction* that has the *potentiality* for highly destructive consequences. For Agamben, *suspension* is akin to non-being, or at least the capacity to be politically recognised as such, a mode of existence whose *indistinction* is so severe that it is barely intelligible as a form of being at all: *bare life*.

Woman’s political existence has always been predicated on her sexual characteristics, her biology, making her in many ways an archetypal exemplar of biopolitics in action. Even at the beginning of the second-wave feminist movement the conversation of gender was beginning to take an increasingly biopolitical turn. Simone de Beauvoir exposed the situation of women as that of “a second sex”, making it clear that the biological foregrounds the construction of supposed female inferiority: “if I wish to define myself, I first have to say ‘I am a woman’; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth...a man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex” (De Beauvoir, 1997, p.15). In other words, a woman cannot present herself politically or socially without recourse to her biological aspect or what Agamben refers to as *zoe*. Soon after, Betty Friedan would describe the

political and sexual position of women in society as a “comfortable concentration camp” (Frieden, 2010, p.247). For Frieden, the women who find themselves lulled into a false sense of security by tradition and hence take up the roles of mother and wife “are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps – and the millions more who refused to believe that the concentration camps existed” (Frieden, 2010, p.247). These seminal works within feminist literature reinforce the body politic as integral to the philosophical projects of gender theory and feminism as we understand them today, founded on second-wave conceptualisations of women as socially constructed *primarily* as sexual, biological beings.

I argue that this crude definition of female identity and personhood exemplifies the process that produces what Agamben terms *bare life*. As previously discussed, for Agamben, a subject with *bare life* is stripped of their *bios*: their political being and juridical rights. This denudation leaves them with only their *zoe*: their raw, biological life akin to that of an animal. In relation to this, while Woman is recognised as politically autonomous, the spectre of her biological sex determines the nature of her political identity. Agamben’s paradigmatic system, and his biopolitical thought, can provide an invaluable blueprint for understanding the intricacies of sex, gender, patriarchy, and how these converge on the female body as a site of *bare life*, and inextricably gendered *zoe*. Poignantly exemplifying this link between Agamben’s work and feminist theory, Betty Friedan’s words likening the state of a ‘housewife’ to a camp victim echo those from Agamben’s most famous and controversial of statements: “today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West” (Agamben, 1998, p.181). For Agamben, the state creates *bare life* where it sees fit, as a means of consolidating power through the *suspension* of juridical rights: “the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as ordinary political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zoe* and *bios*” (Agamben, 1998, p.181). While recognising the validity of some as political subjects capable of what is considered politically sanctioned ‘life’ in the eyes of government, it declares the remainder as possessing unworthy, unliveable lives, placing them in the virtual (if not an actual) camp of the modern democratic state.

However, in this chapter I shall argue that sf is not only a place where *bare lives* can be analysed and dissected, it is also a space where they may even be permitted to live once again:

“While...feminist utopias [often]...present better worlds than our own, I think the original meaning of utopia is an especially fruitful one; utopia as an imaginary place, a nowhere land, a realm like the unconscious, where dreams may flourish and desires be realised.” (Lefanu, 1989, p.53)

Sf literature, especially those works now considered part of the feminist sf literature canon, has theorised new and exciting modes of being for gendered subjects. In the space of sf, gender identity outside of prescribed norms is made possible or, to use the terminology of Judith Butler: “liveable” (Butler, 2004, 13). Butler explores the themes of performance, recognition, and the biopolitical subject to examine the specific ways in which gender prefigures our lives as human political subjects. Her understanding of the body politic is remarkably compatible with Agamben’s conception of life as both a personal entity and a public one forever intertwined with the lives and experiences of others:

The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. (Butler, 2004, p.21)

For Butler, as for Agamben, the private sphere of the self, for example one’s sexual desires, are *indiscernibly* blended with one’s social dimension. Gender is one of the most significant social apparatuses that contribute to the *indistinction* of these spheres. As I will show, gender *paradigms*, in tandem with what Butler terms the Heterosexual Matrix – a compulsory network, regulating sexual desire and socially imposed, corresponding gendered behaviour – are founded on the unstable *zoe/bios* model of identity that has formed the basis of the *paradigm*, life, and our understanding of the self for perhaps the last two thousand years.

Sf, particularly feminist sf or those sf texts concerned with gender, are highly valuable in exposing *paradigms* of gender and sexuality, understood as a biopolitical

apparatus and means of control. Furthermore, it has the capacity to imagine alternatives to the current paradigm through this exposition and further *suspension* of the existing model. Judith Butler poses the question:

[I]f I am a certain gender, will I be regarded as part of the human? Will the human expand to include me in its reach? If I desire in certain ways will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life and will it be recognisable to the others upon which I depend for social existence? (Butler, 2004, p.2-3)

In other words, is a life outside of the established heteronormative model liveable and possible and, if so, under what conditions? Perhaps the answer lies in keeping a sense of Agambenian *potentiality* alive. In many ways the ‘silver lining’ to Agamben’s system, *potentiality* is what results from the void of *indisintiction* that lies at the heart of every paradigmatic case. As one *paradigm* dissolves there is the potential for a genuinely different system to arise that improves upon the previous stagnated model. Sf literature is a testing ground for this potential development. It is a place of pure *potentiality*, more so than any other genre, as it offers not only fantasy but, as a virtual world of fiction, the capacity for legitimacy – the chance to make unliveable life possible if only in an imagined landscape: “the thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity” (Butler, 2004, p.31). The space of sf is perhaps the necessity of which Butler speaks here; it could be considered the ultimate haven for *bare life*, where *bare life* has the opportunity to become possible again, to become, in some way, concretised, sanctioned life. I will suggest how Agamben’s philosophy applied to gender can imply a path for future change and in my following chapter I will proceed to expand on how a project for change may be imagined through the work of Deleuze.

While many sf works, like *Solaris*, highlight the *undecidability* of Womanhood and gender as a whole, they cannot necessarily offer insight into how these *paradigms* might be challenged or disrupted. What we might refer to as the feminist sf literature canon – with writers such as Joanna Russ, James Triptree Jr., and Ursula Le Guin – has made numerous attempts to imagine a better world for both sexes, or at least foster a critical analysis of our current gender *paradigm* by portraying alternative

gender arrangements, both desirable and undesirable. Marleen S. Barr writes: “Feminist science fiction literature is as good as it gets in regard to women’s roles and lives” (Barr, 2000, p.3). However, whilst I agree that feminist sf has the potential to construct ideal societies, the utopian strain in feminist sf possesses that same tension that exists in all utopia, a melancholic sense that such a society cannot be achieved, the truth that the complexity of creating a perfect society for all often results in the production of a society that caters to none. By attempting to serve the majority at the expense of the freedoms of the individual Agamben’s state of exception threatens to be realised. This troubling aspect within feminist sf is the consequence of a wider problematic within the feminist movement itself, built on the slippery foundations of opposition politics

Some aspects of feminist discourse would seem to suggest a role reversal, in which male and female would trade their respective positions as the *common* and *proper*, rather than an attempt to rethink or remove the hierarchical system altogether. The influence of second-wave feminism bolstered a notion of female homogeneity, imbuing the very term, ‘feminism’, with a bias toward the biological state of femaleness: “although an ontological construction of the gendered subject has been claimed for political reasons, the assumption of an essential identity consigns subjectivity to biological reductionism” (Phoca, 2001, p.59).

Of course, it is important to avoid reductive definitions of second-wave feminism. While I have discussed the second-wave movement in rather broad terms, it is important to remember that feminism has always been rather sectarian and attempting to describe its overall unifying aims and values with any nuance or specificity is practically rather difficult. In answer to those feminisms that championed women and vilified men were other feminist thinkers like Wittig (who I am already discussed) and Shulamith Firestone. Later writers such as Spivak (1987) and Mohanty (2005), would continue to bring more nuance to the gender debate as well as critique established feminist notions of biological reductionism and contentious notions of sisterhood among women as a whole. Nevertheless, these notions do still endure in society and in literature, revealing that the aspects of feminist thought and politics that I critique here are still present within the wider feminist culture. Furthermore, reappropriating patriarchal constructions of ‘Women’

for political purposes has meant that certain aspects of feminism have become rooted within the *paradigm* responsible for the oppression it is striving against.

Exceptions Disguised: the *Homo Sacer* in the Feminist Dis/Utopia

To be capable of acting as an example, the syntagma must be suspended from its normal function, and nevertheless is it precisely by virtue of this non-functioning and suspension that it can show how the syntagma works and can allow the rule to be stated. (Agamben, 2009, p.24)

All gendered subjects can be seen as suspended between male and female, between common and proper respectively, because both genders contain elements of both the example (Man) as well as the exclusion (Woman) – in very general terms, femininity is in many ways defined by its not being masculine and vica versa; gendered behaviour for both men and women is as much characterised by the absence of certain oppositional gendered performativity as by the presence of specific definable characteristics and actions. Thus the gender ambiguity of a given individual emphasises their *suspension* between the sexes and their inability to conform to gender norms accentuates the inherent instability of the entire system.

For Agamben, *signatures* are that which work in tandem with *paradigms* allowing them to be distributed historically and in different contexts; they are “what makes the sign intelligible” (Agamben, 2009, p.42). Characters of gender discontinuity thus cause the *signatures* in play within a given novel to break down, creating a site of *indifference*. In this way, they expose the instability within the gender *paradigm*, and potentially aid in rendering it incommunicable on a larger scale as this *inoperativity* within gender reaches the novel’s audience.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Angela Carter uses extreme and disturbing appropriations of gender as a means of parody: “Carter shows a precise awareness of the disruptive power implied in carnivalisation. The use she makes of this literary device is a function of a systematic analysis of femininity” (Vallorani, 1994, p.368) In *He, She and It*, Piercy uses the notion of the cyborg to complicate gender operativity, similar to the way in which Carter employs the concept of the transsexual subject in the character of Eve/lyn: and both novels attempt to reveal the

arbitrary aspects of gender by blending the surreal and the mythical with the technological, blurring multiple boundaries in order to create the ideal landscape for an exploration and transgression of sex and gender. Contrastingly, *The Female Man* offers a critique similar to a Socratic dialogue – where a conversation of many alternate realities provides a conversational analysis of feminist concerns as well as future possibilities for change: “for Russ, utopia is not the authoritarian guidance of the blueprint, but rather the emancipating possibilities of the dream” (Moylan, 1986, p.56). Unlike the other two novelists, Russ offers possible paths to utopian equality rather than a single all-encompassing view of gender.

However, in each of the novels there are numerous role reversals which, rather than complicating the *common* versus *proper*, masculine/feminine relationship, leaves the central structure of the hierarchical relationship between the sexes firmly intact; in some ways these novels even serve to reinforce this binary paradigmatic structure. The *paradigm*, as historically contingent, shifts in these future or alternative fictional worlds or histories, but the *signature* of power based in gender difference remains unaltered. All that has changed is that man and woman have traded their respective positions of *common* and *proper* in the gender hierarchy.

Throughout history superficial aspects of *zoe* (biology, appearance, etc) have been appropriated as a means of stripping groups of people with these shared characteristics of their *bios*. From Nazi notions of genetic purity to prejudice against people with ginger hair, biological distinctiveness has often formed the basis of prejudice which, in the worst cases, has led to certain groups being placed in a situation of *bare life*. This relates back to Agamben’s analysis of Foucault’s term ‘biopolitics’ where “*the production of the biopolitical body is the original activity of the sovereign power*” (italics his) (Agamben, 1998, p.6). For Agamben, biopower, the control of subjects through *zoe*, is and has always been a part of the *homo sacer*/sovereign power structure: “Placing biological life at the centre of its calculations, the modern state therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life” (Agamben, 1998, p.6). This fact supports the notion that sex too is just such a superficial difference whose significance has been magnified for the purposes of female oppression both culturally and politically – and then *also* for the political purposes of the feminist movement. In many ways, it

serves the interests of feminism to maintain the *homo sacer* position of women in order to unite them under a banner of oppression shared at the basic biological level before individual circumstance is considered. Being born is enough to constitute victimhood. As Judith Butler recognises:

The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism's own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women's common subjugated experience." (Butler, 2006a, p.5)

It has become a trope within feminist dystopia to portray certain groups of women, or women in general, as sacrificial, *homo sacer* figures. For example, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* the American government is overthrown, giving way to a misogynist theocracy where most of the rights and privileges that modern western women currently enjoy are revoked. In an age of high pollution resulting in low fertility rates, fertile women (known as Handmaidens) are reduced to a state of *bare life*, owned by families as slaves for the purposes of reproduction (Atwood, 1993). The femaleness of the handmaidens, their biological *zoe*, is what sanctions their treatment, where men are the sovereign executing full power over their bodies – the Handmaiden's *bios* is non-existent by virtue of her ability to successfully carry out the bare function of her biological sex. An interesting hierarchy amongst women is also created here, where infertile women are afforded more rights than the fertile Handmaidens (Atwood, 1993). Their inability to reproduce somehow distances them from their gendered status as *bare life*: this is logical as a barren woman is distanced from the animalistic aspect of humanity associated with sexual reproduction, *zoe*:

[T]he sovereign and the *homo sacer* present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns. (Agamben, 1998, p.84)

Thus, the feminist dystopia sets up Man as sovereign over women, all of whom exist as potential *homines sacri*. However, in the novels I have chosen to analyse, as in other examples of feminist, it is often men who are positioned as *homines sacri* in an attempt to disrupt and problematize the issue of female subjugation. This often

occurs in ambiguously utopian feminist sf novels, where male subjects are stripped of their *bios* and are treated as *bare life* within feminist or matriarchal societies. In these instances, the presence of the *homo sacer*/sovereign dichotomy, in many ways, succeeds in reinforcing gender constructs rather than rendering them *indistinct*.

Despite attempts in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* to complicate gender norms, the novel is, nevertheless, frequently constrained by them. The narrative structure relies so heavily on the hierarchical aspects of the patriarchal *paradigm*, as well as its essentialist assumptions about sex/gender, that it often appears at the mercy of gender stereotypes, rather than living up to its heavily implied status as a self-reflexive work, ingeniously disassembling them. In the novel, the protagonist, Eve/lyn, is punished for mistreating a woman by being forced to become a woman himself; as a woman he is raped, suffers countless indignities, and – in the true spirit of female victimhood – does relatively little to free him/herself from his/her suffering. Eve/lyn mirrors the masochistic personality of his idol, the silent movie-star, Tristessa, in this respect as he/she similarly revels in the solipsistic suffering and martyrdom that was characteristic of Tristessa's movie performances (a satirical fictional representation of classic 40s and 50s Hollywood actresses). Having been captured by the despot Zero and added to his harem of slave wives, whom he controls with whippings and the forbidding of any spoken language, Eve/lyn seems to gain a perverse satisfaction from his/her own debasement and subjugation, as Zero repeatedly rapes her:

Each time, a renewed defloration, as if his violence perpetually refreshed my virginity. And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part if my being was ravaged by him...I felt myself to be not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection. (Carter, 1982, p.101)

Eve/lyn lingers over the experience with relish, describing it in almost rapturous detail: "I suffered the rage of his marital rape. My life as the wife of Zero! Boredom, pain, a state of siege" (Carter, 1982, p.102). While wallowing with avid anguish in her repeated violation she does nothing to resist this man, who is unguarded, and more importantly, crippled and half blind with a missing eye and leg – a man who could, one would think, be easily physically overthrown. However, neither Eve/lyn

nor any of Zero's demeaned mistresses make any attempt to escape his control: "The girls...they loved him for his air of authority but only their submission had created that. By himself, he would have been nothing" (Carter, 1982, p.99-100). The subservience of Zero's wives is somewhat understandable: they have been indoctrinated into his cult of subservience and are now fully, mentally under his control. However, the narrator, Eve/lyn (as shown in the above quotation), is not a worshipper in the church of Zero, and is fully aware of his tenuous hold on power; thus, the implication is inevitably that the female state is, even when inhabited by a male mind taught to be capable and decisive, utterly paralyzing.

The plot exaggerates the physical gap between the sexes – where a young, healthy woman cannot assail even a *disabled* man – and places significance ultimately on the biological gendered subject, rather than the individual will. In this way, *zoe* is favoured above *bios* such that biological fact comes to determine agency, confirming the conception of identity apparent in works such as *The Handmaid's Tale* where gender determines political as well as social status. Eve/lyn, rather than occupying a space *between* 'male' and 'female' instead seems to simply switch from the position of common (Evelyn) to a position of proper (Eve). His/her mind is apparently still 'male', but this fact is referenced as merely an incongruity, a sign that he/she has yet to make the full transition into womanhood – "I would often make a gesture with my hands that was out of Eve's character" (Carter, 1982, p.100-101), says Eve/lyn, capitulating to the patriarchal politics of difference that have placed him/her in the diabolical position under the tyranny of male domination in its most extreme form, a tyranny that the male and capable Eve/lyn (before his transition) would never have accepted.

The narrative, rather than bringing about "the complete destruction of both genders" (Vallorani, 1994, p.368), reinforces them by sustaining a reductionist view of gender. The narrative's central focus of potential gender *inoperativity*, the transsexual subject of Eve/lyn, is confounded by the patriarchal clichés that inform the character, in both his/her male and female states. It would be a tenuous assertion to describe the transgendered state as a site of *indistinction*, as altering one's physical body in order to cross over into another sex and gender is still a kind of act of conformity: it is choosing to reflect internal feelings and dispositions through external, bodily

alterations which in turn are designed to affect the nature of one's interactions and relationships with others. In other words, it is choosing to move from one gendered identity, predicated on a series of social constructions associated with a biological sex, to another gendered identity, based on corresponding social and political fictions loosely yet powerfully reinforced by biological appearance. In the purely technical sense of the paradigmatic construction of gender, nothing has been altered, except the individual's experience of living as a gendered subject: the person now experiences the *paradigm* from the opposite side, shifting from *common* to *proper* or vice versa.

Eve/lyn is potentially a more complex figure as he/she was forced into transitioning. However, his transformation is coloured by a politically gendered agenda. Eve/lyn is violated and ritually humiliated and Eve is raped into existence by Mother who then proceeds to surgically remove the genitalia she violated (Carter, 1982, p.64-71). Evelyn dies for the sins of patriarchy, for the sins of men, and is born again as Eve, hence the significance of the novel's title. He/she is the victim of a punishment ritual, the sins he committed towards women perversely visited upon him in a mythic manner that glorifies and sanctions the act, as well as violence towards men as a whole. Eve/lyn, rather than making the transition into a truly incommunicable being (in terms of gender), only succeeds in conforming to certain constructions of femininity; and this is consistent with the aims of Mother, for it is part of Eve/lyn's punishment for his treatment of Leilah, a woman he abused and abandoned, that he should suffer as a woman in order to finally be redeemed from the evils of maleness and masculinity.

Having said this, it is important to note that the events and characters of the novel are largely intended to be satirical, rather than part of a truth-revealing exercise: "the elaborate games that Carter plays with gender identity means that...the novel is...resistant to simplistic analyses which seek to interpret it as a wish-fulfilment fantasy" (Gamble, 2001, p.90). Characters such as Zero and Mother are such exaggerated examples of masculinity and femininity as to make them completely unrealistic and even laughable. In this sense their paradigmatic status is exposed, setting the stage for these structures to be problematised in characters such as Eve/lyn, a potential zone of *inoperativity*.

There is however, a disturbing incongruity between the elements of parody in the piece and the enabling genre chosen in which to stage them; there is a continuous tension between moments of potential female emancipation and extreme portrayals of gender at their most unrealistic and undesirable. How are we to interpret such moments as when Eve/lyn is viciously tortured and abused by Mother and the women of Beulah – an act which is celebrated through its mysticism: “Carter’s creation of the mythic...‘Grand Emasculator’ is so powerful that its vitality undermines the readers overt concern to mock radical feminist idealisations of the Earth Mother” (Makinen, 1997, p.161). Mother’s actions are disturbing, and yet her potency as a god-like figure sanctions her viciousness and brutality, sweeping the atrocity under the rug and allowing for Mother’s violation of Eve/lyn to become a platform for the exploration of a transgendered character and an instance of potential gender *indifference*. Mother’s brutality is glorified as necessary, transformative, and even (most patronisingly) ultimately for Evelyn’s own good who, at the end of the novel, scoffs when offered the genital remains of his previous male self (Carter, 1982, p.187).

Thus, the parody element is undermined by an apparent bias towards the ‘female’ *paradigm* actualised in Mother. Truly horrific behaviour is portrayed as solely the province of males; when a man terrorises a woman it is a matter of ego, an act of animal-like debauchery. When a woman commits a similar act it is framed as an essential requirement for the eventual emancipation of Womankind and the education and enlightenment of males who are inherently bestial and incapable of knowing any better. The ideology of Mother and her followers is a totalitarian one, aligned with feminist politics at its most dictatorial and oppressive: the war against men in the novel is a mirror image of the patriarchal disdain for and oppression of women. The two taken together are merely facets of the very same *signature* of gender hierarchy in action, not unlike the Ingsoc’s eternal and yet ever shifting war with Eastasia/Eurasia in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four*: we have always been at war with Womankind; we have always been at war with Mankind. Were Beulah to become the dominant power in the West, it would be an Agambenian state of exception.

Moreover, there is yet another central contradiction within the novel: *zoe* reinforces the position of women as the *proper* in the novel, both in the case of Evelyn as he/she transitions into Eve, and for characters such as Mother. However, Mother's biological state as a woman, her *zoe*, also allows her to escape any narrative penalty or come-uppance for her behaviour. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Woman is shown to be at times 'naturally' helpless and yet at others empowered by her femaleness; this is revealed through manifestations such as Mother drawing strength from those very aspects of her gendered *zoe* that place her in the *proper*; in other words, being biologically female gives Mother carte-blanc to behave reprehensively in the novel. The dual operation of *zoe* for women in the novel reveals this inherent contradiction within Carter's attempt to invert the gender *paradigm*. Not only does the inversion result in a failure to realise a full deconstruction of gender, it also reveals the deeply problematic (if not impossible) aspect of attempting to create female power through *paradigms* of subordination while also highlighting the dangerous political and social consequences of trying to do so.

Piercy's *He, She and It* displays a similar reluctance or incapacity to break away from patriarchal gender assumptions, as well as the hierarchical, oppositional framework that has historically dictated the nature of gender and dominated its conversation. The focus of the narrative is a cyborg called Yod, created as superficially male and yet with a complex amalgamation of masculine and feminine influences. All this would seem to suggest that the novel might serve as a dialogue for potential new gender constructions, emerging through the medium of technology: "[Piercy] endows Yod with what she considers to be distinct gender characteristics, making him a laboratory for gender cross fertilisation" (Deery, 2000, p.94). To a large extent this potential is harnessed, similar to the way transsexuality is utilised to examine gender in *The Passion of New Eve*.

Throughout the novel, the blend of human and machine acts as a platform for potential gender equality where binary gender difference is removed or diluted through technological implants and alternative programming that improves on biological or social 'programming'. This is achieved through the characters Yod and Nili. Here, very much in line with the posthumanist work of Donna Haraway, the cyborg becomes a potential site of gender *indifference* whereby technology renders a

gendered subject no longer discernible within patriarchal gender constructs. Yod, for example, has a mixture of masculine and feminine traits acquired from his male and female creators which allow him see the world, and particularly gender, in a different light: “The sex roles of old stories confused him. In the world he knew, a princess was as apt to rescue a prince as vice versa” (Piercy, 1993, p.377). In this way, he is, at least mentally, neither *common* nor *proper*, suggesting a valuable and positive state of *indifference*. The introduction of technology into the individual subject complicates the *zoe/bios* distinction such that the parameters of both these elements become blurred. Yod not only interacts with the world differently, his status as an individual is complicated by his technologically induced gender *inoperativity*.

However, it is the introduction of technology into his *zoe* that places him in a situation of *bare life*. He has no rights, he is not paid for his work (Piercy, 1993, p.236), he is not supposed to have relationships, or even initially allowed to leave the lab in which he was created by the scientist Avram (Piercy, 1993, p.96). In a sense, it is an aspect of his *zoe* that strips him of his *bios*. Paradoxically, it is technology that reduces him to the level of a mere animal without rights, who, like the animal is considered a form of *pure zoe* who has been stripped of its political being. In this way we can see how the man/machine dichotomy is aligned with that of the *homo sacer*/sovereign relationship as well as that of male and female.

Furthermore, Yod’s programming propounds a biological reductionist view that male and female are essential categories that can only be overcome when biology is altered. Yod’s ‘male’ nature (given to him by Avram) is altered by feminineprogramming received from Malkah:

Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. ... I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasising his love for knowledge, and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection. (Piercy, 1993, p.142)

A woman, Malkah, was responsible for Yod’s feminine aspects and a man for the masculine: “Avram should not have let me loose if he wanted a simple man-made cyborg. For you are also woman-made” (Piercy, 1993, p.114). These notions and the characters of Avram and Malkah embody the *common/proper*, male/female

patriarchal *paradigm*. Their gendered programming of Yod complicates his *zoe* (technologically) which, I argue, contributes to his state of *bare life*. His masculine programming reduces him to a mere weapon and his feminine programming objectifies him. His programming to be the ultimate lover and female fantasy (due to Malkah's influence) is a rather uncomfortable and degrading aspect of Yod's creation:

What [Shira] was responding to in Yod was simply technique. He had been programmed to satisfy, and he satisfied. She had to admit that she was perhaps a little disappointed in herself that she could indeed be pleased by what was programmed to do just that. (Piercy, 1993, p.178)

Malkah's programming causes Yod to value a woman's supposed sexual needs above his own. That he should be *programmed* to be sexually selfless, to be the ultimate male sexual object implies a violation, even abuse of his mind and body. "He did not grow fatigued. He would simply continue until stopped" (Piercy, 1993, p.170). Even if this programming had merely extended to a traditionally female desire for intimacy, this would still be a highly personal aspect of his personality that has been regulated rather than allowed to evolve naturally (Piercy, 1993, p.184). Yod is programmed, essentially, to be much like that which others mockingly call him: a "walking vibrator," (Piercy, 1993, p.248) the ultimate male prostitute. The implication here is that gender contains a dehumanising element which can contribute to the loss of *bios*. However this point is magnified further (and more disturbingly) by Yod's 'female'-oriented programming. Weapons have physical power, whereas prostitutes are often at the mercy of others, whether their clients or their employers.

It seems clear, however, that Yod can usefully be read not as an ideal figure but as a parodic reversal of traditional Western fantasies of the 'ideal' woman. For example, his lack of any sort of physical messiness can be read as a comment on the traditional male fear and loathing of the physicality of women. (Booker, 1994, p.348)

Yod is based on female fantasies that are based on male fantasies. His sexual programming serves as a confirmation of the female state as the *proper*, which not only confirms the female state as, naturally, one of a *homo sacer* figure that is weak

and passive, but also embodies a role reversal where men occupy a similar space of *bare life*. Yod, like Eve/lyn, points to inherent contradictions within patriarchy and feminism, but he does not succeed in rendering gender *indistinct*. Furthermore, if such a character were written into an sf novel as a female and programmed to be similarly selfless and to suit primarily male (stereotypical) sexual needs, it is highly likely that the narrative would be interpreted as misogynistic, rather than a potential instance of gender *inoperativity*; and such an interpretation would be correct: as Yod preserves the notion of the female state as *proper*, a female cyborg character of this kind would only preserve the male state as the *common*.

Traditional notions of femaleness are also glorified in the novel through the feminine connection with nature which is encapsulated in the narrative's depiction of the feminist town of Tikva: "[its] inhabitants respect nature and keep in touch with it as much as possible" (Booker, 1994, p.345-6). The way Shira (the protagonist) associates Tikva with "warm friendships with women" (Piercy, 1993, p.3) is juxtaposed with a multitude of 'male'-orientated dystopian metropolises that exist outside of Tikva. The urban, corporate space is depicted as masculine "with its male dominance" (Piercy, 1993, p.4) where men and women are treated equally only inasmuch as they are evenly valued as a commodity, as workers in which a given company, such as Y-S, invests: "It went with rigid sex roles – not at work, of course, for no one could afford such nonsense, but in every other sector of living" (Piercy, 1993, p.100). Socially women are required to "[bare] their breasts at Y-S functions" (Piercy, 1993, p.100) and, as shown in the example of Shira and Josh's marriage, men are favoured in custody battles (Piercy, 1993, p.4-6).

Shira leaves the Y-S company to return to the society of Tikva where she immediately finds support and strength from her relationship with her grandmother, Malkah, and the rural environment of the town. In this way, feminine *paradigms* are once again idolised in a setting where patriarchal constructs are supposedly being destabilised. In the novel, technology becomes a potential site of gender *inoperativity* as the novel's cyborg figures, Yod and Nili, fail to conform to prescribed gender constructs. The blend of biology and technology acts as a possible platform for potential *indifference*, Yod: a new being which Avram and Malkah create, which surpasses supposed social and/or biological gender limitations: "he is

intellectually androgynous...Yod thus transgresses not only the conventional boundary between human and machine, but between male and female as well” (Booker, 1994, p.347). Nevertheless, the novel portrays clear boundaries between male and female spaces both externally, through the juxtaposition of the feminine Tikva and the masculine Y-S Corporation, and internally as this contrast is mirrored in the duality of Yod’s personality (Piercy, 1993, p.142).

Despite Piercy’s focus “upon women’s technical and scientific expertise” (Deery, 2000, p.97) a divide is drawn between male and female technology; Malkah’s house is infused with a protective female computer and Malkah herself is involved in protective feminine programming within the “base” to defend Tikva from outside attacks, and also is responsible for the emotional and caring aspects of Yod’s personality (Piercy, 1993, p.351). Contrastingly, Avram is involved in masculine technology, programming Yod as a weapon designed with aggressive as well as defensive instincts. Furthermore, at the end of the novel, masculine technology in the form of Yod is destroyed and feminine unity is preserved. In this sense, technology is treated as a masculine entity that, rather than being an enabling device that exists beyond gender constructs, is ultimately constrained by gender.

Despite this, the character of Nili survives as a positive depiction of a cyborg though she is very different in nature to Yod. She was constructed only by women and, prior to the installation of her mechanical implants, she was born a human being. This would again point to a biological essentialism that is at odds with the *inoperative* potential in the novel:

Piercy suggests that [Nili’s] biotechnological mix is preferable to [Yod’s]. Unlike Yod, Nili was born human (of woman) and then underwent serious technological augmentation...she was not brought into consciousness through artificial means. (Deery, 2000, p.96)

The narrative points to the message that biology is unassailable, that the construction of a subject that is, in many ways, devoid of gender constraints will ultimately end in failure. Yod is given the potential to be androgynous, *genderless*, to exist independent of his gendered *zoe*, and he is destroyed. Nili comes about as a subject that exists outside of gender, not as the result of a balanced life among both men and

women, but rather as the result of a female-centric society and upbringing. She is an anomaly merely by virtue of her all-female ‘programming’, implying that gender can only be surpassed when the binary opposite is absent, rendering Nili’s relative *inoperativity* less impressive; thus, paradoxically, her technologically infused nature only reinforces her identity as defined by her gendered *zoe*. In many ways the potential inherent in the concept of the cyborg outlined in Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway, 1991, p.151) fails to be realised in *He, She and It* and its *inoperative* potential is hindered by feminist *paradigms*. There is still an overriding male/female, rural/urban, and nature/technology divide present in the novel influenced by feminist *paradigms*.

Though it does not explore the notion of the cyborg to the extent that *He, She and It* does, *The Female Man* deals with technology in a more positive light overall. In Russ’s novel, technology is not scrutinised as a gendered entity (masculine) but rather is accepted as neutral, whereby gender is externally introduced into the concept by the people who control/those who are excluded from it. Technology in the hands of the Whileawayan’s is not gendered and they incorporate technology into their rural lifestyles with ease. It is only in Joanna’s world, our world, that technology is male. Like Haraway, Shulamith Firestone writes of the emancipatory potential of technology, for example in terms of reproduction:

The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either, however one chooses to look at it. (Firestone, 2015, p.19)

Radical though they appear, Firestone’s notions point to a future where technological advancement removes or diminishes the significance of gender by removing one of the only *common/proper* dichotomies that remains once men and women are regarded as having equal subjecthood. In line with Butler’s analysis of sex as merely an extension of the construction of gender, technology has the capacity to *expose* sex as part of the patriarchal *paradigm* by acting as an equalising force. I argue that the ‘natural’ differences between men and women are minimal and only appear significant because such differences as those relating to reproduction are emphasised by culture. Technology has the capacity to reduce these differences or even remove

them entirely, actualising the potential, discussed earlier, for gender to become as superficial a characteristic as any other physical aspect. This is where the use of Deleuzian philosophy will prove to be highly valuable: for Deleuze social and political reality is divided into *assemblages* (similar to Agamben's *paradigms*). Where biological sex might still define some aspects of physicality, removing reproductive inequality would be a crucial step towards deconstructing myths associated with aligning a Woman's identity with her female biological state.

The desire to remove reproductive inequality, perhaps the strongest of all patriarchal binaries, is likely the reason that so many societies in feminist utopias are all-female – as in the society of Whileaway in *The Female Man*. A complete role reversal where, for example, men care for the children and women work, might be impractical in comparison to a society where all citizens are equal in reproductive terms. Janet's world, populated entirely by women (one of four represented in the novel), is in many ways the ideal, for it removes the need for any potential biological interdependence. In the society of Whileaway, all women are equal biologically and equally inconvenienced by the biological necessity of childbirth. Thus, it can be argued that there is a tendency toward biological equality, of the kind described by Firestone, inherent in the all-female societies present in the novel. In *The Female Man*, the equality of the reproduction process, socially speaking, in Whileaway is given some special attention. The quotation below comes from a passage that is given its own section within the chapter, isolated by blank space: “JE: I bore my child at thirty; we all do. It's a vacation. Almost five years. The baby rooms are full of people reading, painting, singing, as much as they can, to the children, with the children, over the children” (Russ, 2010, p.14).

This system in which reproduction becomes the prerogative of the individual, rather than the couple or other family unit, removes one of the central contributors to the imbalance of power that still exists between the sexes. As Firestone relates, under such a system “genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally. (A reversion to an unobstructed *pansexuality* – Freud's ‘polymorphus perversity’ would probably supersede hetero/homo/bi-sexuality)” (Firestone, 2015, p.19). In other words, it would not only allow the individual complete reproductive control but could potentially render gender, and the sexual constructions contained

within this patriarchal *paradigm, inoperative*. However, this manner of producing reproductive equality only removes the potential for inequality that arises from purely practical biological differences. In the society of Whileaway, all citizens are biologically equal but whether this method towards uniformity has broken the bond between female biology and female biologically-determined identity is unclear. The society of Whileaway is still, arguably, a society based on myths of female unity; furthermore, it is a society descended from matriarchal notions that inspired the genocide of the entire male gender. In *The Female Man*, in the world of Jael that preceded Whileaway, men quite literally are reduced to *homo sacer* figures as a justification of their slaughter. It is later indicated that the society of Whileaway is the result of this violent genocide; Jael's world and the world of Whileaway share a corresponding period of history where men and women were at war: "I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain" (Russ, 2010, p.205). Again, biologically gendered *zoe* strips men of their *bios* and sanctions their killing. Though the two genders were in a state of war to begin with, in order for the entire male sex to be wiped out, extermination would have been necessary: civilians and prisoners of war would have had to have been executed: "the originary exception in which human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed" (Agamben, 1998, p.85). Men were slaughtered for the benefit of women so that society could be reborn in women's image. Once again the theme of men as the sacrificial step necessary for utopia is present here as in *He, She and It* and *The Passion of New Eve*, inverting the traditional patriarchal *paradigm*, but leaving the signature of dominance and subordination intact.

However, where *The Passion of New Eve* would seem to almost celebrate this concept of men (as an enabling and positive notion rather than a viable course of action), *The Female Man* does not – it could even be seen to actively condemn it. Jael has a powerful appeal – one that is almost mythical, similar to Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* – that is acknowledged by Joanna's opinion of her "I think...that I like Jael best of all, that I would like to be Jael...the hateful hero with the broken heart" (Russ, 2010, p.205). However, her war crimes and their result, the annihilation of 'Man', are also mourned by one of their chief beneficiaries, Janet

(Russ, 2010, p.205). Men are slaughtered, once again, by virtue of their gendered *zoe*, which dehumanises them sufficiently to justify their killing. The men who once existed on Whileaway were also examples of *bare life*. The resulting society, however, did not benefit from this normalising of gender, rather, biology still influenced the society, only in different ways, as shown above. This would seem to reveal an awareness within the novel that the supposed utopia of Whileaway is not in fact a utopia at all but merely a different society subject to an equally problematic view of gender, based on the very same *signature* of gender binarism. The absence of men, in the novel, does not destroy the *signature* of gender or of ‘woman’: rather a new gendered *paradigm* has asserted itself, informed by the ghostly presence of a now absent oppositional *common*. Whileaway can be understood as, in some ways, a planet of *proper* subjects; while masculinity is removed, discursive codes of femininity live on in this society and so it must be admitted that Jael’s attempt to rid her world of men and masculinity utterly failed to negate the oppressive codes of patriarchy that created and cemented the gender divide. The destruction of the male *zoe* only concretises the binary opposition between male and female by producing a void which the women of this society (that will eventually become Whileaway) must then construct their society around. The genocide of an entire gender for the benefit of another intensifies and perpetuates the gender binary indefinitely, perhaps even making the true *suspension* of the gender *signature* impossible, leaving the women of Whileaway forever trapped by codes of meaning that are no longer relevant to their society.

Unlike the other two novels *The Female Man*, rather than offering a single narrative view, presents several alternate realities that interact with each other to produce a dialogue of feminist discourse:

[This] form resists simple closure and consistency yet allows a strong statement about the present situation in the world, especially for women, and offers a clear suggestion of the several means which, taken together, can form oppositional politics of change. (Moylan, 1986, p.62)

Despite the novel’s plurality, well defined opinions emerge from the narrative that conflict with patriarchal as well as some feminist *paradigms* – succeeding where *The Passion of New Eve* in many ways fails to effectively parody radical feminism.

Joanna likes “hotels, air-conditioning, good restaurants, and jet transport.” (Russ, 2010, p.7) Her struggle, unlike those of the other three J’s (versions of Joanna in the other alternate realities) is not to be a woman in a man’s world, but rather to be recognised as an individual in a patriarchal society that relies on invented gender difference. Though she dislikes being “one of the boys” (Russ, 2010, p.129), she likes Man’s world, his technology, progress, ideals, and so what Joanna seems to crave is not an entirely new female or feminised society to replace our own, but rather a modified space where the current world is altered to include women without prejudice and where *zoe* has no bearing on *bios*. Thus, Joanna finds that the most effective means of equality open to her is to become “a female man” (Russ, 2010, p.5). This is partly a charade but it also serves to refute the notion that “anatomy is destiny” (Russ, 2010, p.137) and reveals her desire to be treated as a “Man” in the sense of an individual: “If we are all mankind, it follows that I too am a man, and not at all a woman...I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man.” (Russ, 2010, p.135-6) ‘Man’, rather than denoting the classifying element of *zoe* is used in this sense to *prevent zoe* (in terms of biological gender) from affecting *bios*. Joanna craves a system whereby gender no longer defines a subject, which conflicts with much feminist thought based on notions of fundamental difference, “correlatives...locked in necessity. (Carter, 1982, p.149). This points directly to the notion that ‘woman’ is not a category that needs to be raised up as a different but equal group, but is rather an invented subordinate notion placed paradigmatically in the position as the *proper*. The removal of this category would leave only Man, the *common*, the individual. Thus, all *humans* would no longer operate within a hierarchical gender-based structure; these *signatures* could disintegrate. This rather utopian vision of future gender equality however demands that we also view the category of Man with due suspicion and caution. Though it is possible to understand the category of Man as simply denoting the human person, Man also constitutes a conceptualisation of the individual as dominant over a given *proper* (women, animals, children, etc) – thus the identity of Man is to an extent bound up in hierarchical conceptions of power, an agency that is at least partially afforded at the expense of those under Man’s heel. However, I would argue that while this is an unfortunate facet of individualist, humanist conceptions of Man as mankind, it does not fully constitute the notion as such. Agency does not require domination in order to thrive just as Joanna does not need to oppress other women in order to feel herself

“a female man”. The essential point is that Man, while it has connotations of oppression, as it represents the masculine construction of agency as primarily a male attribute: yet it is an attribute that can be reclaimed by women, by humanity, as a means of empowerment, and while this passage in Russ’s novel is not without irony, a hopeful strain for the future of gender equality is also present here.

A similarly provocative development within the gender *signature* is implied tentatively in a specific scene within the *The Passion of New Eve*. The character of Mother communicates female *paradigms* of nature, motherhood, and Freudian notions of female sexuality; the city over which she presides, Beulah, represents utopian notions of female unity through feminist ideals. She is both ‘mother’ to all the women of Beulah, the origin, the *arche*, as well as the exemplar. She is the *paradigm* to which other women belong as well as a member of that *paradigm* herself, an “‘originary phenomenon’” (Agamben, 2009, p.29), as Agamben describes it, that which appears to be the original but instead exists as *suspended* between universal and particular: “as a paradigm, the [originary phenomenon] is that the place where analogy lives in perfect equilibrium beyond the opposition between generality and particularity” (Agamben, 2009, p.30).

Mother is exposed as a *paradigm* at the end of the novel: she has been reduced to an analogy, *suspended* between general and particular, no longer merely an individual, now a metaphor: “for I now know that Mother is a figure of speech and has retired to a cave beyond consciousness” (Carter, 1982, p.184). Once the *paradigm* of Mother is exposed in this way it could be said to be rendered *inoperative*; Mother now occupies a fantastic realm of multiple and indecipherable symbols inside the caves where she and Eve/Iyn have their last encounter. “I am inching my way towards the beginning and the end of time...Perfume broke from bottles which instantly resolved to sand as the dressing tables on which they’d stood flung roots down into the soil” (Carter, 1982, p.185). Symbols of femininity – the accoutrements of the notion that beauty is a woman’s sceptre – are destabilising, becoming *indiscernible*. Furthermore, time has no meaning here, therefore the concept of an *arche* becomes irrelevant and thus the concept of Woman as a stable notion with a definable origin becomes *undecidable*. There is no longer any biological root from which to trace the operation of femininity. However, this is to the detriment of both patriarchal and

feminist constructions; if femininity no longer has any relationship to biology, thus rendering female *paradigms* incommunicable, those paradigmatic constructions from which some feminism draws its strength are also threatened. If biological femaleness no longer necessarily and naturally translates to any specific traits of performativity then notions of female unity also collapse.

As discussed previously, the structure of gender which Butler's terms the "Heterosexual Matrix" elaborates on this disjuncture between biology and social construct. For her, sex is just as much a construction as gender, so that what is considered biologically 'natural' for a gendered subject has no more relationship to their physical state than the constructs of femininity and masculinity: male and female are invented aspects of the same patriarchal *paradigm*:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. ... The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. (Butler, 2006a, p.9)

This mirrors Agamben's notion of the *paradigm* as an arbitrary construct embedded so deeply in society that it appears to be related to something unchanging, to an original state. Sex and gender are one of only two of the many ways (although, I argue, the most central of them all) in which we categorise ourselves and others; it is only one of the many *signatures* that regulate our being in the world and all of these are subject to inevitable fluctuation over time: "these normative conditions for the production of the subject produce a historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the 'being' of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition" (Butler, 2010, p.4). What Butler is describing is the operation of the *signatures* forming and reforming into separate, historically contingent, *paradigms* that regulate our identities and make us recognisable or intelligible to others in society. However, as Agamben writes: "in the paradigm there is no origin or arché; every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic" (Agamben, 2009, p.30). The *paradigm* emerges as a singularity that, through adopted cultural significance, takes on a status of authority. Sex appears as the origin

of gender whereby sex is the common and gender exists as the proper, a manifestation – an example – that arises from the *common*, forming an essential relationship that forms the larger *paradigm* of gender. Thus, if we accept sex as the *common*, the founding element of the hierarchical *signature* of gender, then we accept that biological status, *zoe*, is just as much a fiction as masculinity and femininity: “if the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender” (Butler, 2006a, p.9-10). This is not to suggest that biological, sexual difference does not exist between men and women, but rather that its *significance* is arbitrary and unnecessary as one of the primary defining factors of personal identity and what Butler describes as “recognisability”: “if we ask how recognisability is constituted, we have through the very question taken up a perspective suggesting that these fields are variably and historically constituted, no matter how *a priori* their function as conditions of appearance” (Butler, 2010, p.5). This not only has wider implications for the patriarchal *paradigm*, as it removes any determinist biological views that reinforce stereotypical gender roles, it also has huge implications for feminist paradigmatic notions of shared female identity. It may even go further, attacking the very foundations of the larger *signature* of gender, for if we accept that a chief method of producing being as recognisable occurs through the categorisation of biological sex is arbitrary and a matter of historical contingency, then what other means of recognisability might have emerged given different historical, social, or even evolutionary conditions?

The implications of this bring the validity of specific *signatures* under scrutiny. The *signature* itself is, for Agamben, a historical inevitability, but *specific signatures* were not necessarily immovable certainties for the development of humanity. It is possible then, that the *signature* of gender might never have existed given certain alterations in our formative past. The possibilities are potentially limitless, posing the question: what *signatures* might develop in the future? If biological sex then were realised and exposed, consigned to the category of pure artifice and performativity alongside its paradigmatic counterparts, masculinity and femininity, the *paradigm* might be forced to disintegrate in such a way as to significantly damage the prominence of the overall *signature* of gender as a dominating force within human society, politics, and culture. It could create a moment of *inoperativity* whereby the

distinction between sex and gender becomes unstable so that the hierarchical *paradigm* within gendered *zoe* would break down. Sexual distinction would no longer inhabit opposite poles of male and female but take on the same level of significance as any other physical feature such as having blue eyes, red hair, or flat feet.

While the potency of the current *paradigm* of patriarchy dwindles, it is possible that the *signature* of gender would remain while its domination over human identity and politics recedes. The real question then is how can this dream be realised? How might the paradigmatic case be sufficiently disturbed in order to expose its operation and remove the iron grip of the *signature* itself? In the passage below I begin a project for imagining how this could be achieved through the figure of the cyborg: more specifically, through the disruptive influence of the popular sf character of the gynoid – the marriage of female *undecidability* and technological ambiguity.

“You can alter our physiology but you cannot change our nature”: Female Machines as *Undecideable* Women

I have discussed the functioning of the *paradigm*, Woman, in the context of both patriarchal and feminist discourse, and I have critiqued examples of unsuccessful attempts to complicate and dismantle gender constructions through what we might describe as traditional feminist political theory (as it is expressed in classic feminist sf literature). Here I will build upon previous approaches towards the disambiguation and dismantling of gender apparatuses by further employing the philosophy of Agamben in relation to what I believe to be the most enigmatic and subtly transgressive of sf figures: the female machine, or gynoid. However, this is only part of what I have set out to do in this thesis. I will also employ the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze in order to build upon the work I have done through the philosophy of Agamben. Where Agamben’s thesis ends, I argue, Deleuze’s project begins, and the two systems can be usefully combined to gain a deeper understanding of the systems that bind and regulate our lives as well as offer us the tools with which to realise possible alternatives. The gynoid, intersects with this project as she both disrupts the existing system while also paving the way for new lines of enquiry within gender and feminist theory. As a result, the gynoid is the perfect popular sf figure with which to marry the two philosophical projects of Deleuze and Agamben.

I am, of course, by no means the first to recognise the significance and emancipatory potential inherent in the figure of the cyborg (female or otherwise), whether this figure manifests itself in the form of a part human/part machine amalgamation or an AI constructed in Man's image: "the cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (Haraway, 1991, p.150). Haraway frames the cyborg as a necessary emancipatory figure, a guiding symbol with the potential to lead mankind to new heights of self-awareness. In this section I will further investigate the implications of the internalisation of technology as a facet of the concept of the cyborg; the fusion of the technological with the gendered subject can complicate the *zoe/bios* relationship so as to destabilise its hierarchy as well as those of other *signatures* knitted into the larger fabric of the biopolitical apparatus: "In all of these various, oppositionally interlinked political and biomedical accounts, the body remained a relatively unambiguous locus of identity, agency, labour, and hierarchicalised function" (Haraway, 2013, p.283). The central *paradigm* of patriarchal gender is the strongest of these *signatory* threads of power which also include life, sovereignty, humanity, etc; that which binds these others most firmly together is the thick, unyielding rope of gender.

For Haraway, the cyborg is a "creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (Haraway, 1991, p.150). Yet, despite her perhaps overly optimistic reading of this 'mythic' figure, even she is obviously aware of its limitations: the cyborg is not a messiah, rather it is a highly complex and undependable organism as a result of its nature as a biopolitical apparatus, moreover an increasingly fundamental one to the overall structure of what Haraway describes in her essay, *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies*, as "immune system discourse": "the immune system is an elaborate icon for principle systems of symbolic and material 'difference'...a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of western biopolitics" (Haraway, 2013, p.275). The immune system has become a dominant *paradigm* in western oppositional thought, framing an ongoing narrative of self and other reformed for a world where such traditional oppositional boundaries are becoming increasingly hard to define and locate. The technological, embodied

subject then (like the biological subject) has become a similarly crucial entity in the development of modern western biopolitics: “Bodies have become cyborgs – cybernetic organisms – compounds of hybrid techno-organic embodiment and textuality. The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor – all theorised and engaged in practice in terms of communications” (Haraway, 2013, p.284).

As I posited earlier in this chapter, sf often approaches technology and technological beings from a gendered perspective that imposes and imprints certain masculine and/or feminine traits onto the figure of the cyborg – as in the case of the character of Yod in *He, She, and It*. The cyborg or AI in popular sf is very often used as a means of questioning the purpose and/or nature of humanity from *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* (1987) Data, to *Robocop* (1987), to the reprogrammed Terminator turned good in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991). These figures stand placidly upon the brink of personhood throughout their narratives, quietly obsessed with a humanity they will always attempt but never possess until they eventually meet their end. Their baptism is one of fire and it is fatal for them. Data's fate is to die in a blaze of glory to save his captain and shipmates in the final *Star Trek: The Next Generation* film, *Nemesis* (2002); the Terminator likewise sacrifices himself for the good of all mankind in the hopes of ridding the world of all Terminator technology (including himself). Furthermore, Asimov's *Bicentennial Man*, as well as the film of the same name, also contains this powerful and insidious trope. In the novel the robot/cyborg protagonist spends his entire life – which spans nearly two-hundred years – striving to exceed his mechanical programming. Having chosen human mortality over mechanical immortality in order to complete his experience of humanity, a human council finally grants him the right to be considered ‘human’ moments before he passes away on his deathbed.

All these cyborg characters, paradoxically, gain entrance to the humanity ‘club’ by sacrificing their lives – they must die in order to have been recognised as living, but retrospectively. Their own reasons for sacrificing their lives seem almost incidental in comparison to the wider didactic lesson they offer the other human characters in the narrative as well as the readers. Data exists to teach the other human characters of the series how to be the best humans they can be, and offer them interesting insights into the nature of consciousness and subjecthood – he provides humanity

with a wealth of self-indulgence as he touchingly fails time and again to mimic humans in all their glory. The Terminator dies having taught young John Connor the necessity of self-sacrifice which will aid him in his role as the future leader of mankind. Finally, the Bicentennial Man exists to humble humanity, as he is finally acknowledged as a political and legal subject. Each of these figures die, Christ-like, in order to redeem humans in some way, all act as sacrificial figures: *homines sacri*. As Gillis realises:

The transgressive promise of the cyborg and the posthuman has not always been evident...the cyborg as metaphor is fraught with difficulties precisely because it is already such a ubiquitous image within popular culture, an image that, unfortunately, replicates traditional ways of thinking about gender (Gillis, 2008, p.205–18)

among other, similar political and social binarisms. Ultimately, the cyborg figure is locked firmly in the grasp of well-established power dichotomies; as such it can act to reinforce these structures while appearing superficially transgressive and new. Though Haraway understands the profound significance of the cyborg, she does not appear to argue for its profound capacity to be manipulated by neighbouring political structures. The cyborg, while potentially an incredible force for *indistinction* is, conversely, also a universal other, mirroring similar hierarchical social structures: the cyborg represents the plight of the universal oppressed figure: Woman, slave, worker, racial other, or *homo sacer*. As such the cyborg is a potentially highly conservative character when positioned within the tired and unending narrative of Hegelian/Marxist, master/slave dialectics.

This narrative is the cyborg's greatest enemy for, as Agamben argues:

Only within a biopolitical horizon will it be possible to decide whether the categories whose opposition founded modern politics...and which have been steadily dissolving, to the point of entering today into a real zone of indistinction – will have to be abandoned. (Agamben, 1998, p.4)

Agamben suggests here that the opposition politics upon which all politics is founded, including the supposedly emancipatory discourses of feminism, etc., will have to be eroded in order for real progressive *indistinction* to become possible; thus, the most valuable aspect of technological life, as a symbol and a philosophical ideal,

is to stand for and create a disjuncture within our understanding of life as divided into political and biological, emphasising the power structures which maintain these assumptions and perhaps rendering them, as well as other closely related structures (such as the gender *paradigm*), incommunicable. In other words, the cyborg is most valuable when held up as a glaring anomaly within the standard biopolitical model.

The robot-cyborg-slave figure is male, anthropocentric, and plays into the hands of archaic power structures. The gynoid or female machine, however, is less susceptible to being overshadowed by rival narratives of related power hierarchies. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the presence of the female (in the form of a cyborg or otherwise) in the sf landscape can expose the otherness inherent in the social fictions that produce the figure of Woman. If we agree that much of what constitutes womanhood is grounded in performativity, then Womankind is characterised by her sexual, biological difference which creates and concretises the identity it performs. So, here we return to the problem of the presence of Woman as *suspended* object between universal and particular: *indistinction* incarnate – universal, and even original, *bare life*. However, the oppressed position that Woman occupies is also a strangely unique position of power or at least of *potentiality*. The *suspended* state at its most extreme breeds *inoperativity* and the possibility for valuable paradigmatic evolution. This potential is compounded by the introduction of the technological into the female subject. As I have already established, Woman is *zoe* personified, and *zoe* is Woman made flesh. However, what happens when the flesh is invaded by an additional form of otherness, when technology interferes in the complex charade that holds together the fibres of gender operativity as well as countless other apparatuses?

The introduction of the female into the domain of the human and machine combined is where the true potential for *indistinction* within the cyborg figure lies – in the mainstream yet also equally enigmatic and often unsettling figure of the female cyborg. Examples of this classic figure are pervasive in popular sf, ranging from the evil Maria robot in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) to the Rachael android/replicant in both Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1999a) and Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Others include the mysterious and often threatening apparition of the Caprica Six Cylon from the 2004 remake of *Battlestar Galactica*, the deadly female Terminator from *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), and *Star Trek:*

Voyager's (1995) Seven of Nine: an often untrustworthy convert to the federation, having been rescued from a totalitarian cyborg empire called the “Borg”.

However, perhaps the most classic and well-recognised example of this *paradigm* within sf, as well as popular culture more generally, is the robot women of Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*, where the women of the small town of Stepford are gradually replaced by obedient, flawlessly beautiful, housework-obsessed, android versions of themselves. The term “Stepford wife” has since passed into common usage as a descriptor of the disturbing, generally used when describing a women with an uncanny obsession with domesticity and subservience to her husband. We see here how Levin has capitalised on the otherness of femaleness, compounded by the well-known ‘fear of the machine’ trope, to effectively produce disturbing figures of unease. Indeed Levin succeeded in making the image of the ideal housewife forever inherently (at least slightly) creepy. However, the novel succeeds in more than simply creating frightening monster figures: the legacy of *The Stepford Wives* is that the figure of the ‘perfect’ housewife has become an irrevocably eerie one. The machine element within the women of Stepford served to highlight the strangeness of Womanhood itself when all the requirements of this state of being as dictated by society are completely fulfilled. By introducing the mechanical element into the story, Levin was able to accentuate the existing uncanny, or *indistinct* nature of femininity and femaleness. This is one of the seminal narrative instances, I believe, of the female android as representative of visceral horror and profound ambiguity. This set the stage for further gynoid characters to be created from this starting point of initial *indistinction*.

Let us consider the character of Seven of Nine from the *Star Trek* spin-off series *Voyager* as a case study for the narrative effects of the gynoid subject. Seven is forcibly removed from the Borg: a half machine/half organic race who forcibly “assimilates” members of other species into their cyborg “collective”, physically altering them as well as eradicating their original identities. Though she has in many ways been rescued from her previous existence, Seven feels violated by her extraction, saying to Captain Janeway (of the Starship Voyager) as her superficial Borg implants are being removed: “You can alter our physiology but you cannot change our nature...We are Borg” (Seven of Nine, 1997, ep: *The Gift*). She claims

here that, despite having been altered physically, she will never become human and will always remain what she believes is her 'true' self: a Borg drone. This line is particularly poignant because of Seven's use of the first person plural. All "drones" within the Borg "collective" are mentally linked to the extent that their sense of self is completely eradicated; their minds form one "hive" consciousness within which there is no possibility for the concept of an 'I'. The newly liberated Seven still conceptualises her identity within this context: she is not a single individual, rather she is the entire Borg. Thus, Seven's situation mimics that of all Womankind. Seven is *indistinct* from the larger collective term 'Borg' just as individual human women are inseparable from the term, 'Woman', that signifies the entire unit or *paradigm*.

This particular story-arch within the *Star Trek* universe, exploring Seven of Nine's relationship with the Borg, becomes a startlingly insightful allegory for the position of women on a large scale; Seven struggles to distinguish her individuality as a singular woman from the vast, super-identity of the Borg collective within the framework of her new environment aboard the USS Voyager, suddenly and shockingly immersed in a community founded upon the binarisms of anthropocentric culture, including those associated with gender and sexuality. As Tama Leaver observes, Seven's introduction into the her new 'collective' aboard the USS Voyager poses an argument "that as technology becomes part of (previously exclusively organic) subjectivity, many traditional binary traditions in Western humanist thought are challenged, especially the dichotomy of nature and culture, as well as the related male/female dualism" (Leaver, 2015, p.70). Seven's endeavour to navigate the maze of social and political *paradigms* within human society mirrors the struggle of all women (as well as perhaps all individuals) to place themselves on the sliding scale between general and particular, between individual gendered subject and speck of gendered material within a larger social organism.

As Seven is gradually assimilated into the crew of Voyager, she soon realises that her existence among humans is not so radically different from her previous one within the Borg, in that she is not entirely separate from those around her. Growing accustomed to her new life, she becomes aware of the similarities between her Borg community and her new Starfleet one, declaring: "Voyager is my collective" (Seven of Nine, 1998, ep: *Drone*). However, she also struggles with some of the

schizophrenic logic that governs humanity's shaky understanding of individuality verses community:

Seven of Nine: You made me into an individual. You encouraged me to stop thinking like a member of the Collective, to cultivate my independence and my humanity. But when I try to assert that independence, I am punished.

Captain Kathryn Janeway: Individuality has its limits - especially on a starship where there's a command structure. (1998, ep: *Prey*)

This conversation between Seven and Janeway reflects the difficult truth of individuality – that it is not really as singular as it may appear – a fact that is far more difficult and frightening perhaps as Seven's initial belief when first removed from the Borg that she was entirely alone. Her realisation reflects some of the truths associated with negotiating between one's self in relation to the other, which Butler describes as “a mode of relation...a mode of being dispossessed...a way of being *for* another or *by virtue of* another” (Butler, 2006b, p.24). Having been severed from the larger organism of the collective, Seven must suddenly confront the raw biopolitical problematics of singular bodily life, of possessing a body “that implies mortality, vulnerability, agency” (Butler, 2006b, p.24). Separate but not without a larger whole, Seven's difficulties stem from an initial bodily separation followed by a sudden necessity of negotiating a network of new bodily *relations* that she cannot comprehend, whose ‘hidden’ nature of a quasi-collective, or covert ‘hive’ community is only subtly apparent. As Judith Butler highlights:

Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to a world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do. Indeed, if I deny that prior to the formation of my “will,” my body related me to others whom I did not choose to have in proximity to myself, if I built a notion of ‘autonomy’ on the basis of the denial of this sphere...then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? (Butler, 2006b, p.26)

The “invariably public dimension” (Butler, 2006b, p.26) of Seven of Nine, however, is both a curse and a blessing, at least from the audience's point of view. Returning briefly to the conversation between Janeway and Seven quoted above, Seven's retort

to Janeway's sweeping rejection of her argument is as follows: "I believe that you are punishing me because I do not think the way that you do. Because I am not becoming more like you. You claim to respect my individuality. But in fact, you are frightened by it" (Seven of Nine, 1998, ep: *Prey*). Seven's struggle to conform to human customs may, on the surface, appear as a limitation of the show's depiction of alternative modes of being: a rather conventional dismissal of alternative ways of self-expression, including unusual modes of gender operativity. However, the manner in which Seven 'fails' to conform ultimately constitutes a highly complex form of *inoperativity*, highlighting and exposing the *paradigms* that surround her. Feminist critics have condemned Seven's appearance – that of a classic B-movie sf bimbo, in a revealing, silver cat-suit and matching, gloriously unnecessary, high heels: "Many critics have complained that the treatment of Seven/Ryan has been misogynistic, rendering the character and actor a cyborg bimbo in tight-fitting outfits" (Grevin, 2009, p.166). Despite such, perhaps well-founded, criticisms, I find Seven's appearance valuably incongruous in comparison with her highly complex character. As I argued earlier in this section, the best gynoids are indecipherable: Seven's emphasised and overly sexualised femininity only contributes to her unintelligibility. Her *zoe* is highlighted by her appearance, but her bodily intelligibility is already obscured by her technological implants. Her Borg physiology interrupts the codes of meaning normally associated with biologically gendered *zoe*, thus complicating and *suspending* the standard relationship between *zoe* and *bios*, making her role as a woman ambiguous in both physical and political terms.

Furthermore, she is a stunning figure of male, sexual fantasy with absolutely no interest in fulfilling that role; in fact, attempts to make her conform to classic patriarchal female roles only confuse or aggravate her. For example, when asked to perform the role of the very kind of 50s, B-movie damsel her appearance emulates in a holodeck game with a fellow crew-member (Tom Paris), she fails miserably to play the part of a helpless space-wench. Rather than running screaming from enemies she simply walks up to them and promptly destroys them, stating menacingly: "I am Borg" (Seven of Nine, 1998, ep: *Night*). Thus, surprisingly, it is precisely Seven's highly conventional appearance – her traditionally feminine *zoe* – that complements her *suspended* state. By simultaneously highlighting the ambivalence with which

Seven views her highly sexualised body, as well as the many technological elements required to maintain it, her *zoe* is portrayed as a tool necessary to maintain her consciousness, rather than as an object of desire.

The line I chose as the title of this section “you may alter our physiology but you cannot change our nature” beautifully illustrates many of the ambiguities and anxieties that surround the female android or cyborg, exposing these tensions as rooted in those uncertainties immanent in the social construction of Womanhood, where the addition of machinic qualities – the visceral technological Borg enhancements that are stripped from Seven but never entirely removed – merely emphasises the otherness that already surrounds and characterises the female. Thus, as Seven astutely observes, the alteration of female physiology does not alter the nature of Womankind as a figure of uncertainty, rather it serves to further complicate and expand upon it, and by extension pose questions that extend not only to the problematics of gender performativity, but also to more broad questions pertaining to the nature of many similar binary structures dependent on the same universal/particular oppositional, paradigmatic structure. However, as Judith Butler observes, socially and politically constructed gender and what we might call ‘reality’ as it is or might be, are truly as intimately linked as they are necessary to each other on a vast scale:

How do drag, butch, femme, transgender, transsexual persons enter the political field? They make us not only question what is real, and what ‘must’ be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can become instituted. (Butler, 2004, p.29)

Gender is profoundly unsettling, so much so that it must be regulated both politically and socially to the point of exposing its own absurdity. This, I argue, is what is so crucial about the gynoid figure, she performs the same function as the figures of gender incongruity that Butler mentions above. The gynoid is troubling because she is transgressive; she is as disturbing as she is mesmerising: seductive and sublime, she is *undecidable* because the consequences of her presence are uncertain, yet full of possibility. Seven, like a true gynoid, responds to the expectations placed upon her in her new role as a human woman: “in a decidedly disruptive manner, retaining her Borg identity, refusing to be socialised into passivity” (Leaver, 2015 p.72).

While the gynoid, like many of the other female or transgender characters I have discussed in this chapter, succeeds in exposing and even shattering pervasive and oppressive *signatures* relating to gender, life, power and politics, the gynoid is the first example I have discussed of a figure capable of not only drastically drawing the epistemology of received *paradigms* into question, but also of providing a useful and viable framework for potential change. Having discussed and analysed the chaotic and destructive potential of the gynoid, I will now combine this analysis with a philosopher whose work looks beyond the Agambenian starting point of *inoperativity*, who focuses on the limitless potential that Agamben believed to be a product of *indifference*. Agamben shows us a valuable means of viewing our current social and political systems and even a means of toppling those systems with a view to building improved versions upon the foundations of *inoperative* structures. However, the philosophy of Deleuze, as I outlined in my introduction, may provide a framework for realising the valuable social and political changes that Agamben's philosophy implies but does not fully articulate.

As I discussed in my introduction, Deleuze's philosophy includes a process which he similarly describes as "indifference" from which Agamben's own various and almost interchangeable terms *indistinction/inoperativity/indifference* were partially derived. As Deleuze writes in his most famous work *Difference and Repetition*:

Indifference has two aspects: the undifferentiated abyss, the black nothingness, the indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved – but also the white nothingness, the once more calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations like scattered members: a head without a neck, an arm without a shoulder, eyes without brows. (Deleuze, 2004a, p.36)

We see here that Deleuze also recognised the potential positivity that can arise from the "abyss" of the indeterminate. Deleuze frames his image of the indifferent in distinctly organic, visceral terms, for his conception of progress towards improving the existing system is to forever rearrange and experiment, revelling in the constant reordering of the 'machines' that make up ourselves, our communities, our others and our institutions:

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks... Everywhere *it* is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.1)

And so on and so forth. Seven of Nine is an example of an *assemblage* – the term Deleuze often uses to denote the “machines” he describes above – that is, the new and the radical that has been formed out of parts of old machines/*assemblages*. Figures like Seven of Nine are part of Deleuze’s central thesis that *assemblages*, whether social, political, bodily, or conceptual, move, expand, relate to each other in ever changing and reforming ways. A given *assemblage* breaks into pieces over time as attitudes, relations, and methods of exchange alter; the pieces migrate and join other machines to form new *assemblages* which in turn will eventually disintegrate so that another generation of machines may rebuild themselves. This is the process of *deterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*: the destruction of one and the rebirth of another, respectively. The force which drives this unending process is what brings figures like Seven of Nine into being:

An apparent conflict arises between desiring-machines and the body without organs. Every coupling of machines...becomes unbearable to the body without organs. Beneath its organs it senses there are larvae and loathsome worms, and a God at work messing it all up or strangling it by organising it... Merely so many nails piercing the flesh, so many forms of torture. In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.9-10)

The *Body without Organs* (*BwO*) is what Deleuze calls that which resists identification and categorisation. It is a chaotic force that expresses itself when existing machines begin to wear out and machine relationships erode. The *BwO* drives the process of decay even further so that the “organ-machine” cannot function. The “body” or “flesh”, for Deleuze, represents the epitome of *assemblages* operating in concert – this is of course because the body is a large and complex arrangement of different organs or “machines” that work together to keep the whole functioning. This is similar to the activity of an institution with many departments, or

social constructions like that of sex and gender that operate for each other's mutual benefit, perpetuating the larger Butlerian Heterosexual Matrix of desire. The "body" is government, society, discourse, the family unit and yes, even the actual *body* itself.

This visceral conceptuality of what Agamben might describe as a *paradigm* (and what Deleuze refers to as an *assemblage*) conjured by the passage above is highly relevant to our cyborg or gynoid subjects – particularly Seven of Nine, whose body is so heavily invaded and transformed by Borg technology and then later by Federation medicine, as Voyager's doctor alters her body to exist outside of the Borg collective – at each point, to differing degrees, it is impossible to say where technology ends and flesh begins. Having been separated from the larger body of the Borg collective, her migration from larger hive organism to individual, self-regulating, machine follows precisely the pathway of the BwO. Seven is removed from the larger *assemblage* to become another, entirely new entity. Yet, this analysis is too simplistic. As the crew of Voyager repeatedly explain to her, individuality does not equal isolation. Initially, Seven laments her new-found mental seclusion from the thoughts of other Borg drones: "My designation is Seven of Nine. But the others are gone. Designations are no longer relevant. I am one" (Seven of Nine, 1997, ep: *The Gift*). However, it is made clear earlier on that from the Borg's perspective, the Voyager crew and other, similar collections of sentient, humanoid species (crews, families, civilisations) are merely collectives or machine-organisms like the Borg themselves – only of a different kind. Seven, having at least a vague understanding of this similarity, declares that the Voyager crew's "attempts to assimilate this drone will fail" (Seven of Nine, 1997, ep: *The Gift*). Thus, Seven understands the Voyager crew, and by extension humans as a whole, as representing individual separate instances of life as well as a larger crew and ship *assemblage* – a mass organism composed of organic and machine elements fused together beyond distinction.

This view is evidenced by the Borg mantra repeated every the encounter a vessel they intend to commandeer: "We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile" (*Star Trek: First Contact*, 1996). For the Borg, the cultures they assimilate are merely smaller

assemblages of embodied organic and machinic matter to be incorporated into their own larger *assemblage*. For them, resistance is futile because they see the process of assimilation as inevitable: unbridled rearranging of machines to produce ever changing, shifting, expanding and transforming apparatuses, which is precisely the intention of the *BwO*. The Borg can be read, then, as the pure unfettered presence of the *BwO*, while Seven can be understood as something rather more complex.

Seven is a new incarnation of several *assemblages*, a new embodied variant of gender, individuality, desire and agency. She disturbs the classic binaries that both Agamben and Deleuze sort to disrupt: general and particular, identity and difference, self and other. Despite her initial loneliness as an individual subject, she is – and can never be – merely “one”; she is an *assemblage* as all things – “bodies” – are and cannot escape the myriad complementary machines to which she, and to which we all, are bound. Yet what machines is she connected to? And what is the nature of her desiring relationship to them? She is ambivalent towards her own sexuality, failing to comprehend or see the relevance of her ostensible place within patriarchal norms; she will not pout, flee, become hysterical, cry, or beg to be recognised by the male gaze. She views her body as a mere receptacle for *herself*, continuing to view it in Borg terms, as a unit: a machine. This is beautifully evidenced by a short, throw-away scene where a member of the god-like race known as the Q, called Junior, attempts to play a practical joke on Seven:

(Seven of Nine is working when her clothes vanish.)

JUNIOR: Talk about perfection.

SEVEN: If you're attempting to embarrass me, you won't succeed.

JUNIOR: I'm just observing humanity. Aren't you going to scamper away, make some futile attempt to cover yourself?

(She continues working. He returns her clothes, shakes his head and leaves.) (2001, ep: Q2)

Seven refuses to engage with this patriarchal stunt, the male gaze does not excite nor pose a threat to her, and as such she cannot be humiliated or otherwise placed at a disadvantage by it. As a result of Seven's attitude towards her body, her traditionally

feminine and hypersexualised appearance appears (as it does to her) an irrelevance: at most the result of human convention and sense of aesthetics influencing the design of her attire. Seven is a woman in a unique position to separate herself from others while still remaining strangely bound to them. She is related to the universal “every-woman”; like Warburg’s nymphs, she maintains a connection to the others in her set, yet she is also set dramatically apart from them. She, in many ways, represents individuality as a surviving refugee from a totalitarian regime, yet her journey is one of learning to coexist with others. She is, finally, a set of startling contradictions that suggest emphatically that a future of gender *inoperativity* is indeed possible.

I suggested earlier that, if Agamben’s *indistinction* could occur for gender on a vast scale, perhaps the norms of gender roles and the established codes of desire that regulate them might be allowed to dissipate and become *incommunicable*. I believe this is only possible through figures such as the gynoids, that I describe in this section, as well as a willingness on the part of readers, viewers, etc., to listen to the messages they offer us, and the possibilities for change that resonate in their voices. Deleuze’s work can help us not only recognise and understand this potential but perhaps also guide it into being.

Chapter 3: The Girl in the Machine - From *Becoming-Woman* to *Becoming-Gynoid*

In the previous chapter I discussed the potential inherent in the popular sf figure of the gynoid – the female machine or female cyborg – to help navigate new territories of gendered being. Having discussed the ways in which the gynoid acts as a disruptive influence, highlighting female *indistinction* and thus exposing the institution of gender as *suspended*; I began to analyse, using the work of Deleuze, how this character may also be highly valuable in imagining and realising alternatives to the existing gendered *paradigm* (or what Deleuze might term an *assemblage*). In this chapter I intend to expand upon this analysis, drawing out the breadth of possibilities a Deleuzian examination of women, and other more complex representations of gender, in sf can produce. I briefly discussed the potential value of viewing the female machine as a tool of the *body without organs*. I would like to elaborate on this analysis of the gynoid, delving deeper into the implications of a female body invaded by technology and how the unique being of the gynoid can be said to relate to Deleuze and Guattari's controversial concept of *becoming-woman*.

Deleuze's is an ontology of becoming, based in a philosophy of immanence; in a sense his work is focussed on the study of change, unlike Agamben whose system is based in historical and archaeological methodologies and thus is inevitably grounded by a study of how things *were* and *are*. Agamben reveals the processes that brought current epistemological processes into being, leading us to question how they might have otherwise been – had historical developments emerged differently or not at all. However, Deleuze brings us past this point and dives directly into a wild exploration of the immanent processes that produce both epistemological and ontological actualities by building a framework for understanding both the actual and the virtual, and the interactions between them: that is, how reality emerges from the possible, or how *becoming* becomes *being*.

The virtual, for Deleuze, is a space full of potential intensities, from which some ideas and events will emerge as actualities: representations in or of knowledge: “when we go from virtual to actual, we go from the virtual to representation. The movement of ‘actualization’ or ‘differentiation’ is the movement from the virtual

object or ‘the object in the idea’ to the actual, represented object” (Hughes, 2009, p.128). That which may materialise from the virtual is limited by that which is already actualised, however, by existing physical, conceptual and epistemological structures. For Deleuze the apparatuses that govern the world and our perception of it are in constant and inevitable flux, a persistent variability perpetuated and propelled by desire. These ‘machines’, or *assemblages*, can be described as an umbrella concept encompassing what we might recognise as discursive or even *paradigmatic* structures. However, the *assemblage*, as well as Deleuze’s overall philosophy of immanence, acknowledges relationships, politics, and institutions in a way that is far more ‘organic’ than the approaches of Agamben or Foucault. By this I mean that Deleuze’s philosophy, heavily informed and grounded in psychoanalysis (or, more specifically a distaste for it which led to the development of his and Guattari’s alternative discourse of *schizoanalysis* – see the series: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) include a deeper awareness of the body and its various interactions, relations, wants and needs. The *assemblage* is not limited to the sphere of the conceptual; a machine can exist anywhere, describing a relationship between any components: the mother-child machine, the desiring machines of the body/individual and its others as microcosms of those broader *assemblages*, the war-machine, the capitalist machine, or even the gender/patriarchy machine.

From the virtual comes the force of desire which promotes the continual reorganisation of *assemblages*, reaching out from the intensive space of the virtual into actualisation. The advantage of Deleuze’s philosophy, as I have stated before, is its optimistic conceptualisation of reality as malleable and thus capable of reform. The machines that govern us are dauntingly powerful, but their constantly shifting nature leaves room for their power to be contested and even diminished, for the lines of *deterritorialisation* to form. Much like Agamben’s understanding of *suspension* within the *paradigm* leading to *indistinction*, *assemblages* are similarly dependent on relationships that are inherently unstable. That which makes the *assemblage* so pervasive and consolidates its power as a network of interconnected pieces of discursive machinery is also that which makes it most vulnerable to structural collapse.

What Deleuze and Guattari term *assemblages* – the machines, bodies, multiplicities that make up the world as we know it – form along various lines that describe their nature and manner in which they engage with the world: “there is the molar line that forms a binary arborescent system of segments, the molecular line that is more fluid although still segmentary, and the line of flight that ruptures the other two lines” (Lorraine, 2005, p.147). The *molar line* is inclined towards institutions, large controlled territories, discursive structures, “whether social, technical, or organic”, thus the *assemblages* that exist here are rigid and difficult to disrupt; the *molecular line*, by contrast, is more susceptible to fluctuation and alteration. This is because the molecular line is home to what Deleuze and Guattari term *desiring-machines*, governed or influenced by intention (for example, human desire):

Desiring-machines are the following: formative machines, whose very misfirings are functional, and whose functioning is indiscernible from their formation; chronogeneous machines engaged in their own assembly...operating by non-localisable intercommunications and dispersed locations. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.315)

In other words, these machines are more amenable to what Deleuze terms *detrterritorialisation*. One of their most important concepts, this term denotes as Deleuze and Guattari define it in *Anti-Oedipus* as a “coming undone” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.354). Like Agamben’s *indistinction*, *detrterritorialisation* is a chaotic force that unravels existing structures, dismantling machines/*assemblages* and severing the links between them; yet it is also an emancipatory procedure “where the flows [that is, lines/connections/movements that course through chains of *assemblages*] cross the threshold of detrterritorialization and produce a new land – not at all a hope, but a simple “finding,” a “finished design,” where the person who escapes causes other escapes, and marks out the land while detrterritorializing himself” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.354). What is left, like the void of *inoperativity*, is an empty space which provides a gateway to the virtual, inspiring the formation of new machines and connections between them, “an active point of escape where the revolutionary machine, the artistic machine, the scientific machine, and the (schizo) analytic machine become parts and pieces of one another” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.354). This provides a path for an entirely new kind of line, the *line of flight*.

The *line of flight* is the line of pure *detritorialisation*, and as we can see from their explanation of this phenomena above Deleuze and Guattari discuss this plundering entity with great enthusiasm in their first joint work *Anti-Oedipus* – seemingly advocating the violent destruction of existing structures. Here too they first develop their concept of the *body without organs* (from here on BwO), which in many ways can be seen as the embodied (or perhaps more accurately, *disembodied*) instance of the *line of flight* and the primary operation of all *desiring-machines*: “Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down...the body without organs is non-productive; nonetheless it is produced, at a certain place and a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.9). The BwO is an instance of becoming in the world: it is a point of pure destratification that may lie along a longer line of events that, taken together, can be considered as a *line of flight*.

However, as Eugene W. Holland notes, Deleuze and Guattari show far greater reticence towards the BwO, and by extension the *line of flight*, in their later collaboration *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013, p.99). Here they display an awareness of the potential dangers of the unfettered *line of flight*:

And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. ... Dismantling the organism never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.185-186)

The widespread production of the BwO would be akin to mass instances of *indistinction* spread out over a large collection of related *assemblages* (paradigms) corroded so quickly that there is no opportunity for anything to form in the wake of the *detritorialised* line, obscuring the process of *reterritorialisation* which is often the natural and desirable second step. Here Deleuze and Guattari develop their initial work, revealing that for *detritorialisation* to be beneficial it must be balanced by this organising force. Here they describe how this balance manifests itself in the ideal operation of the *assemblage*:

[O]n a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilise it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialisation*, which carry it away. ... On the second axis...are the sequenced or conjugated degrees of deterritorialization, and the operations of reterritorialization that stabilise the aggregate at a given moment. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.103)

The “axes” described above are like those of a graph upon which are mapped the coordinates of *assemblages*, groups of which form *molar/molecular* lines or *lines of flight*. We may imagine this graph as follows, where the horizontal or Y-axis coordinate determines the position of the *assemblage* in terms of interactions of “bodies, of actions and passions” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.102-3), as well as the more abstract processes associated with these: “*enunciation...acts and statements*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.102-3), symbols and laws.

Difference emanating from the *virtual* is the engine that drives this process and encourages the incremental development of change, forcing the rearrangement and even dissolution of *assemblages* for the sake of new machines; the *line of flight* or the BwO is responsible for these fragmentations, emerging from the spatium of the *virtual* as a pure intensity. For Deleuze, there is no specific goal in mind in this overall system. Difference is the only possible desirable outcome, that is, a perpetuation of difference aided to the extent that it is not smothered by *reterritorialization*. This process results in *molar lines*, spreading oppression through stagnant, immovable machines and connections incapable of mutation, immune to steady development; in other words, these are impervious to the necessary forces of tempered destratification. The *line of flight* is most valuable when its trajectory is aimed along the molar strata. This is where it serves an essential purpose: causing measured havoc.

Returning to our graph, we may visualise three lines of the molar, molecular, and flight variety respectively. We might imagine the molar as an austere, unwavering line, the molecular a segmented line, each angular portion of it representing a small non-radical change. Finally, the *line of flight* we may imagine as a free flowing curve darting across the chart erratically from point to point, criss-crossing the molar and the molecular lines like a warped lattice. More than this, however, the *line of flight* is not limited as its name implies to a single “line” or the limitations of a two-dimensional graph; rather it is forever branching out into new curves all of which

move in all directions and dimensions, completely free, uncontrollable and unpredictable. Below is a chart that illustrates approximately the nature of these lines:

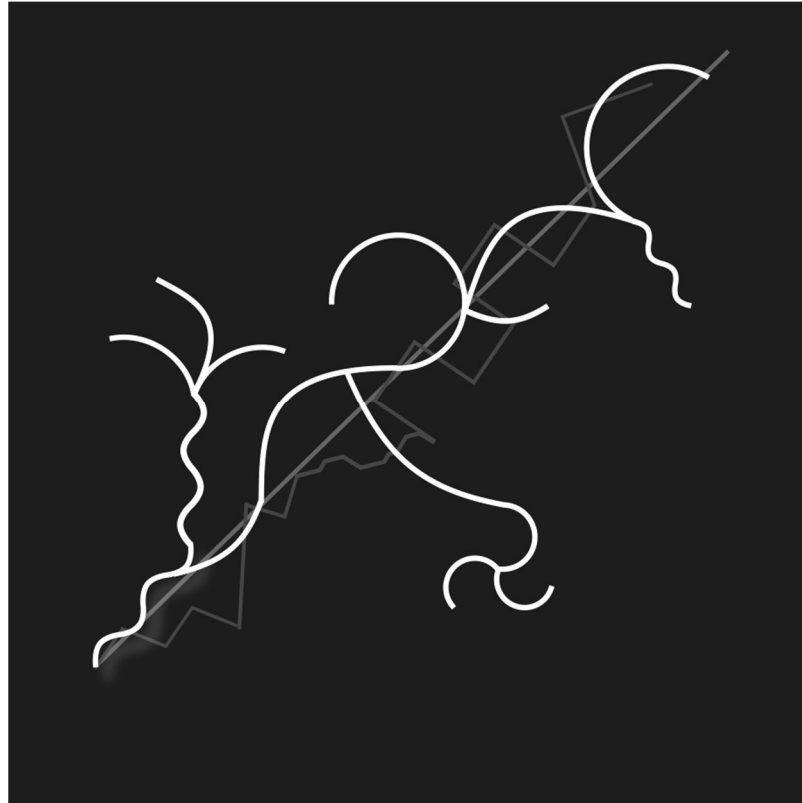


Figure 2 – a visual representation of Deleuze and Guattari's *molar*, *molecular* and *lines of flight*.

We see here *assemblages* lying upon the straight line of molar *assemblages*, for example fascism; on the more fluid (angular) molecular line would lie the machine of democracy; and along the erratic *lines of flight*, the BwO gone too far: cancer, drug abuse. Far more interesting, however, are the intersections of these different lines, the shared coordinates where truly exciting reformations may occur: notice the points at which the *line of flight* intersects with the molar line. At such a point revolution must take place as the old *assemblage* is *deterritorialised*, carried away; such a point is where regimes are overthrown, laws irrevocably broken, and social strictures transgressed. Here the BwO prepares the ground for *reterritorialization* to build a new *assemblage*, from which a new line may emerge.

More pertinent to the subject of this thesis, however, are the events, not of outright upheaval, but of more subtle rebellion, where the segments of the molecular are merely touched by the *line of flight*, where instances of the BwO persuade existing

assemblages into gradual, *imperceptible* change; these encounters are not so openly destructive. Rather, they encroach upon enemy territory like a spy behind enemy lines. Ideally, their espionage is subtle, devastating, and yet unnoticed until it is too late. I believe these points can occur at places where the *molecular line* intersects with the *line of flight*, unravelling previous *assemblages* through a process of gradual becomings, for example: *becoming-woman*.

As an Agambenian analysis of feminism and gender theory has already shown us earlier in this thesis, the position of woman is historically that of an entity suspended between particular and universal standards which continually prevent her from possessing freedom of subjectivity and thus true autonomy. A singular woman is only as important as her entire sex, an entire sex can be reduced to the image of a single woman, carrying with her all the damaging stereotypes ascribed to the whole. It is no wonder then that Woman has managed to retain the status of both virgin and whore simultaneously for so much of history: all women are at once pure and divine with a few exceptions who are Jezebels; in the same moment all women are Jezebels while a mere few are chaste and faithful.

Yet even this is a simplistic approach to the complex situation of gender, particularly with regard to how the position of women has developed in the last few decades in Western culture. Though oppression still exists in Western society, it is far less blatant and is excessively difficult to pinpoint with real accuracy; despite this the age-old *suspended* nature of Womankind is still in existence and can be understood in modern (as opposed to historical) terms as similarly stretched between two disparate categories. As Rosi Braidotti observes: “femininity is caught in the double bind of late postmodernity by being simultaneously ‘Other’ (of the same) and integrated in the majority” (Braidotti, 2003, p.48). The recent new levels of freedom attained by women through the various successes of feminism in the West have given them a new claim to universality. The new assumption that society attempts with difficulty to process is that Women are not *other* but are rather a group of humans to be assimilated into the gender neutral concept of *person*. However, the very act of performing this mental adjustment is reminder and proof of the fact that women cannot yet *be* individuals until all the social conditions upon which femininity is predicated disappear. However, following Deleuzian reasoning, this

circular situation a not a hopeless one, but rather a gradual process of difference and repetition; spiral-like, in which difference is absorbed with each revolution while customs and institutions are partially retained through repetition.

Becoming-woman functions, as all elements of Deleuze's philosophy do, in precisely this way. Woman's desire to *be*, to break free from her *suspended* state, is invading our world, our institutions, and social constructions. Woman as subject, as other, as individual, as a strange, evolving unknown creature is taking over reality, moulding *assemblages* to her will, making space for herself, modifying the *molecular* machines to be compatible with her. Woman is converting the world around her, giving it languages with which to comprehend her. As Deleuze explains, a chief aspect of the *becoming-woman* process is the way in which the sphere of literature is and has been amalgamated with the voices of women: "writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.322). While women's works, experiences and attitudes are and have been historically ignored and dismissed, her *becoming* is at once the result of her oppression and the means through which she breeds revolution. Woman is produced, *created* as a symbol of difference, and yet it is also her presence predicated upon difference, her very *being in the world*, that strikes at the heart of the system that suppresses her:

[T]hese indissociable aspects of becoming-woman...[emit] particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, [they] produce in us a molecular woman, create a molecular woman. ... [T]he woman as a molar entity *has to become-woman* in order that the man also becomes- or can become-woman. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.321)

A little girl is made into a woman, artificially. But Woman is not entirely the instrument of patriarchy. As we know from the application of Agamben's philosophy, the dualisms at the heart of patriarchal discourse are far too fragile for this to be the case. As such, Woman is a *suspended* figure and so has the opportunity to become a renegade within the system, to make herself a *BwO*:

The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history, and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body. ...

That is why, conversely, the reconstruction of the body as a Body without Organs, the anorganism of the body, is inseparable from a becoming-woman, or the production of a molecular woman. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.322)

This brings us back to the problem of the ‘girl’, for she is the focal point and central subject of the process of *becoming-woman* we have been discussing. The girl becomes a woman in a strictly molar sense; this journey takes place upon the rigid *molar line* of matter-of-fact, biological growth and transformation. However, at the same time the girl and her becoming also exist on the *molecular line* as a *BwO*, a uniquely positioned one at the intersection of so many interconnecting molar lines: “the girl is like a block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.323). In this way the girl can be understood as the central conduit of all *becoming* placed at the centre of so many dichotomous relationships; the girl is pure difference and potential combined, a part and a negation of so many key concepts: she is a threat to the boy, employed when he does not perform his *becoming-masculinity* effectively; she is the antithesis of man, an abyss of negativity which the patriarchal male must constantly avoid; she threatens womanhood too, for her existence mocks the adult woman kept in a state of perpetual infancy. As such the girl makes a natural rebel:

She never ceases to roam upon a body without organs. She is an abstract line, or a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to an age, group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.322-3)

In his much earlier work, *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze wrote extensively about a specific girl, Alice from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, whose adventures substantially informed the argument and structure of his work. The central difference between the real world and Alice’s is that Wonderland lays bare the nonsensical structures and inconsistent systems that make up its society whereas, by contrast, the paradoxical and aleatory nature of the real world’s political and social systems that control us are hidden, subsumed beneath discourse, tradition, *paradigms*, stratification – *assemblages*. Wonderland is an inverted world such that its paradoxes are already uncovered and widely acknowledged, or in the language of Agamben, its

paradigms are already exposed. “If there is nothing to see behind the curtain,” writes Deleuze on the nature of Wonderland,

it is because everything is visible, or rather...[i]t suffices to follow it far enough, precisely enough, and superficially enough, in order to reverse sides and to make the right side become the left or vice versa. It is not therefore a question of *the adventures* of Alice, but of Alice’s *adventure*. (Deleuze, 2004b, p.12)

Alice has an unsettling effect on the world she enters, always questioning the illogic that surrounds her, while her very presence poses uncomfortable questions for the citizens of Wonderland that she encounters. For example, the repeated question of the caterpillar: “who are *you*?” (Carroll, 2012, p.37). In this case she is considered strangely indiscernible; his reaction reflects the vacuum of meaning and being that the *girl* represents. She is in this world, as in her own, a question mark, an inconvenient reminder of the unsteady *assemblages* upon which society and institutions are built.

This is because of her nature as a figure of pure absence, a chasm of meaning and yet at the same time – and for the same reasons – a conduit of *becoming*. As Deleuze explains, Alice’s journey is a quest for meaning, or rather a search for the means through which meaning is produced; her adventures comprise “her climb to the surface, her disavowal of false depth and her discovery that everything happens at the border” (Deleuze, 2004b, p.12). By this, Deleuze means that meaning is an inscrutable phenomenon which does not exist in a specific entity but rather is the haphazard result of a network of entities whose vast array of relations produces meaning. Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense* (which I draw on extensively in this chapter) never mentions the concepts of *becoming-woman* or the “girl” that he later develops in *A Thousand Plateaus*, but his work’s central focus is on the nature and development of series of various kinds, how the members of series relate to and feed into one another and, by extension, how they are linked by the processes of becoming. Temporally speaking, for example, how does one object or being ‘grow’ into another? At what point on the evolutionary scale can a fish be called an amphibian, an amphibian a mammal, or a mammal a human? By the same token, at what point can a girl be called a woman? If we take a snapshot of the series of creatures on the evolutionary scale between amphibians and mammals, at what point

within this series could we point to a specific member of the series and indicate that creature as the first mammal, or the last amphibian? This cannot be done with accuracy and to do so, in any case, would not be useful because the nature of the series is such that each individual object does not, and cannot, act alone as a unit of meaning; no single thing can exist in a vacuum. Rather, the series and each of its members are made intelligible by the relationships of the members to each other. Deleuze explains this through the example of language and the process of naming: “we know that the normal law governing all names endowed with sense is precisely that their sense may be denoted only by another name ($\rightarrow n_1 \rightarrow n_2 \rightarrow n_3 \dots$)” (Deleuze, 2004b, p.79).

We might understand Deleuze’s work here on the nature of the series as the proto understanding of his later work on *assemblages*, axes, the molar, molecular, and lines of flight. It is also in *The Logic of Sense* that we see Deleuze first mention the BwO, although in very vague terms. The BwO is described here as an extension of another concept which he terms the “the empty square” or the “floating signifier”, that is, those members of a series that exist not quite within and not quite apart from the series to which they are ostensibly attached: “sense, regarded not at all as appearance but as surface effect and position effect, and produced by the circulation of the empty square in the structural series (the place of the dummy...the blind spot, the floating signifier, the value degree zero...etc)” (Deleuze, 2004b, p.82). These floating signifiers are capable of crossing from one series to another, of traversing many series, “floating”, disrupting established sequences, much like the more fully developed BwO of *A Thousand Plateaus* which is capable of existing along more than one axis or line. It is extremely apt then that Deleuze chose Lewis Carroll’s novel as one of the bases of his work on the nature of meaning (sense), since it is a novel whose central character is a young girl at the centre of myriad becomings, a figure that he would later discover is perhaps the most important examples of a *BwO* or *empty square*.

I make this detour through the perhaps more obscure areas of Deleuze’s philosophy in order to explain the nature of the *girl* as a conduit of *becoming-woman* more clearly but also to develop another, closely related concept of my own: what I term *becoming-gynoid*. As the name suggests, this concept is based on Deleuze’s own

becoming-woman in that it describes a process of gradual change in thought, attitude and being in the world that is a result of the slow encroachment of an *other* on social reality: a careful yet distinct *deterritorialisation*. The gynoid is a special gendered case, I argue, because she possesses the difference of femaleness as well as a difference and a strangeness that is all her own. While the *girl* and *becoming-woman* are indispensable steps in the gradual *deterritorialisation* of gender, I believe the *becoming-gynoid* can further the process infinitely. To fully *deterritorialise* gender but also to begin reimagining it, *reterritorializing* it, forming it and reforming it anew, we need a figure more removed from the gender binary yet still maintaining a powerful connection to it. We have to look beyond Woman to her close relation: the machine of simulated flesh, the strange (dis)embodiment of mechanical womanhood: the gynoid.

Female Machines and Female Flesh: Women and/as Automata

The gynoid is an essential new step within the process of thinking about and reimagining gender, where *becoming-woman's* capacity to disassemble the gendered machines of our society – patriarchy, sexism, etc. – is hindered by an inevitable proximity to the system itself. Though Woman's *suspended* state (to use Agambenian language) allows her to expose the system and, to an extent, destratify it from the inside, her powers are limited; *becoming-woman* can and has challenged so much of our gendered, androcentric world, yet its influence is restricted by its irrevocably gendered nature. Like the paradoxical problem of some feminist discourse that embraces the traits of femininity invented and propagated by patriarchy, *becoming-woman* has a similar problem of attempting to subvert the gender *assemblage* while remaining a working, functioning component of that machine. The limitations of *becoming-woman* unfortunately mimic the overall limitations of Deleuze's philosophical system: all intensities or lines of flight emerge from the virtual as *deterritorialisations* that disperse and destabilise the current status quo. Yet all these *deterritorialisations* must eventually become *reterritorialisations* and thus form part of a stagnant molar or molecular system. How then, can any line of flight truly emerge from the spatium and still retain its originality? The moment it comes into existence it surely becomes territorialised.

In a similar way, *becoming-woman* emerges from the virtual as a *detritorialisation* of a male-centred world. However, the moment the activity of *becoming-woman* enters the world it becomes part of the territory of gendered *assemblages*. Woman behaves much like a cog within a large clockwork device; she is a central cog connected to many others, and so, were her revolutions to be *suspended*, the device itself might cease to function entirely. But how can this be achieved when we still speak of this destratifying process as one that is in some way, female, a process that we term *becoming-woman*? How can a cog both turn and cease to turn at the same time? As Gillian Howie notes with suspicion in her paper *Becoming Woman a Fight Into Abstraction*: “becoming woman empties out the idea of sexual difference but also, I maintain, managed to reintroduce sexual difference, through the back door” (Howie, 2008, p.86). We might attempt to solve the potential problems this poses by saying that as new machines are built around this central cog, they will gradually change the nature of the way the gender machine functions by altering the manner in which it interacts with other existing *assemblages*.

However, this does not seem like a particularly convincing solution, partly because of the problems within the Deleuzian system I have already pointed to, the objection to his philosophy inherent in Agambenian theory: that is, how can an existing *assemblage* or *signature* (in this case gender) transform itself into an entirely different apparatus, or at least different enough from its previous apparatus to ensure that it no longer retains its oppressive power: in other words, why should we believe that any ‘new’ *assemblage* of gender – through the process of *becoming-woman* – is not vitally and necessarily connected to its original patriarchal *assemblage*? Is it possible to both abandon and reclaim womanhood without also introducing its associated ‘baggage’, “by the backdoor”?

In contrast to Woman, the gynoid (or female cyborg) is not bound by gendered associations as the ‘girl’ or *becoming-woman* in the same direct manner because it actively disrupts gendered *assemblages*, rather than passively altering them simply by being in the world and allowing her gendered being to warp and influence gendered *paradigms*. As a result the gynoid has more potential as a BwO, or *floating signifier*; the female machine is a *re-assemblage* of female biology, becoming and being. Whether the gynoid appears in fiction in the form of a completely mechanical

non-organic android or a part-human/part-machine cyborg entity, the gynoid is always, in some sense, a reordering of the concept female. Woman is an essence limited by and grounded in the molar sphere of scientific discourse, the *molar* languages of evolution, instinct, biological determinism combining to form an imagined destiny of female flesh. The gynoid, however, makes a much less problematic *line of flight* because the female android forms an intersection between two territories – that of machine and that of Woman. As she is still, in some shape or form, a woman, the gynoid retains those profound associations of womanhood and yet in the same moment disavows them. Merging the philosophies of Agamben and Deleuze, we could say that the original *signature* of gender is eroded and possibly rendered *inoperative* by the gynoid's rejection and reformation of existing gender *assemblages*.

If we follow this line of reasoning, we must accept that two things are true: first, that Agamben is right in his assertion that the *signature* of gender cannot be dissolved unless rendered inoperative; in other words it must be entirely destroyed. Secondly, we must accept that Deleuzian difference and repetition can, eventually, produce more than mere novelty, that is not merely the same *assemblage* repackaged and rebranded but a truly innovative system. If we accept these two things then we can understand the gynoid as a stepping stone between Woman as she was and whatever she will come to be in the future. I argue that *becoming-woman*, while it has achieved a great deal, simply cannot do all that Deleuze and Guattari claimed; *becoming-woman* is more than novelty, but less than inoperativity, she is not the solution to gender but a step along the line of difference and repetition that may one day lead to a truly different conception of gender: *becoming-gynoid* is the next step.

Perhaps the first most significant early literary example of the gynoid appears in a short story, *Der Sandman*, by E.A. Hoffman; here, a young student, Nathaniel, falls in love with a beautiful, strangely taciturn, young girl who is revealed at the end to be a highly complex automaton created by the student's professor, Stalanzani. This revelation is one of the key moments in the story that contributes to Nathaniel's eventual descent into madness. Later, Freud would famously draw on Hoffman's tale in order to explore his theory of the uncanny; Olympia, specifically, would be used to discuss the feelings of dread associated with objects resembling living beings: "we

have particularly favourable conditions for generating feelings of the uncanny if intellectual uncertainty is aroused as to whether something is animate or inanimate and whether the lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living” (Freud, 2003, p.140-1).

Olympia is Nathaniel’s ideal – she is beautiful, exact in her performance of femininity whether singing and dancing or maintaining an adoring silence before her gentleman admirer, Nathaniel, except to gasp in awe at appropriate moments as he unburdens his soul to her:

Nathaniel fetched up everything he had ever written... And he had never before had so marvellous an auditor: she did not sew or knit, she did not gaze out of the window, she did not feed a caged bird, she did not play with a lapdog or with a favourite cat, she did not fiddle with a handkerchief or with anything else...she sat motionless, her gaze fixed on the eyes of her beloved... Only when Nathaniel finally arose and kissed her hand – mouth too – did she say: ‘Ah, ah!’ (Hoffman, 2015, para. 113)

Nathaniel finds her appealing chiefly because she has no interests of her own, and is instead content to give all her attention to him, fulfilling the masculine fantasy of a woman seen and not heard. When Nathaniel observes Olympia through her window, he sees her sitting motionless in her room and staring vacantly into space in a warped portrayal of feminine passivity and obedience; his extreme appreciation for her submissiveness completely obscures any doubts he may have had about her authenticity. Olympia only comes to life when in Nathaniel’s presence, in a sense ceasing to exist when her lover is absent; she is created by men and her existence is sustained by man’s gaze forming a horrifying amalgamation of patriarchal expectations and desires made into reality. Thus, it is precisely those aspects of Olympia that make her the ideal woman that also make her highly disturbing, and later a figure of dread: Olympia is uncanny because her performance of femininity is too good: she sings and dances too perfectly; her movements are too measured; and her beauty is altogether too precise. As a result, the overall effect of Olympia leaves many people feeling curiously disturbed:

Her figure is well-proportioned; so is her face – that is true! She might be called beautiful if her eyes were not so completely lifeless, I could even say sightless. She walks with a curiously measured gait; every movement seems as if controlled by clockwork. When she

plays and sings it is with the unpleasant soulless regularity of a machine...it seems to us that she is only acting like a living creature. (Hoffman, 2015, para. 115)

In fact, it is very much the case that Olympia is reproducing a simulation of life for the benefit of her male masters. The female machine goes to the very heart of Womanhood as performativity; the woman automaton is femininity incarnate, and it is her precision of being that makes her both an idyllic expression of male fantasy as well as, equally, a figure of unease – to use Freudian terminology this is what makes her uncanny: “for animism, magic and witchcraft, the omnipotence of thought, man’s attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something fearful into an uncanny thing” (Freud, 2003, p.13). Thus we may deduce that, consonant with Freud, it is Olympia’s “involuntary repetition” as a machine, approximating through *automatic* gestures and movements the appearance of a woman that makes her a figure of uncanniness. She performs, with horrifying accuracy and precision, the actions of womanhood, exposing these feminine traits as little more than repetitions; as a result she appears vacuous, exposing the lifeless nature of traditional feminine behaviour at its most extreme. Deleuze and Guattari, of course, heavily critiqued Freudian psychoanalysis through their own form of psychiatric thought, *schizoanalysis*: “refusing to interpret desire through the system of metaphor and paradigm that interprets desire through the system of ‘lack’... [Deleuze and Guattari] insist we understand desire in terms of affectivity, as a rhizomatic mode of interconnection” (Braidotti, 2005, p.240).

For Freud repetition is evidence of neurosis, of repressed desires manifesting themselves through unconscious repeated behaviours, and thus involuntary repetition (as in a lifelike automaton) appears uncanny because it these same equally uncontrolled behaviours in humans that signify mental illness. However, for Deleuze, repetition is not the moniker of latent perversion, rather it is the key mode through which desire moves through the world, inspiring valuable production of new assemblages. Freud dismisses Olympia as a mere prop contributing to the overall sense of uncanniness in Hoffman’s tale, overlooking the true significance of her character. Olympia inspires feelings of dread not because she embodies repetition as a whole, but rather because she repeats fruitlessly. Repetition, for Deleuze, is necessary and purposeful: at its best, it acts as the conduit of desire, providing flows

where it may channel repetitions but also valuable differences, producing *molecular* lines and *lines of flight*. Olympia frightens us because her repetition is stagnant, without difference, her acts are all *molar* and thus satirise not individual psychosis but rather a problem of oppression/repression rooted deep within the social psyche: “social oppression and psychic repression, thus, are for *schizoanalysis* two sides of the same coin, except that *schizoanalysis* reverses the direction of causality, making psychic repression depend on social oppression” (Holland, 2005, p.239). The *molar* repetition that Olympia performs is uncanny because it mimics the psychic repression of women in which they come to desire their own subservience, as a result of social conditioning and oppression.

This is most terrifyingly expressed in the story when Nathaniel discovers the truth of Olympia’s nature: “Nathaniel stood numb with horror. He had seen all too clearly that Olympia’s deathly white face possessed no eyes: where the eyes should have been, there were only pits of blackness – she was a lifeless doll!” (Hoffman, 2015, para. 112). Here the strange warped quality of the female machine is brought to horrifying fruition, in a similar way to the modern literary example of female androids in Ira Levin’s *The Stepford Wives*, where it is revealed that the women of a small town have been slaughtered and replaced with equally uncanny, yet ‘perfect’, feminine automatons. Writers both within and outside the science fiction genre seem to have a history of understanding the dreadful nature of the woman machine and capitalising on it to produce terror and unease in the reader. As a constructed machine she has the ultimate potential to fulfil male fantasy; yet, at the same time it is this potential that contributes to her utter strangeness, for by meeting the impossible and oppressive standards of male fantasy she inevitably perverts them, or exposes them as perverted in themselves. It is extremely poignant then that Nathaniel discovers Olympia’s true nature by glimpsing her without her eyes, which her creator oddly describes as “purloined from you” (meaning Nathaniel). His words suggest that Olympia’s sightlessness is a metaphor for his own thwarted gaze: “at this point Nathaniel saw that a pair of blood-flecked-eyes were lying on the floor and staring up at him; Spalanzani seized them with his uninjured hand and threw them at him, so that they struck him in his chest” (Hoffman, 2015, para. 112). It is very fitting here that the dollmaker’s striking Nathaniel with the doll’s eyes should finally send him into a fit of hysteria: the reflection of his desire hitting him physically in

the chest, her eyeless sockets shattering his perception as her eyes themselves are cast to the ground, destroyed. The mechanical woman blurs the line between fantasy and nightmare by terrorising the male gaze with his own desires, reflecting his gaze back onto him.

Olympia is representative of the two effects of the gynoid figure. The first is to shock, through her ability to simultaneously eclipse and pervert the patriarchal conception of Woman through her mechanical performance of femininity and technological approximation of female biology in a dreadful exposure of the stagnant and disturbing quality of the socially constructed idea of femaleness. The gynoid is a reminder of patriarchal oppression; however, through her uncanniness, the gynoid is able to disrupt the patterns of feminine behaviour that she so perfectly imitates. In other words, the gynoid is such a powerful literary figure because of her incredibly perceptive representation of the female state. This is because Woman simply makes more Deleuzian *sense* as a mechanical structure, as an android with perfectly smooth, manufactured lines, a compact body that can easily be disassembled, dismembered, or reordered entirely – substituting limbs, skin, eyes, hair to taste as with Olympia's own removable eye-balls.

Returning to Deleuze's work in *The Logic of Sense*, I argue that Woman appears most *woman-like* when she is portrayed as an artificially constructed being. Deleuzian sense is composed of a network of meanings that circulate throughout a given series, producing complex referential concepts. The sense of Woman is as much a product of this process as other examples I described earlier, such as language, where each word refers to another and its meanings are all referential and co-dependent on other words. In a similar way, Woman is the product of a surface circulation of many individual examples of women both real and imagined, all of whom are unintelligible as Woman without the larger referential framework that produced the concept of Woman. Yet this overall meaning is as messy and inconclusive as the plethora of often contradictory ideas relating to the members of the Woman series. In other words, the network of meanings that produce the universal conception of Woman has become so distorted through both patriarchal discourses and those of various forms of feminist and gender theory, that it not only

bears the most tenuous of connections to *actual* women but also, now, much more closely resembles that of a machine, abstract and faceless.

C.L. Moore's *No Woman Born* is one of the most famous examples of sf writing which explores the nature of gender. What is more specifically interesting, however, is the intriguing manner in which Moore chose to examine the appearance of womanhood, through a featureless cyborg character. The figure in question, Deirdre, is a glamorous, celebrity singer and dancer whose body is destroyed in a fire; her brain, however, is preserved by the scientist Maltzer who creates an entirely metal body in which to house Deirdre's mind. In some ways her mechanical body avoids the uncanniness which surrounds Olympia's character by appearing deliberately indistinct:

And so she had no face. She had only a smooth, delicately modeled, ovoid for her head, with a...sort of crescent-shaped mask across the frontal area where her eyes would have been...she had no features. And it had been wise of those who designed her, he realised now. Subconsciously he had been dreading some clumsy attempt at human features that might creak like a marionette's in parodies of animation. ... The mask was better. (Moore, 1975, p.206)

Her plain, characterless "mask" for a face and her elegant, golden limbs are desirably ambiguous, allowing the mind of Deirdre, as well as (equally) the minds of observers, to imprint onto her form the overall effect/affect of feminine performativity; Deirdre is clearly able to master this delicate balance of performance and audience illusion as her gestures and movements combine to create a flawless simulation of femaleness.

The implications of this story when analysed from a feminist perspective are perhaps, by modern standards, obvious: the cyborg Deirdre shows that womanhood is a performance that can be accurately recreated by creatures or machines other than flesh and blood women. However, what her character also suggests is far more insightful, that is, that the appearance of womanhood is not only reproducible through mechanical means but that the abstraction of machinery is also a key facet of the conception of womanhood itself. This is why Deirdre is able to create the illusion of a human female with such ease: "[T]hen the machinery moved, exquisitely, smoothly, with a grace as familiar as the swaying poise he remembered. The sweet husky voice of Deirdre said, 'It's me, John Darling. It really is, you know.' And it

was” (Moore, 1975, p.205). Deirdre’s manager, Harris, takes in Deirdre’s surprisingly elegant form with astonishment, where a moment earlier he was horrified by her, seeing only a lump of inanimate machinery – it is only when Deirdre moved that her feminine elegance and poise manifested itself; in this way the passage strikingly aligns female appearance with illusion, or tricks of the mind as Deirdre’s affective performativity of her female persona acts requires Harris’ brain “to perform a very elaborate series of shifting impressions” (Moore, 1975, p.205). Just as Olympia’s own physical eyes are physically thrown back at Nathaniel, in *Der Sandman*, so is Deirdre’s affective femininity cast at Harris. However, here the balance of power is quite different. Here, Deirdre has seemingly complete control over the way she is seen by others; her actual, material appearance seems almost irrelevant as, through movement and gesture, she has full sway over the manner in which she is viewed.

Performance by performance, the woman series has guided itself into a relative obscurity, creating a Deleuzian *sense* of woman characterised by the very ambiguity that Deirdre displays as a machine. For, as Harris realises, without animation Deirdre is “only machinery heaped in a flowered chair” (Moore, 1975, p.205). Like the nightmarish “marionette”-like facsimile that Deirdre’s manager, Harris, feared would be the outcome of her cyborg reconstruction, Olympia possesses an uncanniness, a vacuous quality produced by her lack of personality – her grotesque approximation of the ideal and stereotypical woman produces the terrible suggestion of a lifeless object masquerading as a living thing. Unlike Olympia, however, Deirdre’s body is not made to be a simulacra of human appearance, with two “eye-shaped openings with glass marbles inside them” (Moore, 1975, p.206) or any other such uncanny, gaudy simulation of feminine beauty; rather her ambiguity is of another kind – where Olympia had no agency and her performance of femaleness was completely manufactured, for Deirdre, paradoxically, it is her mechanical nature that links her more so with human women than the mind that allows her to appear as a woman: that is her, technically female, brain. Deirdre’s robotic body is not constructed as an every-woman or even as an ideal woman, in the case of Olympia, instead it was designed to be a blank canvas for the mind of Deirdre to impress her personality upon, and it is this form ambiguity that Moore capitalises on to explore the intriguing and disruptive nature of the gynoid.

As stated earlier, the gynoid in literature exposes the strange traits peculiar to the socialised idea of womankind. The gynoid's indistinctive quality shows the nature and sense of Woman to be synthetic: patriarchy and female culture has encouraged women to create ersatz versions of themselves throughout history, altering their features, their extremities, their skin, faces and bodily proportions, using everything from corsetry to fake-hair to plastic surgery to produce an overall too-perfect effect of impossible, idealised femininity and physical femaleness. As Swift's famous poem *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* illustrates, the female/feminine tendency towards bodily adaptation and even implantation has a long history. The poem describes a prostitute – the eponymous “nymph” – undressing, removing her “artificial hair”, “a crystal eye” and a set of false teeth fastened by means of a “wire” inserted in her gums. (Swift, 2017) Each of these bodily attachments bear a startling connection with modern conceptions of femininity embodied in the gynoid of popular sf; consider *Star Trek: Voyager's* (1995) Seven of Nine with her trademark ocular implant, and corset-tight body held in place by internal metal and a spandex suit ostensibly designed to bolster her unique Borg physiology, echoing the “steel ribbed bodice” of Swift's “nymph” (Swift, 2017).

With every alteration, every false lash, wig, girdle or implant, Woman has gradually transformed herself through the series until transforming finally into a parody of herself: a gynoid. Woman is no longer woman but an adaptable and constructible entity, no longer female but a simulation of a female. Woman has become like Deirdre's metal helmet: set apart from the mind it was designed to house. Woman has transformed herself almost entirely into the mask of femininity to the extent that even female biology has taken on the task of moulding, carving and suturing itself into an embodiment of performance. There has never been any difference between femininity and the female; both are employed in the service of the same illusion, because Woman is not (perhaps has never been) herself. In this sense Woman has already, in many ways, *become-gynoid*.

Yet, it is this air of illusion and ambiguity that surrounds both Woman and female-machine which also allows the gynoid to flourish as a *floating signifier*, for the gynoid is not only a reflection of patriarchal absurdity taken to an extreme, she is also an empty square, a member of the series capable of traversing and even existing

outside of it. Where Olympia was representative of the exposing, indicting qualities of the gynoid, Deirdre is a much more optimistic figure offering up new possibilities for different kinds of female life, outside of traditional conceptions of gender, and outside the female body entirely, as Brian Atteberry notes:

A story like Moore's 'No Woman Born' (1944) is unusual for its era in that the signs of gender are reallocated. Its heroine, transferred into a mechanical body, unites three characteristics rarely seen in combination: femininity, power, and artifice. (Atteberry, 2002, p.6)

Here, Atteberry describes the positive, inspiring traits of the gynoid, yet this is the other source of the gynoid's fascinatingly uncanny quality; she is a being that is not only constructed but *constructible*, that is, not merely artifice but an adaptable entity with the capacity to be designed and redesigned according to the desires of the designer, whoever they may be. The unease which Deirdre evokes in Harris and, for that matter, Maltzer, the scientist who created her mechanical body, reflects this. Harris seems to find Deirdre's ability to mimic the feminine gestures and movements once performed by her old body simultaneously alluring and disturbing as his description of Deirdre shifts from one paragraph to another. In one section Harris is overcome with joy at seeing Deirdre, almost exactly as she was "*This is Dierdre! She hasn't changed at all!*" (Moore, 1975, p.205). However, in the same scene, he describes her with intense trepidation:

She stirred upon the cushions, the long, flexible arms moving with a litheness that was not quite human. The motion disturbed him as the body itself had not, and in spite of himself his face froze a little. He had the feeling that from behind the crescent mask she was watching him very closely. (Moore, 1975, p.208)

It is of course understandable that a person might have difficulties rediscovering their close friend as an android; yet the way Moore lingers on the description of Deirdre, drawing out the details of her body while explaining in depth the manner in which her female brain and metal body interact, reveals a certain deep-set fascination with this amalgamation of woman and machine that might not have been portrayed thus if the protagonist were a male, android. As Atteberry goes on to argue: "if...the powerful mechanical body had been marked as masculine rather than feminine, it would have seemed to most readers to have no gender at all. Only Moore's reassignment of the categories makes them noticeable" (Atteberry, 2002, p.6). Once

again it becomes obvious that a unique connection exists between the female and the mechanical, it is a relationship that disturbs because it breeds possibilities that are uncertain, endlessly intriguing and yet also potentially disturbing. However, the gynoid is not unsettling in quite the same way as an android. The apprehension surrounding the male robot is associated with problems of human destiny, questions regarding the nature of what it means to be human. The male robot is a triumph of human invention; the gynoid, however, is often represented as a kind of abomination, as shown when Maltzer describes himself as a Dr Frankenstein figure and so disturbed is he by what he clearly considers to be his monstrous creation (Deirdre) that he attempts to end his own life (Moore, 1975, p.232). Deirdre, for her part, is consistently depicted through words and images associated with the non-human, rather than the superhuman. She is “serpentine”, “not quite human”, “from another world”, a work of curiosity or beautiful artistry, rather than a miracle of science, as Maltzer’s words illustrate:

‘I should have known my gift would mean worse ruin than any mutilation could be. I know now that there’s only one legitimate way a human being can create life. When he tries another way, as I did, he has a lesson to learn. Remember the lesson of the student Frankenstein? He learned, too.’ (Moore, 1975, p.232)

Deirdre is received as alien, exotic but also, through the reference to Frankenstein and the allusion to the biblical serpent, she is associated with immorality, being portrayed as a crime against nature.

However, as Deirdre explains (and it is she who has the last word in this narrative): “I’m not a Frankenstein monster made out of dead flesh. I’m myself – alive. You didn’t create my life you only preserved it. I’m not a robot with compulsions built into me that I have to obey...I’m human” (Moore, 1975, p.235). Nevertheless, Deirdre is not as she once was: her new body offers her almost infinite potential of new experiences and ways of being, her new-found inhuman suppleness adds new dimensions to her performances, her superhuman strength and speed saves Maltzer’s life a moment before his attempted suicide. Despite this she feels the loss of her previous traditional connections with humanity. Though she will die, she will not reproduce, she has lost her place in the mother-child desiring machine. Furthermore, as a being without touch or sexuality she cannot experience sexual love and thus

cannot form a part of any traditional male-female desiring machine. Yet, by living as a gynoid, Deirdre has gained access to a myriad of alternative ways of living as a female. The loss of the ability to reproduce, or be physically intimate, are also assurances of a degree of independence impossible for many women; they represent a freedom and a potential for infinite becomings. As Deirdre herself excitedly declares on the story's final page: "[T]here is so much still untried. My brain is human, and no human brain could leave such possibilities untested. I wonder, though...I do wonder—" (Moore, 1975, p.242).

Deirdre is an example of how the gender *assemblage* can be remodelled, how its operator can be replaced: the dominating, patriarchal male machine no longer necessarily interacts as oppressor with the passive female machine. *Becoming-gynoid* sweeps across these relationships and has begun to redefine them; as a result the gynoid has the potential to bring us toward a genuinely innovative conception of gender identity that begins to think beyond the gender *assemblage*. At the juncture of the gynoid both machine and female territories are invaded, *deteritorialising* those respective territories and giving rise to new potentialities – new intensities rise from the spatium into the sphere of actuality by posing countless questions to the observer: first, in what sense is this womanoid machine a woman? How can we understand her as such? On the other hand, what relationship could the gynoid possibly have with the desires and limitations which characterise female flesh? Monique Wittig once famously stated that lesbians were not women; that is, lesbians do not fit into the patriarchal desiring-machines whose processes oppress women, and as such do not constitute women in so far as 'Woman' is a term encompassing the sexual and social subservience of an individual to a male (Wittig, 1990b, p.57). By the same token gynoids are not women either, for they too often cannot enter, or choose not to enter, into the desiring relationships that women traditionally form: the man-woman desiring machine, and also that of the mother-child *assemblage* (from which the gynoid is often physically barred) that relate to human *assemblages* of desire and procreation. Thus, a gynoid's physical difference from flesh and blood women in many ways emancipates her from the biological deterministic necessities of reproduction and sexual desire. Indeed, what are the desires of the gynoid?

This is one of many questions posed in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* which explores the potential nature and being of artificial intelligence. Interestingly, the novel examines these possibilities through a largely female or feminised lens; while the narrator is a male human bounty hunter who 'retires' androids, many of the other central characters are not only androids but, more specifically female machines: gynoids. Thus, the novel largely deals with a machine perspective that is, in some sense, feminine or female: a mechanical consciousness that is in some shape or form womanly, whether in a socialised or otherwise pre-programmed manner.

Given that the novel explores the nature of humanity and the post-human, it does not seem likely that Dick's focus on gynoids, as opposed to androids, was accidental. The gynoids of the novel, like *No Woman Born's* Dierdre, are portrayed with great unease and suspicion, acknowledging their deeply disruptive power and thus heavily unsettling aura. As a result, the gynoids of this novel become doubly significant. Their disruptive potential as beings with the appearance of femininity but without the bonds of biological womanhood that would make them subject to the limiting desiring *assemblages* of heteronormative relationships – traditional heterosexual marriage, heterosexual reproduction and idealised images of domestic life – make them ideal characters by means of which to question those traits which we consider so fundamentally human. Desiring-machines – Deleuzian *assemblages* of human relationships – are linked to restrictive or even oppressive *assemblages* of the nuclear family, imposed heterosexuality, and female subservience; however these relationships are often also intimately associated with those emotional attributes which we consider unique to human existence, such as love, kindness, and – most importantly for the novel I am about to discuss – empathy.

“Formally a correct response. But simulated”: Scoring Women on the Voight-Kampff Scale

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* humanity has become scattered – thinly spread upon the surface of the irradiated Earth, and dotted about the solar system as part of a large-scale human colonisation programme – following the nuclear fallout of World War Terminus; this briefly-mentioned nuclear holocaust rendered the Earth largely barren and its citizens at risk of harmful radiation-induced physical and

mental retardation; those who suffer most severely from these effects are known as “chickenheads”. This future society is a bleak one, where humans have become increasingly isolated from one another and disaffected by their desolate existences, many relying on devices known as “mood-organs” in order to experience fulfilling emotions. Their interactions with other humans are similarly disenchanting, and scarce due to the low population, so much so that social encounters are most often mediated by another machine that allows humans to fuse together emotionally, known as an “empathy box”. Adding another level to the simulated and artificial nature of daily human life, androids have become standard equipment for off-world colonial settlers, issued by the government to work for colonists as slaves to aid them in building new communities on other planets. Thus, as Booker and Thomas note “not only has technology made it possible to manufacture androids who are quite similar to humans, but the humans of the book are becoming more and more like machines” (Booker and Thomas, 2009, p.223). As androids become more and more advanced, so does their capacity for self-awareness, and they even develop desires of their own, with the result that they often kill their colonial masters in order to make their way back to Earth, masquerading as humans. However, as humanity’s capacity for that which is considered most uniquely human begins to evaporate in this desolate future existence, their need to rigorously protect and religiously maintain human self-conception increases, so that “what emerges is that the need for humans to maintain strict boundaries between themselves and their technological creations actually robs them of their humanity” (Booker and Thomas, 2009, p.223). Escaped androids are hunted by bounty hunters, like the novel’s protagonist Rick Deckard, who murders (“retires”) “andys”, whom he identifies as such by using the so called “Voight-Kampff scale”, a test designed to measure the authenticity of an individual’s empathic responses. This is the poignant contradiction around which the narrative revolves: androids are persecuted for their inability to effectively approximate an emotion that has become just as inauthentic and simulated in humans themselves.

The fact that many of the “andys” encountered in the novel are, in fact, gynoids, is thus highly significant, as the female is synonymous with so much that we idealise as characteristically, emotionally, human. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Woman is the personification of human emotion, intimate and familial relationships and empathy; this is a connection cemented by her deeply biological and visceral

connection to reproduction and physical nurturing. The gynoid is an immediate refusal of these traditional *molecular assemblages* as she is a woman in appearance and behaviour only, unconstrained by the desiring connections of mother-child, and man-woman: relationships based on empathy and human intimacy, connections on which humanity has always relied on for the sake of a collective identity and which, in this society, they have come to rely on more than ever. As a result the gynoid, much more so than the android, represents a great threat to the human sense of self both politically and spiritually.

One of the key ways in which the future society of *Androids* delineates the differences between human and android is through an exaggerated affection for, and worship of, animals. In a future where animals have become incredibly scarce due to radiation, the few that survive are extremely valuable both financially and spiritually; having evolved in human society as the quintessential hallmark of human empathy, they are similarly an indicator of social status. The human capacity to love and care for an animal has become enshrined in the religion of Mercerism, almost universally practiced by all humans, while the Voight-Kampff scale is used to determine the authenticity of a human based on their physical emotional responses to scenarios where animals are harmed or mutilated. The bizarre nature of this very obviously politically constructed demarcation between humans and androids is inescapable, made all the more poignant for the reader as “like Dick’s androids, many modern Americans would fail the test, an implication that further destabilises the boundary between humans and androids by forcing the reader to question her own supposed humanity” (Booker and Thomas, 2009, p.225). The distinction is further concretised, and the human capacity for empathy romanticised, through the government sanctioned religion, Mercerism, a belief system that worships animals and glorifies the use of the empathy box which allows several humans at once to engage emotionally by communally experiencing the suffering of Mercer, a Jesus-like figure who roams a desert as he is pelted with rocks. The religion valorises human empathy through the human/animal connection while simultaneously glorifying human connection at a distance: allowing humans to continue with their isolationist behaviour while maintaining the belief that their ability to connect emotionally with other living beings is superior to that of androids.

As the distinction between human and android becomes more and more blurred throughout the novel, the gynoid proves an ideal figure through which to analyse the breakdown of the machinic *assemblages* that theoretically separate the mechanical from the biological, revealing the fragile nature of the conception of human identity as well as, equally, the disruptive potential of the gynoid to destroy these distinctions both in the dystopian world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and in our own present day through the gynoid's presence as a contemporary character in popular sf.

The main gynoid character, through which the novel explores the disruptive qualities of the gynoid, is Rachael Rosen, an artificial representative of Rosen Associates, sole manufacturers of the new current Nexus-6 model of androids. Her potential as a threatening force is established from the first scene in which she is introduced, when Deckard interviews her using the Voight-Kampff test. Initially presented to Deckard as a human, Rachael fails this test. The failure, however, is explained away by a fictitious childhood spent alone on a space station, resulting in retarded personality development and thus a reduced empathic capacity; this is another juncture at which the validity of the Voight-Kampff test is questioned, heavily implying the unreliability of the test given that large groups of humans would not, theoretically be able to pass it. Despite this, Deckard eventually intuits the Rosen Association's deception and pronounces her an android, tipped off by her repeated reference to a rare owl, owned by the Rosens, as an "it" rather than a "he" or a "she". However, in the tradition of a classic Dickian reversal, this Owl turns out to be artificial – an electric simulacrum developed by the same corporation that designed Rachael; thus, Deckard's apparently astute determination that Rachael was an android is reduced, in the final pages of this chapter, to a lucky guess. Furthermore, as Umberto Rossi notes "the presence of android animals adds another form of ontological uncertainty to the novel, which in the episode of Rachael's test further complicated the main human vs android opposition" (Rossi, 2011, p.143); this in turn contributes to the pervasive ambiguity with which the gynoid is portrayed throughout the novel, continually challenging this future society's pervasive fallacy that the boundary between human and machine *assemblages* can be easily discerned.

Rachael's failure to display empathic responses (or at least, at what Deckard deems appropriate levels) is at odds with the patriarchal assumptions that underpin

traditional feminine responses to cruelty. However, one does not simply pass or fail the test, the determination of whether the subject is an android is completely in the hands of the bounty hunter administering the test, as is the (potential) android's fate, no matter what verbal and physical responses they offer to the Voight-Kampff questions. During the scene where Deckard uses the test on Rachael, the suspicious nature of the conclusions reached based on the highly inconclusive data collected from the test is made abundantly clear.

'You're reading a novel written in the old days before the war. The characters are visiting Fisherman's Warf in San Francisco. They become hungry and enter a seafood restaurant. One of them orders lobster, and the chef drops the lobster into the tub of boiling water while the characters watch.'

'Oh god,' Rachael said. 'That's awful! Did they really do that? It's depraved! You mean a *live* lobster?' The gauges, however, did not respond. Formally, a correct response. But simulated. (Dick, 1999b, p.43)

Her reaction is only marginally different from that expected from a human, and yet this subtle disparity is enough for Rachael to be classified as a 'fake' woman: an android, and therefore a woman without personhood or autonomy. Furthermore, this scene highlights the nightmarish possibilities inherent in an ideology that would seek to devise a test in order to determine the 'authenticity' of a person. Deckard's damning pronouncement that Rachael is an android, and therefore (were she not the property of the Rosen corporation) legally able to be killed, is based on the interpretation of a single person reading a single set of data. Without controls, repeat-experiments or fail-safes, Deckard has the state-sanctioned right to murder her without any need for due process. Deckard's right to execute her is predicated solely on the fact that Rachael did not offer what Deckard personally deemed an appropriate, involuntary response to a hypothetical situation.

However, this part of the novel becomes even more poignant when we consider that it involves a man, Deckard, classifying a 'female', Rachael, as a *non-woman* for failing to present herself in accordance with social norms. From a biopolitical standpoint, this is particularly significant, as Deckard is a government official classifying a woman as less than such based on her ability to accurately *perform* empathy, not behaviourally, but physically, involuntarily and biologically in order to

meet the requirements of a pseudo-scientific test. Deckard, as an extension of the establishment, puts the lives of countless citizens at the mercy of a wildly inexact form of analysis whose scientific validity seems completely unsubstantiated. The confidence which Deckard and the state places in it can only be explained by its ability to bolster the delicate human ego and sanction, with the stamp of scientific corroboration, the killing of innocent life-forms that threaten the status quo.

In the same passage of the novel (also discussed in previous chapters), Rachael and Eldon Rosen discuss the nature of the Vioght-Kampff testing machine:

Rick said. 'This'—he held up the flat adhesive disk with its trailing wires—'measures capillary dilation in the facial area. We know this to be a primary autonomic response, the so-called "shame" or "blushing" reaction to a morally shocking stimulus. ...'

'And these can't be found in androids,' Rachael said.

'They're not engendered by the stimuli-questions; no. Although biologically they exist. Potentially.' (Dick, 1999b, p.40)

Here, Deckard freely admits that it is very possible – even likely – that Androids do in fact 'feel' emotions that they may not fully manifest physically. Thus, the test does not test for empathy, but merely *human* empathy, revealing the double standard on which the segregation of androids is founded, which in turn is predicated upon an equally unstable assumption about the nature of human identity, as constructed here, on the basis of empathy.

As discussed earlier, Deckard studies Rachael for suitably empathic responses, evidences of a trait associated most with femininity. More specifically, Deckard tests for her ability to feel empathy for animals, once again a highly traditional female expression of her capacity to function within the mother-child desiring machine, fulfilling her role as a breeder and child carer. It is particularly significant then that the final question Deckard asks Rachael, and whose response finally convinces him that she is in fact a 'fake' woman, directly references human offspring: "Like my case? Nice isn't it? Baby-hide" (Dick, 1999b, p.51). This final question cements the link between the human capacity – personified by the human female – to feel empathy for animals and the ability to care, and feel empathy, for children. In other words, Rachael is a threatening force not only because she, as a gynoid, potentially

denies the superiority of human feeling but also because, as a simulacrum of a woman, her capacity to very nearly pass undetected as a human female tarnishes the ideal of female empathic superiority on which human identity is founded, a capacity that is grounded in a desire to care for offspring and, as an extension of this, animals. Like a Victorian doctor declaring a woman hysterical or mad for failing to behave in accordance with patriarchal social norms, so does Deckard declare Rachael an unreal woman for failing to display the appropriate, socially-sanctioned responses to questions pertaining to situations, whose significance is predicated entirely on standards and values that are culturally specific rather than scientifically significant. Just as women and female sexuality have historically been considered a threat to male dominance and identity, so do androids – and particularly gynoids – pose a similarly devastating risk to the human dominance in the world more generally.

This is highlighted most notably by Rachael's fierce act of rebellion against humanity's veneer of superiority when, at the end of the novel, she kills Deckard's expensive new goat by pushing it from the top of his apartment building. However, in doing so, Rachael does not only reveal her ambivalence towards animal life, she also shows she is capable of feeling empathy for her fellow androids, a group of which Deckard had just "retired". After Deckard's wife Iran laments the needless nature of Rachael's crime Deckard is forced to acknowledge that there was, at least from Rachael's perspective, some significance to her action: "'Not needless,' he said, 'She had what seemed to her a reason.' An android reason, he thought" (Dick, 1999b, p.195). This strongly suggests that androids are capable of feeling: perhaps not empathy that can be related to human standards of emotion, but a similar 'emotion' of sorts. Rachael's revenge on Deckard is particularly important because it reveals that Rachael, and quite possibly other androids like her, are capable not only of feeling some form of anger and loss but also of understanding the complex injustice at work when the life of a non-sentient animal is worth infinitely more than that of a complex, mechanical life-form capable of reasoned, rational thought. This possibility is further supported by comparing the novel's description of androids with its portrayals of human characters:

[A]ndroid bodies are typically more expressive than those of humans in the novel, subject to more detailed descriptions, and they also engage in traditionally human physical expressions of affection while

humans themselves primarily ‘touch’ each other through the technological medium of the empathy box. (Booker and Thomas, 2009, p.226)

As Rachael notes, in an earlier passage before Deckard retires the other androids: “‘That goat,’ Rachael said. ‘You love that goat more than me. More than you love your wife, probably. First the goat, then your wife, and last of all—’ She laughed merrily. ‘What can you do but laugh?’” (Dick, 1999b, p.172). Here Rachael ranks animals, other humans and androids by order of importance to the average person, demonstrating her awareness of her position as well as the ridiculous manner in which humans form relationships, feeling more affection for and intimacy with animals than their spouses, incapable of experiencing truly close relationships with other humans. Here Rachael laughs cynically at the awful contradiction of her existence: “androids cry, laugh, become enraged, and yet are conscious of that according to the dictates of human culture, they are not, in fact alive” (Booker and Thomas, 1999b, p.226). In doing so, Rachael displays a level of emotional depth and understanding that seems beyond the capacity of most of the novel’s human characters, Deckard included. Deckard’s conversations with Rachael, and even his wife Iran, are stilted, full of fits and starts of powerful emotion and bland conversation.

After his sexual encounter with Rachael, Deckard and she leave their hotel room:

[T]ogether, saying little, the two of them journeyed to the roof field...
‘My goat is probably asleep right now,’ he said. ‘Or maybe goats are nocturnal. Some animals never sleep. Sheep never do, not that I could detect...’

‘If you weren’t an android...if I could legally marry you, I would.’
(Dick, 1999b, p.168)

The fact that Deckard speaks about Rachael and his pet almost in the same breath also contributes to the sense that the goat is of as much or even more importance to him than Rachael, whom he claims to love enough to marry. Thus, Rachael’s words about Deckard’s love of his goat also reflect the similarly ridiculous position of women within the traditional *molar*, marriage *assemblage*, where both women mentioned in Rachael’s list appear below that of a pet, thus either equating women with animals or suggesting they are considered by men to be beneath them, an accessory. Most crucially, however, in this Rachael categorically refutes any

connection she has with the *assemblages* that might have conceivably tied to her to those expressions of humanity grounded in female biological responses. Rachael's destruction of the thing she is supposed to love and care for is a direct protest and refusal of the mother-child desiring machine and, by extension, the bonds that ineffectively hold the fabric of Earth's dwindling occupants together under the banner of humanity.

Furthermore, having recently become Deckard's mistress, Rachael echoes by her words the ancient trope of virgin and whore: where Deckard's wife represents the purer, more respectable face of Woman, Rachael corresponds with the figure of the sinful harlot. Rachael understands that, as a machine, she can never hope to be anything more to Deckard, despite his earlier claim that he would marry her were it legally possible. Thus, in this passage, the novel once again points to the intersection of woman and machine. The gynoid reveals the *assemblages* that constitute Woman – the ancient binary of wife and Jezebel – and these same *assemblages* can be seen as deeply associated with our conception of the female android. Judith B. Kerman, comments on the similarity between real women and fictional gynoids: “Some real women such as prostitutes and housewives can, in the manner of film stars, be compared to [gynoids] because they adhere to feminine roles manufactured by the minds of men” (Kerman, 2003, p.30). The gynoid is the fulfilled fantasy of the ideal prostitute, a woman divorced from reproductive capability as well as from (in theory) emotional need or agency, making her the perfect mechanical sex toy.

However, Rachael, like the other gynoids I have discussed in this chapter, cannot be so simply reduced to such an allegory, since the gynoid figure cannot be trusted to easily conform to one conceptualisation or another. She is a multiplicity that intersects with many *assemblages* at many points across many *molar/molecular* lines. Rachael subverts the hyper-sexualised, male fantasy of the self-less sexbot, as a character with agency and great manipulative power, particularly over Deckard. As Rossi notes “Rachael belongs to a type of character whose ability to cheat is remarkable...I am obviously talking of the so called *dark ladies* so often found both in noir movies and hard boiled fiction” (Rossi, 2011, p.144). Conforming, in many ways, to this noir trope lends Rachael's character a great deal of potency and also serves to complicate her position in the narrative in relation to Deckard. As Rossi

also points out, “one of the classical theorists of noir cinema, Damian Hirsch, defined [dark ladies] as ‘amoral destroyers of male strength’” (Rossi, 2011, p.144). Dark ladies typically succeed in this by using their sexuality to trick and deceive male protagonists, leading them to their doom, their “male strength” weakened by the knowledge that they have been beaten by a woman and furthermore, have been used emotionally and sexually in a manner resembling the way hard boiled male characters typically treat their women. In line with this, Rachael’s manipulative capacity is immediately established in the novel when Rachael and Eldon Rosen trap Deckard with the Voight-Kampff test early on in the novel.

Later on, Rachael makes Deckard believe that she wishes to help him to retire the escaped androids, when in truth she hopes to force him to abandon his mission by using his human emotions against him: in a cunning reversal of the Voight-Kampff passage where they first met, Rachael attempts to weaponise Deckard’s capacity for empathy; in the fashion of a typical dark lady, Rachael entraps him by making him care for her physically and emotionally, a tactic she has employed with several bounty hunters as a means of thwarting their efforts to retire androids, as she explains: “you’re not going to be able to retire androids any longer...no bounty hunter has ever gone on...after being with me” (Dick, 1999b, p.171). However, this traditional sequence of events is complicated by the fact that Rachael is a gynoid. Deckard has not been outwitted by a woman, but by a machine performing the part of a dark lady, exploding the traditional tropes of male and female, masculine and feminine, that should govern their interaction within the narrative.

In this way, Deckard has been doubly deceived, having fallen for several performances of different kinds. Rachael performs her role of femme fatale in order to achieve her own ends but also, like many real women, in order to function within society. Rachael must perform her female role in order to masquerade as a ‘real’ woman when travelling outside the Rosen Association – to survive and in turn aid the survival of others like her. However, Rachael, like real women, is also at the mercy of the role she is perpetually confined to; when Deckard threatens her with violence in response to the revelation of her betrayal Rachael becomes helpless as she tries to locate her weapon with which to fight him off: “her hands dived for her bulging, overstuffed, kipple-filled purse; she searched frantically, then gave up.

‘Goddamn this purse,’ she said with ferocity. ‘I never can lay my hands on anything in it’” (Dick, 1999b, p.170). Prophetically, Deckard had mentally noted in an earlier scene that “like a human woman, Rachael had every class of object conceivable filched and hidden away in her purse” (Dick, 1999b, p.164). Rachael’s tryst with Deckard warps him because of its intense ambiguity that almost convinces him to end his career as a bounty hunter: “This is my end, he said to himself. As a bounty hunter. After the Batys there won’t be any more, not after this, tonight” (Dick, 1999b, p.169). Deckard is unable to decipher his encounter with Rachael, for its nature is impossible to define because he realises he cannot connect with her in the traditional manner of man and woman, user and used. She is neither prostitute nor dark lady: neither sex toy nor viable romantic partner.

Furthermore, Deckard is not the first person to be warped by Rachael’s nature: another Bounty Hunter, Phil Resch, whom Rachael also attempted to seduce in order to protect other androids, was brought to the brink of insanity by Rachael’s indeterminate nature. His inability to make *sense* of her and of his feelings for her, as Rachael puts it, warped him “the wrong way”: he went mad in a manner that was undesirable to the android cause, in that it hardened him in an almost inhuman way so that he began to take a perverse pleasure in “retiring” androids, making him a more vicious and efficient killer. Earlier in the novel Phil has recommended that Rick sleep with an android in order to somehow quell his feelings of empathy for androids. At that point Rick did not understand what Resch meant but after his experience with Rachael, he finally understands: “Rick said, ‘I understand now why Phil Resch said what he said. He wan’t being cynical; he just learned too much. Going through this – I can’t blame him. It warped him’” (Dick, 1999b, p.170-1). In this way, we can see how the intersection of Woman and machine, where the molecular line of female intersects with the molecular mechanical line produces a line of flight that is, as previously discussed, inevitably powerful and often useful but also erratic, impossible to control and potentially deadly. Once again, the gynoid is disturbing because she is unpredictable, chaotic and at times an unreliable ally.

Strikingly, Rachael’s role in the narrative was greatly reduced in Ridley Scott’s film adaptation, *Blade Runner*. Unlike the novel’s depiction of her as an intelligent and cunning femme fatale, with her own nefarious agenda and sexual agency, her

portrayal in the film shows a greatly diluted version of the character whose only real resemblance to the original is her position within the Rosen (Tyrell, in the film) corporation, a public facing, complex gynoid portrayed as Eldon Rosen/Tyrell's niece. As I have argued, Dick portrays Rachael as a profound character who serves to challenge the oppressive assumptions that mitigate the existence of androids. By extension she also manages to reflect some of the *assemblages* that limit the lives of women and reveal how the gynoid, at the intersection of these two *assemblages*, acts as a disruptive force to both the *molar/molecular* lines. In the film, Rachael and the other gynoids, or "replicants" as they are called in here, are portrayed in a heavily feminised and sexualised manner. Rachael is transformed from scheming, 'dark lady', into a demure ally and love-interest for Deckard, who, in this adaptation, is divorced and single. Rather than providing a complex critique to the established world view that androids are lesser beings, this Rachael does not attempt to save her robotic brethren from Deckard's slaughter, rather she aids in their demise, shooting one in the back in order to save Deckard's life (*Blade Runner*, 1982). Predictably the 'good' female replicant, Rachael, is shown to be shy and retiring, initially rejecting Deckard's sexual advances toward her, her pale and trembling femininity accentuated with long locks of black hair and conservative clothing, the bulky power-dressing fashion of which heightens the small and fragile nature of the woman underneath. Meanwhile, the 'bad' female replicants are slutty and promiscuous, flaunting their sexuality for material or personal gain and dressing provocatively.

While the Scott adaptation largely fails to communicate the highly disruptive and ambiguous nature of the gynoid, the film does reveal the powerful nature of this figure by showing how the forces of film-making sometimes seem to collaborate to obscure the gynoids. It would be naïve to suggest that a single /author/writer/designer/producer or even director of the cinematic work of art can be held solely to account for the messages a film conveys; thus one can only talk in terms of the film-producing/Hollywood culture as the creator of a given film's subtext. Here it would seem that costume design, script, direction and mis-en-scene have all come together to make the gynoids of Dick's narrative as vulnerable and 'silent' as possible, portrayed to viewers as the very soulless 'things' that they are assumed to be by the society that created them – paradoxically the gynoids are

objectified in a manner that confirms the prejudices that the novel and the film (ostensibly) seeks to question.

Most of Rachael's witty, sly dialogue is removed from the film, her language and behaviour passive and often characterless, highlighting her mechanical nature. She speaks to Deckard in soft, short, half-whispered sentences when she speaks at all – much like the Olympia of *Der Sandman* who also had a similarly limited number of verbal responses to give to her lover, her speech confined to breathlessly uttered sighs. Here a parallel is drawn between traditional 'good' female behaviour and the behaviour of Rachael, the 'good' female robot. Rachael is calm, accepting of Deckard's brash behaviour even when directly hurtful, replying only with a tearful silence. Furthermore, she is acquiescent in Deckard's sexual advances, having initially resisted him by running away she meekly submits as he slams the door of his apartment in front of her just as she is attempting to exit through it. Deckard then throws her against the wall and instructs her to "say 'Kiss me'" (*Blade Runner*, 1982). When she attempts to explain that she doesn't want to be intimate with him because she cannot trust what she has recently discovered are programmed, mechanical emotions, he interrupts, repeating his previous line, this time with more emphasis and menace in his tone. It is hardly surprising that several critics have noted that "the scene has a disturbing rape-like quality" (Gaut, 2015, p.40). Most crucially, however, it powerfully shows how the gynoid characters of the film are portrayed as objects "and powerfully conveys that Deckard is still treating [Rachael] as a thing" (Gaut, 2015, p.40).

Rachael is a good gynoid because she submits to the human male entirely, because she is, like the traditional ideal woman, passive, childlike, naïve and powerless. In this way also she is almost indistinguishable from Nathaniel's Olympia in *Der Sandmann*, subservient to the superior intellect of her man and an exemplar and parody of quiet, feminine beauty. Unlike the Rachael of the novel, the film's gynoid is forced by the movie's narrative into the traditional feminine position within the man-woman desiring *assemblage*. What this gynoid lacks in reproductive capability she makes up for in other, heavily exaggerated female attributes: she bolsters the dominant position of Deckard through her diminutive nature and her dialogue's only purpose is to provide questions that Deckard will later seek to answer – for example,

“Have you ever retired an android by mistake?” or “Deckard, have you ever taken that Voight-Kampff test yourself?” (*Blade Runner*, 1982). This Rachael drops philosophical conundrums in Deckard’s lap for him to explore and discover in contrast with the original Rachael who, as we have seen, poses questions which leave Deckard paralysed with confusion.

The character of Pris in the film (which is loosely based on the Pris Stratton of the novel) is the opposite of Rachael. Here, it is *Pris* who is the dark lady contrasted with Rachael’s innocence; described by Deckard’s superior as “a basic pleasure model” (*Blade Runner*, 1982) she is directly described as a robotic concubine. Scantly clad in tight-fitting, punk-rock, black attire, complete with visible suspenders, the visual connotations of her character leave little to the imagination. An escaped android from the off world colonies, she conspires with another android, Roy Batty, to attempt to lengthen their limited life-span. She uses her feminine wiles to achieve what she wants, flaunting her sexuality in order to obtain information and access to the Tyrell corporation through a naïve Tyrell employee, J. F. Sebastian, a robotics specialist. She simperingly asks him “how do I look?” to which he replies “oh fine,” and she seductively asks, giggling “just ‘fine’?” (*Blade Runner*, 1982). In Scott’s depiction of this world, the ‘good’ gynoids are submissive and almost apologetic in their expression of personhood, the ‘bad’ gynoids are overtly sexual and are punished by death for their attempt to gain freedom – in Pris’s case, from a life of forced prostitution. Pris is eventually killed by Deckard as is another fellow escaped gynoid, Zhoara, who works on earth as a stripper who dances with a snake. As Judith Kerman observes:

Appropriately, both Zhoara and Pris, literal female objects, die against a background of other literal female objects. Deckard shoots Zhoara as she runs in front of a story window filled with naked female manikins. And, Pris masquerades as a member of a group of manikins before Deckard kills her. (Kerman, 2003, p.30)

Thus, at every turn, there is an attempt to suppress the gynoid by placing her in traditional *assemblages* of male/female desiring relationships, paradoxically making these examples of female machines appear all the more like real, living women by heightening and accentuating their status as an object, as a machine or ‘doll’ created specifically for the male gaze. Thus, by portraying gynoids as worthless, soulless

objects capable only of sex as manipulation or submission, the film carries startling and uncomfortable implications for the lives of real women.

However, the manner of Pris's death in many ways confronts these problems of gynoid objectification, challenging traditional conceptions of the female as well as those classic *assemblages* associated with the female machine as ideal sex object. Appropriately, *Blade Runner* contains several visual and conceptual allusions to Hoffman's *Der Sandman*, the short story discussed earlier in this chapter; these hark back to the original example of a gynoid in a work which contains elements of what we might describe as proto science fiction. The first, and most obvious example of this, is with the film's visual, stylistic and conceptual fixation with eyes, which is also a central theme in *Der Sandman*. The audience is able to distinguish androids from humans by the fact that androids eyes are marked by an ethereal glow; when Deckard first meets Rachael and tests her using the Voight-Kampff a beam of light focuses on the iris of her eyes in order to measure (as in the novel) emotional response revealed through involuntary pupil dilation. Pris's eyes also glow, and this almost demonic sparkle is accentuated when she sprays a liquid eye-makeup in a black band over her eyes – the fact that this pattern resembles the shape of a blind-fold seems again to point to the uncanny, unsettling nature of the gynoid. Just as Olympia's eyes are thrown in the face of her human lover Nathaniel, confronting him with the lifelessness of his beloved, so too do the eyes of Rachael and Pris confront Deckard, and the audience, with a sense of penetrating ambiguity. As both characters repeatedly gaze directly into the camera they perpetually stare the audience out, penetrating us with the questions their characters pose.

As eyes are traditionally the seat of the soul, whose expression is an indicator consciousness, their accentuation here highlights the natural curiosity posed by the problem of mechanical artificial intelligence. If the brain behind the eyes is the basis of sentience for humans, is this also the basis for mechanical beings? Where is their 'soul' located? Although the character of Roy Batty, a male escaped android and romantic partner of Pris, articulates most the philosophical questions at work in the film, it is the gynoid characters, particularly Pris, who most hauntingly pose these problems on a visually stunning level.

As Will Brooker argues: “a number of critical accounts have compared Pris to Olympia” (Brooker, 2012, p.1923), and the visual relationship between the two is undeniable; Deckard discovers Pris for the first time when she is posing as a mannequin or doll by remaining perfectly still among a host of clockwork figures. Dressed in white, her skin covered with white foundation and heavy dark blue circles of blush on her cheeks, she appears for the first time as a nightmarish doll, as uncanny and “pale and lifeless” as the Olympia doll seems to Nathaniel when he discovers her true nature. However, Pris is not pale and lifeless when Deckard finally engages her. Lifting the thin veil from her head, Deckard peers at her in wonder, mimicking the curiosity felt by the audience for these strange, indeterminate, android creatures. Pris responds to this intrusive stare by suddenly coming to life and striking him in the face; she then proceeds to fight him through a series of highly athletic leaps and twists. I have already argued that many aspects of the way the gynoids in *Blade Runner* are depicted can be interpreted as deeply sexist, or even misogynist. Pris’s portrayal as a doll in this scene of the film would seem to support this view. However:

The graphically violent deaths of Zhoara and Pris, women who do not submit to their male-determined fate but who aggressively fight for and cling passionately to every last breath in their bodies in an entirely ‘unfeminine’ fashion, unsettle such a reading. (Brooker, 2012, p.1923)

Pris is not the passive doll she appears to be when, instantly and unexpectedly for both Deckard and the audience, she is transformed into a lethal fighter, directly striking violently out against Deckard’s male gaze, the same gaze that created a market for her to be brought into being as nothing but a “basic pleasure model” for male colonists. She refutes the dominion of her programming by revealing her own, acrobatic skills, which she employs to fight Deckard physically, rather than engaging with him with those instincts and skills she was programmed to employ. Pris, changes the terms of the mechanical *assemblage* relationship through which she is meant to interact with Deckard. Proving she is more than a mere “pleasure model”, she sets the terms of her involvement with the opposite sex, attempting to kill Deckard in a way that perfectly symbolises her break with those *assemblages* of sex and reproduction that define the female in her place within the desiring machine that

encompasses both Man and Woman. As Kerman argues, this is communicated in a startlingly visual fashion as Pris

squeezes [Deckard's] head with her legs, a potentially lethal action which, of course, reverses the intent of the birth process. Here, instead of a male baby's head emerging from between his mother's legs, an adult male's life is threatened when his head is almost crushed by the legs of a female. (Kerman, 2003, p.29)

In this way, Pris violently severs her ties to that which is classically female, reminding the viewer as well that, as a gynoid, she has the advantage of being able to refuse female molar *assemblages* of biological determinism in a way that is far more complete than those aspects of reproduction that are for many women impossible to overcome.

As the Rachael Rosen of the novel wonders, in a display of astuteness quite beyond the capacity of the Rachael Tyrell of the movie, "Androids can't bear children...Is that a loss?" (Dick, 1999b, p.165). Quite possibly not, if the severing of a 'female's' ties to biological reproduction offers her freedoms from the desiring *assemblages* that can confine human women. While a human woman can choose not to have children through the use of birth control, sterilisation, abstinence or by a choice of sexual partner which prohibits the possibility of pregnancy, the desire for genetic reproduction may still be there even if it is outweighed by other concerns relating to the process of that reproduction. Furthermore, even if this were not the case, the female reproductive system can remain a hinderance as a result of the possibly of disease, infection, and the inconvenience of menstruation if it cannot be healthily suppressed hormonally. The gynoids suggests possibilities outside these limitations: what if 'women' (cyborgs or gynoids) were capable of possessing a strength similar to that of the average man – as Pris appears to do in her final scene with Deckard? What if she could have more control over her reproductive capabilities? What if gynoids were capable of reproducing in a manner completely different from the typical, sexual way, allowing new levels of sexual freedom, and removing the risks associated with birth?

It has been noted by Christopher Palmer that Philip K. Dick, much like Deleuze,

values that which is unassimilated—unassimilated into the mechanical collective, into an oppressive society, in a single godhead,

into entropy; but the urgency of assertion and defence of that value leads him to break all traditional definitions of the humanly individual. (Palmer, 2003, p.227)

It is through the android, and even more so the gynoid, that Philip K. Dick explores the post-human by breaking away from the mechanical, molar *assemblages* that would limit the possibilities of analysis. As with Deleuze and Guattari, and also to an extent Agamben, Philip K. Dick's works seek to break boundaries, to explore human constructions through the lens of the non-human or extra-human entities, *being* as such rather than merely *human* being.

This is why critical readings of *Androids* as an expansion of Cartesian dualism is far too simplistic, as Fredric Jameson notably argued when he described Dick's works, including *Androids*, as collectively "[reactivating] the Cartesian problem". As Jameson writes:

[T]he questions now identified as involving 'Artificial Intelligence' seep into and infect every experience of Descartes' realm of thought or consciousness, and it is no longer only the android who must ask such autoreferential questions. What emerges at length is what I will call the 'android cogito': I think, therefore I am an android. (Jameson, 2005, p.374)

Such readings of Dick's works reduce their philosophical potential to rather narrow realms of enquiry in relation to what is human as such, rather than a far broader exploration of *being* as such – whether that *being* is experienced by a human, animal, artificial intelligence or alien life-form, etc. This is the most valuable way to examine the nature of social/political constructions, from the point of view of an outsider whose place within them is made exaggeratedly ambiguous so as to expose the restrictive, *molar* nature of the *assemblages* that govern and categorise human life. Dick's work approaches philosophical problems from the point of view of someone outside of the machine(s) that construct perceived reality, just as Deleuze's philosophy seeks to understand reality from the perspective of one completely outside the system that produces it, observing its progression from inception through to realisation in the world – the movement from the intensive space of the *virtual*, to the *actual*, in the form of ideas, and then finally into actions and actualisations operating as *assemblages* in reality. As Palmer argues, the questions posed by Dick's works are passed through the medium of science fiction and "when passed through

this sieve” what emerges is “intuition of the potentially valuable in androids, gods, animals, robots” (Palmer, 2003, p.227). This perspective allows us to examine human *being* through the lens of post-human others, science fiction stock characters, such as the gynoid, rather than viewing the post-human through the lens of the human as he/she exists in our own reality. Seeing science fiction worlds as mere analogies of our own existence is extremely limiting compared with understanding them as distinct virtual, possibilities which may offer new, alternative perspectives of our own reality through contrast/comparison. Science fiction allows us to examine, for example, the construction of gender outside of the environment in which it usually operates, in a foreign, fictional landscape. Deleuze’s concept of *becoming-woman* allows us to view male and female as molar/molecular forces that act on and influence the world, rather than biological or social traits limited to specific groups of people. However, *becoming-gynoid* allows us to examine gender from outside the *assemblage* entirely. Suddenly, gender – as experienced and performed by a gynoid/android – is severed completely from biological, sexual, entities and the desiring-machines that govern them: for androids and gynoids, gender can be a factually mechanical process, purely performative, programmed and as such capable of being reprogrammed, *detransformed*. Through comparison, the mechanical being – and the gynoid especially – gives us hope that the machinic *assemblages* experienced by humans might also be as capable of being altered and overcome.

A fear of the machine is a classic trope of science fiction texts, from black and white B-movies to classic examples of sf literature. This fear is not so much one of technology specifically as it is fear of the ‘new’, which technology symbolises and the gynoid often embodies. However, what a study of sf combined with Deleuze’s philosophy teaches us is that the *assemblage* – whatever form it may take – is not necessarily an imperious structure to be feared, like the villainous skeletal assassins of the *Terminator* film series, or the iconic, deranged HAL from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); the *assemblage* does not hold certain dominion over humans, rather, it can be our tool for shaping the future.

Chapter 4: Profane Simulations - *Suspension* and Becoming in the “Half-Real”

In previous chapters I have discussed how science fiction literature and popular culture can help us imagine new social and political possibilities as well as re-examine and critique current realities. I have described sf literature as similar to Deleuze’s idea of the *virtual* – a place where pre-actualised *potentialities* exist in a *spatium* before becoming *actualised* in the real world as events, ideas, objects and institutions. I also discussed sf as a zone of *inoperativity*, adopting Agamben’s terminology. Following his work, we can understand sf as a realm where certain oppositional hierarchical relationships are exposed through the manner in which they are portrayed, or played with, in an imagined future, alternate or alien society. In this way these binaries – *paradigms* – of culture and politics are *suspended* by virtue of the strange and alternative manner in which they are viewed. One example which I discussed in the previous chapter included the opposition of man versus machine: in sf novels (and film and TV) that include life-like or sentient machines, or machine/human hybrids, the distinction becomes much harder to define and thus the traditional political and social constructs which underpin this opposition become exposed. The arbitrary hierarchy of organic domination over synthetic comes into the spot light – is suddenly definable, capable of being discussed, questioned, critiqued, even demolished – and is in danger of fading into obscurity. Thus the *paradigm*’s ability to function is threatened, rendering it potentially *inoperative*.

However, while sf literature and some other forms of narrative-based media allow us to begin experimenting with philosophical problems, the creative potential for the reader is limited to the world created by the author(s). While there is room for a certain level of interpretation in a given text/cinematic work, which can be inspiring for the reader and can fuel further creative exploration, literature and film offer an overall passive experience which does not always provide the most ideal platform for the level of experimentation that the philosophy of Agamben and Deleuze suggests and inspires. The medium of art and/or entertainment that could fully evidence and illustrate the work of these philosophers, I suspect, does not yet exist. However, there is one medium whose capacity for meaningful interaction approaches the

creativity inspired by these philosophers' systems and begins to showcase their potential: video games.

To elaborate, games are significantly defined as a medium by their rules, rather than only by their narratives, which sets video games apart from other visual media. It is also important to note however that the rules of games form an interchange relationship with game narratives, particularly in the case of video games, so that the rules support the narrative of the game and vice versa. As Jesper Juul writes: "It is a basic paradox of games that...the enjoyment of a game depends on...easy-to-use rules presenting challenges that *cannot* be easily overcome" (Juul, 2011, p.5). In this chapter, I am interested in exploring the process through which the ludological and narrative aspects of video games interact and provide a unique experience for the player. As Juul continues to explain, the activity of gaming – specifically video gaming - can be distilled down to the experience of two game elements, "that of *emergence* (a number of simple rules combining to form interesting variations) and *progression* (separate challenges presented serially)" (Juul, 2011, p.5).

The progression elements of game design are a relatively recent innovation and are a more common component of video games as opposed to other forms of gaming (Juul, 2011, p.72). These elements were popularised with the advent of text-based adventure games such as the *Zork* (Infocom: 1980) interactive fiction game series or Beam Software's illustrated text adventure *The Hobbit* (Melbourne House: 1982). Broadly speaking, we might define these as video games which employ narrative as part of their central design, the structure of which aids in the games organisation of challenges. The more modern adventure or action role playing games evolved from text-based precursors and their table-top counterparts such as the highly popular *Dungeons and Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast: 1974). Action and adventure RPGs, from *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo: 1986) and *Final Fantasy* (Square Enix: 1987) franchises to *The Witcher* (Atari: 2007) and *The Elder Scrolls* series (Bethesda Softworks: 1994), typically employ the popular mechanic of the quest as a way of organising challenges. Juul cites this popular game mechanic as a prime example of *emergence* and *progression* working together: the quest allows the player to complete challenges while also progressing through the story, providing "an interesting type of bridge between game rules and game fiction in that the game can

contain a predefined sequence of events that the player then has to actualise or enact” (Juul, 2011, p.17). It is these instances of ludonarrative harmony within video games, in which *emergence* and *progression*, narrative and play, immersive ‘text’ experience and player creativity come together, that are of most interest because these are moments where intriguing levels (to varying degrees) of meaningful interactivity become possible. Moments such as these in video games allow for the generation of potentialities akin to those imagined in the philosophy of Agamben and Deleuze; more specifically, as I shall demonstrate, video games provide simulations of real world instances of Agambenian *suspension*, *inoperativity*, or Deleuzian *molecular/molar assemblages* and *Bodies without Organs (BwO)*. These can be explored and creative methods of interacting with these structures can be experimented with within the simulated, virtual world of the game.

This form of engagement with possible fictions, partially informed by real-world scenarios, is in some ways unique to the video game (as opposed to other game formats). This resonates greatly with the potential inherent in the sf genre as a whole, which I have discussed at length in previous chapters. Sf is an institution of experimentation enabling the creation of myriad future/alternative reality landscapes housing limitless social, political, and ethical possibilities ripe for philosophical engagement, first on the part of the author/film crew/game designer during the work’s creation, and then later on the part of the reader/viewer/player. Many critics have cited the innovative potential inherent in the sf genre; for example, Kneale and Kitchin describe sf as a “privileged site for critical thought,” largely as a result of its unusual nature defined by “a gap: between science and fiction, between the reader’s reality and the world of the fiction...it is entirely appropriate that it is possible to read the term ‘science fiction’ itself as an oxymoron” (Kneale and Kitchin, 2005, p.4). However, it is only in the case of the video game that the creator’s storyline(s) and the audience’s participation in the ‘text’ allows for real interaction, where the audience may not only ponder the questions posed by the work, but may also be allowed to play with the ideas expressed, and even experiment with them within the confines of the simulated game world.

As Mary Flanagan suggests in her book, *Critical Play* “What if some games, and the more general concept of ‘play,’ not only provide outlets for entertainment but also

function as means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, or as tools to help examine or work through social issues?” (Flanagan, 2013 p.1). Such experimentation, however, is mediated by what Juul refers to as the “state machine” (Juul, 2011, p.56): the rules that constitute the game as such and define the various actions the player is able to perform. The state machine regulates what the player can and cannot do within the confines of the game space – whether this space is a football pitch or the simulated space of a video game, e.g. the virtual borders of the fictional continents of *Azeroth* in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment: 2005). Some modern video games, particularly open world games with detailed and elaborate narratives, such as the *Mass Effect* (Eidos Interactive: 2012) and *The Fallout* (Interplay Entertainment and Bethesda Softworks: 1997-2015) series, offer colourful landscapes ripe for experimentation as they create synthetic worlds whose rules mimic those of the real world. That is, while the narrative content of a video game may have little to do with reality – the dragon I slay in *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Softworks: 2011) is unrelated to my experience of day to day life – the affordances of the game I play provide me with choices allowing me to experiment with the game in unusual and unique ways, possibly unanticipated by the game developer.

Many modern action adventure RPGs, and sometimes other game genres such as first-person shooters, offer players a variety of options from character appearance and clothing decisions, to political and ethical choices whose consequences may alter the very nature of the game environment and the proceeding experience of the game. Consider the example of the *Mass Effect* series whose highly interactive story-line affords a great many varied narrative experiences resulting from the player’s decisions; philosophical and ethical dilemmas form a large portion of the game-play, and the choices the player selects, can dramatically influence the experience of the game. As Shaw and Sharp argue, the player is forced to make “moral and ethical choices that will affect the outcome of their relationship with other characters and events in the gaming world. This is written through the narratives of the games, but is also embedded within their ludic qualities” (Shaw and Sharpe, 2013, p.349). The *Mass Effect* games create truly meaningful play by combining a compelling narrative whose *progression* is significantly dependent on the ludic *emergence* of the gaming experience; that is, while the narrative decisions in the game are pre-determined by

the game's designers, the overall story created by an individual player is *emergent* due to the great many variables the player must choose from as they navigate the game's narrative and fictional world. To elaborate, Juul defines emergent play as follows:

There is more to playing games than simply memorising the rules. So we need a framework for understanding how something interesting and complex (the actual gameplay) can arise from something simple (the game rules). How can something made from simple rules present challenges that extend beyond the rules? (Juul, 2002, p.324)

Thus, we can understand aspects of the *Mass Effect* games as emergent because the plethora of choices afforded to the player ensures a gaming experience that is unpredictable and which is, furthermore, more difficult to understand as merely the result of a system of rules, compared to many video games that rely on a more traditional, linear *progression* model. In other words, the game as played by an individual player is conceptually harder to trace back to the state machine that produced it. The game, or rather the player's experience of the game, appears to be more than the sum of a series of set variables put in place by the game developers.

As Shaw and Sharpe continue to argue, the story in *Mass Effect* is informed constantly by decisions the protagonist Shepard must make regarding which political factions to support, which friendships to honour, which wars to wage: "moreover, because these games pivot around the personalities and decisions of characters, there is an emotional investment demanded of the player" (Shaw and Sharpe, 2013, p.350). The world of the game is entirely fictional but the alliances formed, both personal and political, between the player's Shepard avatar and the game's characters/factions produce real emotions: ethical and philosophical conundrums whose significance is embedded and reinforced by the personal emotions attached to these decisions through character interaction. Sara Mosberg Iversen discusses the complex and indeterminate nature of game challenges which cannot always be traced easily back to the rules of the games but instead come about as the result of a unique player-game engagement:

Challenge, then, is not a static phenomenon but something that appears in the specific relations between a given subject and the surroundings. This means that an actual challenge only arises when a

subject is challenged by a given situation. Hence, any actual challenge is a subjective phenomenon and it may differ greatly among individuals what they find challenging or not. (Iversen, 2012, para.4)

Once, again this illustrates an uneasy relationship between real and unreal within the video game space. Iversen never expresses this situation in terms of emergence in her paper but nevertheless I believe we can extrapolate that this phenomena within the player-game interaction fosters further *emergent* activity, that is, not only in-game emergent player actions within the game, but also experiences which are outside the game space yet are nevertheless the result of playing the game: feeling strong emotions, conceptualising philosophical problems and then even applying those thoughts to real world situations.

Such instances of *emergent* gameplay are reminiscent of Deleuze's conception of the *virtual*, where the video game can be understood as similar to the intensive space where certain potential *actualities* exist in the *pre-actualised spatium*. Like the *spatium*, the video game is limited by affordances of the state machine, and thus – like the space of the *virtual* – not all possibilities are equally achievable. Rather, only a subset of the possible (what Deleuze terms *potentialities*) are capable of being *actualised* in the real world. In a similar sense, the affordances of the game world make only certain actions available to the player, out of which only a few will be chosen – *actualised* – dictating the outcome, or story-development of the game. Complex RPG games, particularly those with open worlds, are somewhat unique in their attempt to balance a progression game format – in many ways necessary to produce a game with a coherent story – with the *emergent* characteristics of much simpler games with fewer rules and a great many more possible actions and outcomes. From the *pre-actualised* space where possible actions afforded by the state machine exist conceptually, 'real' *actualised* actions emerge and affect the player's experience of the game. In the case of the RPG, it is not always easy to discern which processes resulting from the game's rules made the resulting gameplay possible. Thus, *emergent* gameplay mimics the Deleuzian movement of *potentialities* from the sphere of the *virtual* to the actual sphere.

In addition, however, the emergent and 'half-real' qualities of the video game, and more specifically for the purposes of this investigation, the video RPG, has the

capacity to expose the *suspended* qualities of certain constructions in the real world via the *suspended* nature of the game and play. To explain this fully, it is necessary to make the important distinction between these two concepts, *game* and *play*, which are often used interchangeably to describe the same general idea of leisure activity. Many theorists, from Huizinga, in his seminal work *Homo Ludens* (2016), to Brian Sutton Smith (2001) and Miguel Sicart (2014) have argued that play is an activity distinct from the concept of the game; for play, in its purest sense, is free-form, unstructured and removed from all organisation. Furthermore, play is in many ways the antithesis of the game in that the creative nature of play defies rule systems that would limit and confine it. The social scientist Shiv Visvanathan distinguishes between the two in the following manner: “One must differentiate between game and play. A game is a bounded, specific way of problem solving. Play is more cosmic and open-ended. Gods play, but man unfortunately is a gaming individual. A game has a predictable resolution, play may not” (Visvanathan, 2016). This is why it is a struggle for game developers to create meaningful play experiences as they attempt to provide interesting and satisfying game environments and fictional worlds for the player to inhabit while also affording them a certain amount of freedom to create their own unique play experiences.

As a result, it is often the case that, in order for play’s creative properties to truly flourish, the player must find ways to experiment within the game space, sometimes in a manner unanticipated by the rules of the game; play does not simply consist of interacting or engaging with a game but rather of *playing* with the game, and I shall offer specific examples of this later in the chapter. We can, therefore, frame play and the game as two polar opposites of a fully *suspended paradigm* in the Agambenian sense, caught in the tension between free-form experimentation and creativity on the one hand, and a strict, rule-based system on the other. I say *fully suspended* because it is more accurate to say that play and the game are not so much part of a single *paradigm* but are rather two nearly separate *paradigms* that have arisen from the *signature* of the sacred rite. As I will explain further, the game is the historical child of the sacred ritual which contains the internal opposition of sacred rite and the divine itself, represented by sacred acts. Play, as inappropriate use of the sacred, suspends this opposition so that the two become *indiscernible*, and exposes the nature of both as *indistinct* quantities. The game emerges from this as a strict rule

based system based on the model of the sacred ritual and the profane performance of these rules as play.

Brian Sutton-Smith, in his influential work *The Ambiguity of Play*, also discusses how game elements might resemble real-world institutions: how “play rhetorics are part of the multiple broad symbolic systems – political, religious, social and educational – through which we construct the meaning of the cultures in which we live” (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p.9). For example, the Karma system in Bethesda’s *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Softworks: 2008) and *Fallout: New Vegas* (Bethesda Softworks: 2012) which regulates the relative morality of the player based on their decisions. This system is based on a specific traditional conception of morality based on altruism. In *Fallout 3*, the player’s character “The Lone Wanderer”, will encounter situations where the player can choose to behave violently or charitably towards certain factions, can do good deeds or ignore requests for help, choose to hunt down evil-doers or slaughter the innocent for personal gain, and all these decisions influence the way other characters and political factions regard and behave towards them. Marcus Schulzke in his paper *Moral Decision Making in Fallout*, explains how Bethesda achieved this complex gameplay mechanic:

Although *Fallout* does not start from the utilitarian assumption of happiness being the greatest goal, it does measure the amount of harm done to other characters in the game. ... Nearly everything the player does in *Fallout 3* affects Karma in some way, either increasing or decreasing the number of points depending on the morality of the action. Stealing incurs minor penalties, killing results in more significant drops in karma (sic), and destroying an entire town – something the game allows the player to do – exacts a heavy karmic price. In order for the system to work the developers had to assign numerical values indicating the magnitude of each action then set good, bad and neutral paths by which to complete each task. (Schulze, 2009, para.13)

Though *Fallout 3* does not explicitly endorse a utilitarian ideology, the game’s karma system mechanic implicitly espouses a rigorous utilitarian system that ranks actions as various specific numerical delineations of good, evil and neutral. The karma system also supports a heavily altruistic sense of morality, where any action that aids another character (provided they are not a slave merchant or a mass murderer) is considered good regardless of the player’s motivation.

Despite the morality the *Fallout* series ostensibly promotes, the affordances of the game also allow the player a great deal of ethical freedom to do as they choose in each situation. While certain actions are deemed ‘good’ and ‘bad’ on a sliding scale, the consequences of one’s actions are very much subject to the way other characters and political factions react to one as a result of those actions. Thus, moral judgement on the player’s actions is really reserved for each individual faction, which goes a significant way to avoiding the problem of promoting a simplistic conception of moral absolutism. The player must choose at various points in the games to support some characters, which may also mean destroying others: thus actions which are admired by some characters are hated by others. Furthermore, the way players choose to deal with more morally ambiguous situations does not negatively affect their karma rating. For example, one particular quest in *Fallout 3*, called Oasis, involves a mutant, Harold, who – having previously been infected by a substance developed by the pre-war government, known as the “Forced Evolutionary Virus” (FEV) – was transformed into an immortal being with a tree growing out of his head. This tree gradually overtook him and became rooted to the ground and Harold’s tree/self growth created a beautiful, lush green enclosure in the desert in which the player encounters him and the tribe of people, known as the “TreeMinders”, who worship him as a god (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008).

The tree-like entity, Harold, implores the player to kill him as he is now very old and weary, and furthermore trapped by the tree he is now part of and destined to stay fixed to a single spot forever. However, the TreeMinders view Harold as sacred and believe his pleas for death are part of some complex ‘test’. Furthermore, they have other ambitions for Harold’s ability for encouraging growth. While one of the TreeMinder leaders asks that the player limit this power so that the cult may keep Harold’s gift to themselves, another leader asks that the player give Harold a drug that will stimulate his growth in the hopes of expanding the vegetation that has grown up around him. The quest poses a genuine moral dilemma, simultaneously raising questions relating to euthanasia, the needs of the group versus the rights of the individual and whether a non-human entity can lay claim to these rights in the same way as other individuals.

With no clear right or wrong answer, the quest “encourages the player to form an opinion about what is the right thing to do and it imposes consequences” (Schulze, 2009, para. 24). More importantly, however, as Schulzke argues, the quest also

forces players to resolve moral dilemmas that they encounter in the real world, albeit from a new perspective that fosters original thinking. There are also distinct rewards for and punishments for each of the resolutions, which means that the way in which the quest is resolved affects the rest of the story. (Schulze, 2009, para.24)

This means that, even after the quest has been resolved, the game continues to remind the player of their choice and of its consequences.

To reiterate, the video game itself is the product of a collection of *real* rules which create an equally *real* experience for the player within a context that is, nevertheless, simulated and fictional. Furthermore, video games demand the use of mental skills which are often transferable to real life situations, and vice versa. The work of James Paul Gee (2014) is very useful here, and his understanding of *projectivity* as a process where player and play experience come together in emergent ways (which I will discuss and explore in depth later in this chapter). Our in-game experiences inform real life, provoke new ways of thinking and expand our mental skill-sets; in turn our real-world experiences inform our gameplay and enrich our gaming experience and this cyclical process is what contributes to meaningful play interactions. Kelly Boudreau writes extensively on this topic, understanding the interchange relationship that emerges as a result of player-avatar interaction as a third, separate identity distinct from that of the avatar and that of the human playing the game:

[I]dentity becomes decentralized, making room for the possibility of hybrid-identity to emerge in different play contexts. ... Hybrid-identity is not about the state of the player or the avatar, rather, it is about a non-human-centric identity that develops through the networked process of videogame play which is a separate, often abstract, identity. (Boudreau, 2012, p.18-19)

In this way, the video game holds much in common with the sf genre as a whole (in whatever medium this genre manifests), in that it holds the real in ambiguous and often unstable ‘balance’ with the unreal.

Furthermore, the rules of video games are somewhat unique in that they have a tendency to mimic, or incorporate, the processes and relationships involved in the real world and the living of real life. “Although founded on representation, video games are, after all, constructed virtual worlds often using referential images of ‘real world’ objects. This enables the player to be able to make inferences about object behaviours that influence gameplay expectations” (Boudreau, 2012, p.190). As a result, video games of the sf genre form an ideal pairing where the formal aspects of each mingle to create the ideal *virtual* landscape in which to explore, creatively: possible scenarios; potential solutions to *real* or imagined problems; or, more generally, entertaining notions of other worlds both like and unlike our own. As Shaw and Sharp argue: “Although it is true that video games usually produce fictional spaces, they do not produce entirely *unreal* spaces. Instead, they are much more like virtual laboratories for probing, playing and experimenting with reality” (Shaw and Sharp, 2013, p.343). Though Shaw and Sharp did not make this argument solely about video games of the sf genre, their words exemplify why video games are an ideal medium in which to experiment with sf narratives and fictional worlds.

As I will argue later in this chapter, the interactive alternative worlds and imagined futures encountered in sf RPGs offer players a unique opportunity to engage with political and ethical questions in a manner that is both physically safe and free from social judgement. While the sf novel may encourage the mind to wander, to imagine possibilities, the sf RPG offers players a more intimate experience: a chance to experiment, challenge, *play* with that which is often impossible in real life, whether because it is physically unattainable (e.g. slaying a dragon, exploring space, performing magic), dangerous (dodging bullets, climbing cliffs) or socially/legally prohibited (committing crimes, dispensing one’s own brand of justice, taking morally ambiguous narrative paths). However, before delving into my full analysis of specific games, I must first explain how I intend to employ the philosophical systems that will aid my analysis of both: how both Agamben and Deleuze’s philosophy highlight the manner in which play functions as a means of forcing political and philosophical thought, while also simultaneously subverting and disrupting the real world that the simulated game environment inevitably (at least partially) imitates.

Suspending the World: Blasphemous Play in the Fallout Universe

Aside from game studies academics, play is a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of many kinds of theorists from anthropologists like Sutton-Smith, to sociologists including Miguel Sicart and philosophers such as Gadamer (2004) and Agamben. The last of these highlighted repeatedly in his work the essentially disruptive and inherently critical nature of play in relation to the established *paradigms* they imitate. Agamben discusses the historical significance of play as an archetypal form of blasphemy in his work *Profanations*, where he explains play's connection with the sacred and the performance of ritual. For Agamben, sacred acts are composed of two elements, the performance itself and the divine operation which it symbolises: “the power of the sacred act...lies in the conjunction of the myth that tells the story and the rite that reproduces and stages it” (Agamben, 2007, p.75).

The sacred aspect of the ritual need not be specifically religious, however. For although most rituals include or once included a deference to the divine, more modern secular traditions inevitably espouse the same *signature* of power, as Agamben explains: “the political secularisation of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact” (Agamben, 2007, p.77). Thus, the sacred can be said to theoretically include any well-established *paradigm* of power, whether it be a religious, political, economical or social tradition. The key thing here is that even the secular *paradigms* that make up western civilisation derive some share of their potency from an archaic relationship to the *signature* of the sacred or religious – that which is related to an infallible authority and an unchallengeable hierarchy. Thus, as Agamben explains, what is considered ‘sacred’ by society may not have any relationship with the religious that is consciously understood by those that observe the ‘rites’ and ‘rituals’ which bolster a given society’s traditions. Thus, from here on I will employ the word ‘sacred’ as a moniker for any *paradigm* or *signature* of power whose position in society is so elevated that its symbolic artefacts are considered inappropriate for use in play.

This understanding of the sacred is in line with Agamben as, for him, the sacred can refer to anything that is separated in a scission and yet also retained within the overall structure, in the paradoxical logic of the inclusion/exclusion opposition at the heart of every *paradigm*. The *homo sacer paradigm*, for example, refers to a sacred operation that endures today in other forms where certain groups – the Jews during WWII, for example – are treated as *bare life* even though their killing is not sanctioned through any relationship with the divine. The sacred then, is ultimately the originary *paradigm* of inclusion and exclusion, where a partition separates the ‘divine’ or other form of authority from the sphere of the ‘mortal’, or that which is considered lower in dignity. However, as in the case of the divine/human opposition, the divide is strangely permeable, as humans are subject to divine laws and held to those standards under the threat of punishment, despite the accepted truth that humans are considered lesser and imperfect – and as such incapable of obeying these imposed rules. Thus, the sacred acts as a structure that supplements and facilitates the action of the *signature*, where the founding illogic of *paradigms* like the *homo sacer* aid the functioning of *signatures* such as the divine, government, etc., providing the conditions necessary for these contradictory powers structures to remain in place.

Video games provide a haven for the profane use of the sacred, particularly RPGs that create a detailed simulated world where any ‘profane’ actions of the player may remain above reproach by virtue of the entirely fictional space in which these actions take place. In other words, video games allow players to experience and perform with relative freedom and without fear of moral sanction that which society or government might chastise; as in the case of the “Oasis” quest in *Fallout 3* discussed earlier, the player has the capacity to choose from three morally ambiguous options all of which might invite moral outrage, however, whatever the player’s choice their decision is protected by the virtual nature of the video game.

Nevertheless, while the game itself is virtual, the acts that take place within the simulated landscape occupy a strange limbo between real and unreal. Though they are fictional, it cannot be denied that they have an effect on the player’s mind, and may even affect the player’s real-life actions, thus having repercussions in the real world. We must also be careful not to misconstrue the act of play as something that

occurs in a vacuum; the player's interaction with the game, after all, takes place in the real world, with tangible gaming equipment (TV, games console/PC, controller, headset, etc.) which is operated in reality by the player's body, and inevitably within a real environment where play takes place. As a result, the player – whilst playing the game – can be said to be *suspended* between the virtual world of the video game and the actual world that they simultaneously inhabit. One falls into the other as the player engages with the game space, always slipping in and out of their fictional experience as they rescue princesses or raid tombs in one moment and in another pause the game to answer the phone, make tea, speak to a family member, only to return the virtual game world a moment later. This alone is enough to make play a highly disruptive and *indistinct* process.

Furthermore, many theorists have commented on the disruptive, dangerous or even abusive elements of play. Brian Sutton Smith talks about the “illicit play” of children as a way of rebelling against adult power through satirising adult authority figures such as teachers. He also discusses the use of “cruel play” in school playgrounds: bullying and teasing (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p.111-12). Miguel Sicart discusses play as a means of relieving tension, providing a break from a norm with an opportunity to ignore certain rules for a brief period: “we need play precisely because we need occasional freedom and distance from our conventional understanding of the moral fabric of society” (Sicart, 2014, p.5). On the other hand, providing this respite is destructive to convention, taking over

the context in which play takes place, it breaks the state of affairs. This is often done for the sake of laughter, for enjoyment, for passing pleasures. But like all other passing pleasures, play can also disruptively reveal our conventions, assumptions, biases, and dislikes. (Sicart, 2014, p.14-15)

This is precisely why play has such unique potential because play takes ‘sacred’ processes and puts them to “an entirely inappropriate use” (Agamben, 2007, p.75). This allows us to estrange ourselves from a given *paradigm* by separating ‘sacred’ acts from the myths and power structures they both convey and support. Play divorces the ‘sacred’ object, act or ritual from the values these practices and things typically represent outside of the game space: “play breaks up this unity: as *ludus*, or physical play, it drops the myth that preserves the rite; as *iocus*, or wordplay, it

effaces the rite and allows the myth to survive” (Agamben, 2007, p.75-6). In this way, games once again are shown to be ‘half-real’, this time in a slightly different sense: they both repeat symbolic actions which represent real-world processes of power and ritual and yet also unsuccessfully mimic these *paradigms* in the game space.

Play repeats a ritual badly; it only approximates the processes of the ritual or relationship it seeks to imitate. By repeating incorrectly, repeating with difference, players open-up new possibilities for those ‘sacred’ *paradigms* they are mimicking:

Children, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract becomes a toy. (Agamben, 2007, p.76)

By the same token, a child playing at getting married does not grasp the full significance of the ritual they perform and so the meaning behind the ritual itself is partially or even entirely obscured. As Agamben states: “play frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it” (Agamben, 2007, p.76). Play is thus a profanation which temporarily *suspends* the power of the *paradigms* it imitates, a form of blasphemy that “neutralises what it profanes”: toy soldiers ‘die’ in ‘battles’ and then come back to life, cars ‘crash’ and yet remain undamaged, the objects that were once ‘sacred’ enter a new dimension of “use”, as Agamben explains. The *signature* of power that links the *paradigms* of government, economics, social traditions, etc. with religion imbues modern secular *paradigms* with a status removed from common use: “not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation also contains or preserves within itself a genuinely religious core” (Agamben, 2007, p.74). Play is a profanation then that degrades this separation and returns the sacred to common, human (rather than divine) use. In other words, play makes certain subjects, and their related objects, uniquely accessible to criticism, satire and experimentation by exposing the aleatory nature of the oppositions which normally place these subjects above criticism. The founding dichotomies of higher and lower, divine and human, sovereign and subject can be exposed as *indistinct* categories through the use of play to devastating effect.

The Value of Junk

The *Fallout* series of games is an excellent example of how video RPGs can provide a platform for the type of *emergent* play opportunities that can be valuably disruptive: problematizing, *suspending* and critiquing the established traditions to which Agamben refers. Based on an alternative history of America in which 50s aesthetics and Atomic Age optimism endured up to the year 2077, when a nuclear holocaust destroyed most of the world, David Chandler discusses how *Fallout 3* achieves a high level of player autonomy in a post-apocalyptic landscape – the ruins of Washington DC – where players interact with a post-war world two-hundred years after the bombs fell:

By prioritising player agency in an environment built from detritus, *Fallout 3* invites the player to seek or to create alternate modes of play that illustrate an emergent freedom afforded by the post-apocalyptic sensibility reflected in the game's aesthetic design. (Chandler, 2015, p.52)

The *Fallout* games (particularly the later instalments from *Fallout 3* onwards) depict a world built from wreckage, the repurposed ruins of pre-war cultural artefacts. The *Fallout* universe creates a visual representation of *paradigms* rendered *inoperative*. As old divisions of power have crumbled into obscurity, so have those symbols of institutions been rendered *indistinct*, as torn war-recruitment posters and advertising slogans litter a landscape of ruined buildings, antique weaponry, the repurposed or destroyed husks of robots, and other kinds of rebuilt, re-appropriated or now useless tech.

However, this is not only apparent in the design of the game's landscape; it is also embedded in the gameplay mechanics, the overall narrative and available quests. The more recent games in the franchise, *Fallout 3*, *Fallout: New Vegas*, and *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Softworks: 2015), allow the player to craft items and weaponry out of old-world objects from lawn mowers and motorcycles to crutches and medical braces. As in Agamben's case of the child playing with fire trucks and firearms, items that (in the world of the game) were once connected with serious aspects of society are reduced to mere components of playful creativity. For example, items of 50s era pride and status – lawn mowers and motorcycles – are satirised by their inclusion as

components in humorous weapon designs such as the “Rock-it Launcher” (a gun that allows the player to shoot miscellaneous junk at enemies from empty bottles to teddy bears) or the “Shishkebob”, (a comically large, flaming sword-like weapon) (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008).

In other words, the *Fallout* series returns serious, in some ways ‘sacred’, objects to common use so that they may be commandeered for other means. *Fallout: New Vegas* is even more flagrant with its easy appropriation of serious objects with its vast array of possible drugs, or “chems”, that the player can create themselves by combining various cocktails of dangerous and addictive drugs that can be found throughout the wasteland: for example, “Stimpacks”, “Jet”, “Buffout”, “Psycho”, etc, many of which resemble real chemicals. One in particular was even originally called “morphine” before censors forced the developers to change it to Med-X (Schulzke, 2009, para.9). In addition, Australia decided to ban *Fallout 3* as a result of its drug related content until an altered version of the game was made to suit the country’s game classification rules (Schulzke, 2009, para.9). However, *Fallout 4* takes this mechanic of returning ‘sacred’ or serious objects to common use the furthest by allowing players to acquire and maintain outposts throughout the world’s map; each outpost contains a diverse array of junk, from Atomic Age style cars to American flags, that can be broken down and turned into whatever other object the player needs in order to ensure the prosperity of the camp and its inhabitants (*Fallout 4*, Bethesda Softworks: 2015).

Items found in the *Fallout* universe become virtual toys within the post-apocalyptic world, a process which mirrors the game’s narrative of rebuilding objects, institutions and ideologies from the ruins of the old. This mimics and represents the evolution of the paradigmatic occurring before the player’s very eyes as old tools are repurposed for new uses, whereby their function becomes *indistinct* to the extent that alternative operations become possible. This process, furthermore, repeats itself thematically in the story-line; several quests involve the reclamation of the old for new purposes. *Fallout 3* includes several examples of this: the quest “Head of State” requires the player to empty the Lincoln Memorial of Slave Merchants and dangerous Mutants so that it might be reclaimed as a homestead for runaway slaves; the main story quest involves working on a water purification project called “Project

Purity”, that uses the Jefferson Memorial as a central laboratory and base of operations; and one of the central locations and city hubs in the game, around which many quests revolve, is called “Rivet City”, a thriving metropolis located within a beached, pre-war aircraft carrier (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008).

However, despite these qualities present in the newer games in the *Fallout* series, *Fallout 3* remains rather concentrated on the reclamation of pre-war ideals than the creation of new apparatuses. *Fallout 3*’s main quest fixates on a desperate attempt to reclaim some portion of pre-war life by purifying Washington’s (now called the “Capitol Wasteland”) irradiated water. “The Enclave” – an adversary from *Fallout 2* – returns as the narrative’s main villain, an organisation descended from pre-war government and military. Having anticipated the war, they secured themselves in an offshore oil rig and then returned to the Capitol, considering themselves “the legitimate continuation of the pre-war U.S. government...determined to take all territories back under its control” (Davies, Hill and Sutton, 2015, p.21), and furthermore “deeming its own members the only humans wholly free of mutation and thus the only ones entitled to live in its new nation” (Davies, Hill and Sutton, 2015, p.24). However, the player’s character (The Lone Wanderer) is forced by the game to destroy The Enclave, and thus support a free and diverse world of uncertainty over the safer option of life under a predictable though tyrannical government.

The game has undeniably melancholy overtones of loss emphasised by the tragic romance of dilapidated iconic buildings that exist in the real world; the terrible living conditions of many wasteland inhabitants; and the fact that the game begins with the player’s mother dying in childbirth. In spite of this atmosphere, the possibility inherent in *Fallout 3*’s decaying environment, as well as the mechanics of the game, overtakes this: “*Fallout 3*, then, becomes not about progressing through the wastes, or even restoring Washington D.C. to its former state. Rather, it emphasises and revels in the creative possibilities offered by a broken world” (Chandler, 2015, p.58).

The characters encountered and the quests they offer the player reflect this sensibility also. Moira Brown, a mechanic in the city of “Megaton”, requests The Lone Wanderer’s help in completing research for a book she is writing: “The Wasteland

Survival Guide”. The guide embraces the post-war world, offering advice on how best to harness the possibilities of the wasteland for the sustainable benefit of its inhabitants: where to find food and medicine, how to make the most of pre-war technology and how to deal with the dangerous mutant creatures of the wastes. When completing the quest the player actively engages with the raw possibilities of the Capitol Wasteland as they scavenge for food, fight monsters and discover troves of pre-war knowledge and technology. As the player reports back to Moira with their findings, a ‘How-To’ guide on restructuring the *paradigms/institutions/objects* etc. of the old world into new *paradigms* fit for the purposes of wasteland society emerges (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008).

Moreover, the nature of the book and its level of usefulness is decided by the player, and how and what they choose to tell Moira about the outcomes of their field research. Vague or deceitful answers to Moira’s questions result in a bad guide whereas complete and accurate responses lead to a valuable one. The player may discover the guide’s relative quality through a random encounter with a wastelander whose response to the guide varies from thanking the player for helping to write it to commenting that the book was “good for a laugh” (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008). Thus, the player’s interaction with the potential of the wasteland, and what they choose to do with the resulting knowledge, has perceivable consequences on the world of the game – as the Capitol Wasteland’s radio DJ, “Three-Dog”, will also weigh in on the quality of the publication. The philosophy of innovation the Wasteland Survival Guide advocates is reflected in Moira’s own dialogue:

Did you ever try to put a broken piece of glass back together? Even if the pieces fit, you can’t make it whole again the way it was. But if you’re clever, you can still use the pieces to make other useful things. Maybe even something wonderful, like a mosaic ... Well, the world broke just like glass. And everyone’s trying to put it back together like it was, but it’ll never come together the same way. (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008)

Her words once again resonate with the idea of progress through the evolution of the paradigmatic, where the glass – the substance – might be understood as the homogenous *signature* while the individual shards, capable of being reassembled into various different shapes, can be seen as the individual *paradigms* that are subject to change over time. The shards of the broken, *inoperative* wastes of the *Fallout*

universe, cannot be reassembled and – while certain fundamental *signatures* of power may remain in some form – creative play with the paradigmatic shards of these apparatuses may yield valuable change. While the tag line of the *Fallout* franchise pessimistically states “war never changes” the game and the player’s experience of it always does as every replay, every repurposing of the game’s affordances – choice of weapon, dialogue option, quest outcome, character stats – create a new play experience.

Hiding From the Fallout: Authority in the Vaults

While the *Fallout* games playfully point to a general corruption and *suspension* of power structures and apparatuses, offering players new ways of approaching ideas by virtue of the games’ deconstructed setting, I would now like to direct the reader’s attention to a more specific way in which the *Fallout* games more directly *suspend* a specific set of *paradigms* through one of the key aspects of their fictional world: the underground Vaults. These vast nuclear bunkers were “commissioned by the US government and built by Vault-Tec Industries” (Davies, Hill and Sutton, 2015, p.7) ostensibly to house those few who signed up for the program before the bombs fell, so they might wait out the nuclear disaster until it was safe to venture out and rebuild society. However, the Vaults had a secret purpose: to conduct illicit experiments on the inhabitants on behalf of the US government, “to study pre-selected segments of the population to see how they react to the stresses of isolationism and how successfully they re-colonise after the Vault opens” (Avellone, 2002, p.11). However, before I delve further into my exploration of the Vaults I must first illustrate some further aspects of Agamben’s view of play in order to adequately explain my reading of this aspect of the *Fallout* universe and its relationship with Agamben’s philosophy.

Let us start with a description of a common hierarchical *paradigm* that is also frequently also the subject play. When children play at ‘Mums and Dads’, those playing the part of the ‘kids’ in the game often become subordinate players to those fulfilling the roles of ‘mother’ and ‘father’. A hierarchy is formed within the game which mimics the real world power dynamic between adult and child, and yet expresses it not as a necessary uneven distribution of power but merely trivialised as

the rules of a game. The ‘sacred’ adult-child relationship is disrupted through profanation, making an unconscious mockery of this traditional structure:

Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized. (Agamben, 2007, p.77)

Thus, once again we see that the game is *suspended* between real and unreal, or more specifically between physical and digital; that is, the game is *suspended* between the reality it partially illustrates through the fictional world of the game and the immediate disjuncture it simultaneously showcases: between physical social and political processes that exist primarily outside of the game world and the accompanying symbolism that has been either discarded or warped through the act of play. The *suspended* nature of play allows the player to probe real situations and relationships via the desecration of sacred objects, symbols, and rituals. Sicart argues a very similar point when he describes play as “carnavalesque”, in that it “appropriates events, structures, and institutions to mock them and trivialise them, or make them deadly serious. The carnival of the middle ages, with its capacity to subvert conventions and institutions in a *suspension* of time and power, was a symptom of freedom” (Sicart, 2014, p.3-4) (italics mine).

The carnivalesque is present everywhere in the *Fallout* world, frequently mocking power structures through sinister comedic representation. Examples include the “Church of Atom” (whose followers appear in *Fallout 3* and *Fallout 4*) that worships the radiation from nuclear weapons; the “Children of the Cathedral” religious order (from the first *Fallout* game: Interplay Entertainment: 1997) established by the monstrous “Master” mutant leader who intends to expose all his followers to a nightmarish virus that transforms the victim into a mutant; and President John Henry Eden, the leader of The Enclave faction and self-styled, rightful ruler of the US wasteland, who is really an advanced computer with a personality based on famous pre-war US presidents (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008).

Within the game space all such profane experimentation is sanctioned within the jurisdiction of the game, where play “takes control of the world and gives it to the players for them to explore, challenge, or subvert” (Sicart, 2014, p.4). Yet, the act of playing’s irrepressible connection to the real world renders the processes it ‘plays with’ similarly *suspended* within the game space, potentially rendering these *paradigms inoperative*. Through the Vault-tech experimentation programmes, the game developers play with the concepts of home and society, once again, in a comically sinister manner by portraying cruel yet sometimes also humorous experiments on the vault dwellers: e.g. Vault 55 where “all entertainment tapes were removed” and Vault 56 where “all entertainment tapes were removed except those of one particularly bad comic actor. Sociologists predicted failure before Vault 55” (Avellone, 2002, p.11). Furthermore, many of the experiments involved were attempts to disrupt the community and/or family unit. For example, Vault 13 – from which the “Vault Dweller” character from the first *Fallout* game emerges – was designed to stay shut for 200 years in order to study the effects of long-term isolation on a population (Avellone, 2002). This brings us back to another key component of Agamben’s philosophy which I discussed earlier in this thesis: the political and social *paradigm* or *signature* of *oikonomia*, “conceived in the early Greek and later Christian theological sense as a paradigm of management” (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84).

Thanos Zartaloudis describes Agamben’s study of *oikonomia* as the basis for the “key problem in the long established negative relation between political authority and political activity or *praxis*” (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84). For Agamben, this *signature* is responsible for the conflation and confusion of the management of government with the political praxis of its citizens. *Oikonomia* enters the political sphere as a result of religious influence which “grounds the transcendence of sovereign power in its judicial (or juridico-political) in the doctrine of one God” (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84). As in the case of play, games and ritual, Agamben traces the origins of government power to the Greek *oikonomic paradigm* of management that then came to underpin the Christian theological understanding of God’s own division of power within the holy trinity. This *oikonomic* basis of divine power also became the basis of divine power on earth: the divine authority of the sovereign whose power divides itself between two polar aspects of government: authority and praxis. In terms of modern western politics, these aspects are more specifically: the

political authority of those in power and the political activity within the democratic process that produces and maintains government authority.

The modern western separation of church and state attempts to remove the notion of a relationship between divine power and government rule yet without altering the *signature* of *oikonomia* which underlies this assumption, that government authority can be executed by means of dividing its power along the lines of divine power, which ensures the dominance of government management over many aspects of life: “it is this *oikonomic* or managerial *paradigm* that leads, according to Agamben, to modern biopolitics and the current domination of economic and managerial logics over all aspects of social life” (Zartaloudis, 2011, p.84). It is the *suspension* and *indiscernability* of these power dynamics that create the conditions necessary for perpetuating government power and it is this fact that reveals the obscure and unstable nature of government’s mandate to rule in the absence of divine justification. Strangely, however, it is the *indeterminacy* of government power that determines the breadth of its power: an ambiguous sovereignty over an ill-defined set of spheres which include the juridical and yet frequently bleed into the domestic, the sphere of private life and the home, the management of which can also be described as *oikonomic*. Thus, as I have discussed in previous chapters, private and public life, the political and the domestic, *auctoritas* and *postestas*, are all suspended binary oppositions and at the heart of each is the underlying *signature* of *oikonomia* (economy). This management *signature* is the basis of the organisation of the paradigmatic structure of common (universal) and proper (specific). As such the paradigmatic, which is based on an *oikonomic* organisation, founds *signatures* and acts as the engine of their power. Unsurprisingly, then, this convoluted and self-referential apparatus tends to become blurred and confused, where *suspension* occurs between oppositional *paradigms* of power, in turn grinding this machine of economy to a halt by exposing its fundamental *indistinction*.

The vaults of the *Fallout* series of games serve to expose the functioning of these oppositions through the mis-use or mismanagement of the societies of the Vaults, which serve to mock and *suspend* the *paradigms* of government that exist in the real world but are here taken to their most surreal and devastating extremes. As all vaults are the subject of government experiments (with the exception of the few “Control

Vaults”) they can be seen as a hyperbolic macrocosm of actual government processes where the modern political *paradigm* seeks control over all aspects of life, both political and biological. The kinds of experiments performed on the vault dwellers are varied and diverse, but all share a relationship to an *oikonomic* managerial apparatus of politics. All the vaults include an overseer who is invariably aware of the experiment being performed and even participates in its execution; the dwellers are beholden to his power as he commands the vault’s security forces and is often able to control various crucial systems within the vault, such as life support and the locking mechanism for the door to the outside world. Meanwhile, government appointed scientists or informants leer in secrecy over the panoptic underground complexes, observing and scrutinising the behaviour of the inhabitants. In other words, the vaults are a nightmarish depiction of the operation of biopolitical processes. The experiments frequently involve a disruption of the home environment, interfering in the *oikonomic* affairs of individual households and communities by pitting family members and friends against one another in vicious social experiments as well as frequently interfering biologically with subjects as part of the test. Other examples of such clandestine experiments include Vault 75, which appears in *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Softworks: 2015), where children were ruthlessly experimented upon (after their parents had been murdered) in the name of “the refinement of human genetics” (*Fallout 4 - Chief Scientist’s Terminal Entry*, Bethesda Softworks: 2015) and then slaughtered once their DNA had been “harvested”, and vault 106 where all inhabitants were exposed to psychoactive drugs leaked into the ventilation system so that their resulting behaviour could be monitored. In Vault 87, subjects were injected with the Forced Evolutionary Virus (FEV) (*Fallout 3*, Bethesda Softworks: 2008), a chemical designed to change ordinary humans into super-soldiers; Vault 12 was designed so that the door to the outside world would not shut properly, exposing the inhabitants to mass amounts of radiation when the bombs fell and allowing Vault-Tech to study the effects (*Fallout*, Black Isle Studios); the test subjects of Vault 95 were deliberately peopled with drug addicts so that, when a stash of drugs was released after five years of the vault closing, an insider could monitor the dwellers’ will-power and responses (*Fallout 4*, Bethesda Studios), and so on.

A particularly horrific example of this is Vault 11 (*Fallout: New Vegas*, Bethesda Softworks: 2012) where the dwellers were informed they had to sacrifice one of their number annually or the vault would automatically slaughter all the inhabitants. This gave rise to a macabre electoral system where voting blocs rose up to assert power and influence over the annual selection of victims. Posters in the style of presidential election campaigns cover the walls as the player explores, many of which are captioned with critical rather than glorifying slogans such as “I HATE NATE” or “HALEY IS A KNOWN ADULTERER AND COMMUNIST SYMPATHISER – ELECT HALEY” (*Fallout: New Vegas*, Bethesda Softworks: 2012). This vault parodies the insular and primitive culture of modern western politics where the system of democracy has devolved into a pure smear campaign and the only way candidates can hope to be elected is by avoiding criticism. Reinforcing the vault’s critique of modern political processes, the election process has come about as a result of the death of the first overseer: when it became clear that he was the only one who knew about the experiment prior to entering the vault, in their anger the vault dwellers selected him for the first sacrifice. Ever since this point the role of sacrifice and the role of overseer has become one and the same for the dwellers of Vault 11. If we view this vault (as all vaults) as a microcosm of prewar politics (which is very similar to real world politics) we see a startling critique of western government embedded within this nightmarish electoral system. In Vault 11, the sovereign and the *homo sacer* become one and the same drawing an already suspended system into further confusion.

Because of this the *auctoritas* (political authority) and *potestas* (political activity) of the vault’s society becomes irrevocably *suspended* as a result of the conflation of praxis – the dwellers voting for candidates and exerting their extreme influence through voting blocs – and the position of governance that bestows authority in name only as the elected overseer is killed before any of their power can be executed. The *oikonomic* machine has become fully *suspended* here as the excluded *bare life* – the inconvenient by-product of western biopolitics – inhabits the sphere of authority in the ultimate contradiction; here the primary example of exclusion (which is always in a state of *suspension* with the included) is placed in the ultimate position of inclusion: the position of overseer, and the seat of government and juridical power within the vault, that determines the laws which determine which side of the

inclusion/exclusion divide each citizen/vault dweller lies within. Furthermore, the overseer is in the same moment both the sacrificial other as well as the one person capable of sanctioning as well as prohibiting the 'law' that makes their killing possible and 'legal'. If the player follows all the clues left within the vault, they will discover that the final person to be selected for sacrifice (and the position as overseer) changed the rules of the electoral system. In her new capacity as overseer the central vault computer recognised her authority and allowed her to change the rules so that the annual sacrifice would be chosen by the vault's systems using a random number generator, rather than relying on the inhabitants to choose a citizen by voting.

Thus, *auctoritas* and *potestas* blend into one another as the position of true authority is as *indiscernible* as the nature of the political activity that installs the overseer and which also, immediately, destroys them. Underlying this social experiment, whose consequences have been manifested in the sphere of the *polis*, is the very primal, animalistic threat of brutal death. I have discussed in previous chapters how Agamben's philosophy insists that political (*bios*) and biological (*life*) are considered opposing forces within each individual and yet are in fact part of a *suspended* binary within the *oikonomic paradigm*, upon which modern politics is based and which further contributes to the problem of this managerial apparatus. Beneath the public facing *bios* is the fact of our instinctive, biological selves which can easily be exploited by government *auctoritas*. This comes about as a result of the *suspension* of *zoe* and *bios* when government jurisdiction over the political activity of individuals extends to the biological sphere of *zoe*, the manner in which citizens live, procreate, desire and die. In the case of Vault 11, the citizens' bodies are finally under the sovereignty of the government organisation, Vault-Tech, that orchestrated the experiment. Ultimately it is the US government that sanctions and orchestrates the annual sacrifice of a dweller. Thus, Vault 11, as well as other Vaults involving similarly deadly experiments, can be read as an extreme portrayal of the *suspended* functioning of biopolitical economy where the lives of all citizens of the government (the pre-war government of the US and microcosmic governments within the vaults) are potentially, at any given moment, forfeit (*Fallout: New Vegas*, Bethesda Softworks, 2012). In this way, Vault 11 is particularly illustrative of the sacrificial elements of *bare life* as a facet of modern government, where the killing of a person

is fully sanctioned by both *auctoritas* and *potestas* and which occurs openly with the full and almost gleeful acknowledgement of this brutal practice. There is no conspiracy here, no secrecy or pretence as in the case of the Nazi concentration camp where so many did not know, claimed not to know, or simply refused to acknowledge the existence of the atrocities that took place.

Yet such a blatant use of *bare life* does nothing but render destruction, it does not aid in bolstering the fictional authority on which the US government is based, rather it exposes its bizarre and twisted apparatus to the extent that the experiment of Vault 11 leads to the deaths of all but a single vault dweller (*Fallout: New Vegas*, Bethesda Softworks: 2012). David Bowman, discussing *Fallout 4*, discusses how the game portrays the futile, self-perpetuating nature of the vault experiments:

The still functioning terminals that fill the former office space of the world contain email exchanges detailing the means by which the corporations exploited and experimented on their employees in order to fulfil government contracts, often with no tangible results. These entities resemble Tony Blair's PFI initiatives...where the perception of results via setting and meeting targets and expanding bureaucracy comes at the expense of the actual operation of public services. (Bowman, 2016, para.11)

The vaults are an expression of *suspended* government power, as a force being exerted over citizens for its own sake. The reason for these biopolitical experiments is never fully explained in the *Fallout* games and this fact accentuates the *indiscernible* nature of government power as portrayed through the vaults. Black Isle studios' Chris Avellone, who worked on *Fallout's* 1 and 2 and then later on *Fallout: New Vegas*, explained in the unofficial *Fallout Bible* (a collection of notes and discussions between Avellone and fans posted online) that the Vault-Tech experiments were commissioned as a cold-war Research and Development initiative (Avellone, 2002). However, it is also heavily suggested throughout the games that the government – or some portions of it – had not only predicted the war but also the breadth of its devastation and thus must surely have realised that the Vault-Tech programmes and the fruits of their research would be useless, even dangerous, in a post-nuclear war setting.

Thus, the government's use of *auctoritas* to protect its citizens in war-time has been so horribly mis-managed as to destroy the very citizens it seeks to shelter. This draws praxis and authority into *indistinction* as political activity is extinguished by war and government power where the political activity of citizens and the role of juridical processes are subsumed by *auctoritas*. This is of course assuming that the two aspects of government power, *auctoritas* and *potestas*, are well defined. However, it has been well established that they are not and, according to Agamben, never have been; as such their *indistinction* is to some extent the natural state of politics both now and historically. The vaults of the *Fallout* universe merely expose this fact in a highly exaggerated fashion.

Furthermore, the player usually encounters these moments of *indistinction* within the vaults they find as a detective or archaeologist delving into pockets of pre-war history, piecing together the stories of these abandoned places from discarded "holotapes" and fragments of computer terminal entries. In other words, the player usually experiences the *indistinction* of the vaults as a historian viewing *paradigms* whose *suspension* is already fully exposed, and must put together a picture of the original *paradigms* that lead to present-day ruinous surroundings. In a series of games that all encourage exploration, (even in favour of completing the central quests) players are enticed by these forgotten tombs of the wasteland, filled with mystery and archaic objects frozen in a forgotten time. Pichlmair argues that

[s]ince the Vaults were closed before the war they maintain a conserved view of the world before the bombs dropped, which again is a projection of the social norms and customs of the 1950s into the future. The Vaults are in-game museums; places where the laws from before the world ended still apply. (Pichlmair, 2009, p.111)

However, this is not true of all vaults in the *Fallout* games series. While some have remained preserved in almost their original condition – for example Vault City in *Fallout 2*, or Vault 101 from *Fallout 3* – many have been overrun by the consequences of previous pre-war government decisions which the player often comes face to face with on their travels. In *Fallout: New Vegas* the player may enter Vault 34 (Bethesda Softworks: 2012) which was deliberately built with luxury facilities that reduced living space and lead to overpopulation; in addition, the vault came complete with an overstocked armoury that could not be locked. If the player

reads all terminal entries and fragments of the overseer's journal, which are scattered throughout the vault, they will learn that the violent overpopulation crisis led to a radiation leak. As a result the dwellers were all turned into insane feral ghouls (monstrous irradiated, cannibals) but still remained dressed in the uniforms of their previous lives. The player thus comes face to face with the terrifying visual representation of biopower as crazed, inhuman creatures running and clawing mindlessly about their decaying home: a nightmare vision of suspended *auctoritas* and *potestas* is presented to the player as they fight off ghouls in the ragged uniforms of security officers, ordinary vault dweller citizens and lastly the ghoul vault overseer himself. All of these figures, symbolic of both the juridical praxis and the sovereign *auctoritas*, are rendered *indifferent* as they are all perceived by the player as mere enemy targets to be defeated; as such they are playfully mocked by the game and player. For, while their power is fearsome (they can be difficult to kill), they are not presented as serious representatives of government institutions but more like B-movie zombies, glowing comically with green radiation, about to have their brains blown out equally comically by the player's gun.

As I discussed earlier in this section, Miguel Sicart argues for the capacity of play to liberate the individual as a means of better coming to terms with reality and negotiating it on the terms of the status quo, admitting only to a limited revolutionary capacity. For Sicart, play "shocks", "appropriates", "challenges", gives pleasure, and is even instrumental in individual self discovery and freedom (Sicart, 2014, p.18), but it does not go so far as to alter anything fundamental. For Agamben, as I have shown and discussed in depth, play destroys, neutralises, blasphemes. The difference in attitude of these two thinkers illustrates the dual purpose of play that I would like to explore: play as profanation and play as *becoming* – the latter of which I will discuss in the following section of this chapter.

Becoming and Avatar: Playing As Cyborgs Among Gynoids in the *Deus Ex* Games

In the previous section I discussed the potential of complex and detailed video RPGs, such as the *Fallout* series of games, to engage players philosophically by creating vast fictional worlds that foster emergent gameplay. Furthermore, and as a result of the open-world video RPG's emergent potential, the kind of creative play

encouraged by these complex games is capable of challenging social and political constructions by virtue of their highly interactive capacity – making a great many decisions, from minor choices about armour and weaponry, to more serious matters such as which political faction to support, how to divide essential resources or resolve dangerous conflicts, all of which have an effect (to varying degrees) on the game world. Of course, not all video RPGs (or video games with RPG elements) contain such elaborate fictional backdrops or myriad amounts of sprawling quests which lead the player all over an enormous map. However, such things are not necessarily needed in order to offer players a meaningful sense of agency or to provoke political/ethical thought.

The level of ‘realism’ offered by some RPGs is often of little importance to players who, as Juul notes, all revel (to some degree at least) in the limited realism of an essentially incoherent fictional world where characters die and then respawn, save-games can be loaded in order to replay a sequence of events and playable characters lack common real-life powers of decision making: “Computer games...are allegories of space: they pretend to portray space in ever more realistic ways, but rely on their deviation from reality in order to make the illusion playable” (Aarseth, 2001, p.169). Lara Croft may decide whether to kill an enemy with a bow or a pistol, but she cannot radio the local authorities for help in a dire situation, or decide to bring more than one health-pack and an extra gun before leaving for her expeditions, rather than relying on the generosity of hard to reach crawl spaces for her supplies. Peter Bell explains that game developers do not intend or even need to approach such a level realism. Rather, it is the game’s clever use of a limited set of available rules combined with players’ willingness to believe and immerse themselves in the game environment that makes games appear in some way ‘real’. Just as audiences suspend disbelief in reaction to a well produced film, so do gamers willingly partake in a well-designed game:

[I]n these games, this slotted subject believes he or she is freely making these choices. To make production’s discourse seem natural, technological differences (such as being able to look in 360 degrees) serve production as a means of differentiation. Products are naturalized as realistic and interactive through interpellation. (Bell, 2016, p.10)

The stylised illusion of simulated reality is maintained, in some ways, by all video games, attempting, as Bell argues, not to approximate reality as closely as possible but rather to help each one distinguish itself from other games (Bell, *Realism and Subjectivity*, 6). However, this aspect of videogames does seem to resonate particularly with those that have RPG elements; and those games that aspire to tell, and immerse players in, grand narratives use these elements to particularly interesting effect: “digital fantasy role-playing can be seen as collections of performances or ritual acts, in which players are connecting worlds while constructing the game/play space, identities, and meaning” (Copier, 2005, p.8). As Marinka Copier argues here, video RPGs offer complex narratives whose fictional backdrop and intricate story provide players with a great deal to experiment with. It is not the level of realism or even agency afforded the player that is key to my interest in games with strong story-telling ambitions, rather it is the way in which these games in particular arrive at an intriguing balance between reality and fiction, creating landscapes that are perhaps not simply half-real but rather form a fluctuating interchange relationship with the real.

A particularly interesting aspect of the constantly evolving relationship between games and reality, and games and players, is the role of the avatar and the complex implications for identity in relation to the player behind it. Zach Waggoner’s work will be useful in coming to terms with this point later on in this chapter: “the avatar is part of the user but at the same time remains separate, and the user? makes decisions? as to the nature of the avatar but the avatar also exists independent from the user” (Waggoner, 2014 p.11). There has been a visible shift within the gaming industry in recent years from game-centred to character/avatar-centred play experience as demand has increased for ever more immersive narratives, reflected in the gaming market and with the rise of the adventure game RPG elements. This current and ever increasing desire among players to have a greater sense of agency or involvement in story/character development has placed questions about identity and becoming at the forefront of the games studies field. I intend to engage with the long-standing research on the potential of player-avatar interaction as a way of negotiating and theorising identity in relation to Deleuzian concepts of *becoming*, in order to open up new avenues for exploration of his philosophy.

The apparent rise in player desire to customise their in-game experience through decisions that affect their characters' various traits and available in-game decisions makes for fascinating gaming spaces within which to explore, among other things, notions of identity as expressed and disrupted by the complex act of video game play. As Adrienne Shaw explains:

[W]e can distinguish between core game play and representation when looking at games but...we must recognise the dialectical relationship between them. ... [G]ame structure informs how we might decode representational elements and the important insights to be garnered from looking at games as structures and games as representational objects. (Shaw, 2015, p.37)

The *Tomb Raider* franchise is a prime example of a game company shifting its focus from the purely ludic elements of the game to an intimate journey of discovery where the player is absorbed into the character of Lara Croft and the world in which she exists: “the marketing of the game demonstrates...a shift in how the company is positioning the audience in relation to Lara – largely from an emphasis on accompanying or learning about Lara to an emphasis on becoming and/or identifying as Lara” (Shaw, 2015, p.60). The early *Tomb Raider* games promoted Lara in a rather abstract way, very much distinct from the player. *Tomb Raider's I and II* (Eidos Interactive: 1996 and 1997, respectively), for Playstation 1, included the tag lines “Featuring Lara Croft” or “Starring Lara Croft”, advertising her fictional nature in the same way that a film announces its leading actors. As a result she appears more as a ludic component of the game rather than a role to be taken on and performed by the player: there is no need for the player to take on this part in the earlier games because Lara already has the starring role. As the closing pages of the games instruction manual indicate, the player is merely along for Lara's the ride: on the same page as the credits, and explanation of what will happen when the game ends, is a note from Lara scribbled on a ‘photograph’ of her with the ‘handwritten’ words: “the pleasure was all mine”, indicating that she enjoyed bringing the player along on *her* adventure. This is in stark contrast to later games, such as *Tomb Raider: Legend* (Eidos Interactive: 2006), where players are invited to immerse themselves in Lara's story. This and the sequel, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* (Eidos Interactive: 2008) demand that the player accompany the intrepid adventurer on a journey of self-discovery involving personal trials and the emergence of a detailed

backstory complete with traumatic experiences and deceased/missing parents. This is almost the opposite of the early *Tomb Raider* plot-lines where the most intimate detail revealed about her personal life was the fact that she had buried treasure hidden behind a secret door in the hallway of Croft Manner (*Tomb Raider II*, Eidos Interactive: 1998).

Eventually, in the series reboot *Tomb Raider* (Square Enix: 2013) the player is invited to *become* the main character, to “step into the role of Lara Croft” (cited in Shaw, 2015, p.60). This and the recent sequel *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (Square Enix: 2016) are bloated with RPG elements: employing a non-linear structure that allows players to explore the games’ locations freely; including crafting and survival elements; and skill systems allowing players to, essentially ‘level up’ Lara and gain new abilities. These elements increase a sense of player-as-Lara subjectivity: the players are living Lara’s story, but are afforded a level of implied agency that allows them to simultaneously imagine Lara’s adventure to be their adventure also, positioning themselves at the centre of a dramatic performative piece, rather than seeing themselves as merely a consumer of an essentially ludic experience.

This *emergent* desire to come ever closer to the game narratives and avatars reveals the nature of video games as a space not only of disruption and Agambenian *suspension*, as I discussed in the previous section, but also crucially a space of *becoming*. While video games and particularly video RPGs have great potential to expose, and reflect on, the nature of social constructions and political apparatuses present in the real world, they also point to possible alternatives to our own reality, and offer opportunities for experimentation in a uniquely interactive manner that can be highly valuable for the discerning player. Agamben discusses play as a means of disrupting *paradigms*, yet play offers more than merely the potential to be destructive through the ridicule and mockery of established sacred traditions. Deleuze’s conceptualisation of the child player as an aspect of becoming and immanence is most inspiring when considering this aspect of play and how the virtual worlds of video games offer opportunities for players and scholars alike to experiment with *paradigms* (or what Deleuze would call *assemblages*) rather than merely render them *inoperative* through satire.

It would be remiss not to include Huizinga's famous analogy of the magic circle at this point, which aids in framing the division between game space and reality, player and avatar:

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off before hand... Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card table, the magic circle...are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart. (Huizinga, 2016, p.10)

Here Huizinga argues that play is always confined to a physical space that demarcates the division between the real world and the game space. Both Agamben and Huizinga appreciate the connection between the spheres of play and ritual, of games and sacred acts, where Huizinga focuses more on the space in which these playful/sacred acts take place and how this formal division, when permeated, complicates the nature of play as distinct from the processes of the outside world. More strikingly both Agamben and Huizinga discuss play as both a consecrated sphere as well as a potential testing ground, a place which is other-worldly and separate from reality in such a way that profane experimentation is simultaneously forbidden and sanctioned: condemned in the 'real world' represented by the game environment and yet also permissible by virtue of its fictional nature, in much the same way that sf maintained a licence under so many oppressive governments to make forbidden political comments within the confines of a text both undeniably fictional and undoubtedly real.

Though the magic circle may be helpful as a very general way of distinguishing between game space and real space, it is important to note that many scholars have – quite rightly – largely dismissed this analogy as something of an irrelevance, particularly in an age where we are increasingly aware of the limitations of perception and the many ways in which experience is mediated. Today there is not merely a single "circle" that divides real from unreal but rather there are many circles, precarious boundaries, that mediate our connection with the outside world, the most basic of which is individual perception; how can one deny the virtual dimension of one's understanding of the world as mediated through various senses?

Then there is the vast technological component of everyday life to consider – many actions not generally considered playful or part of a game are performed virtually: our communications with others are frequently mediated by technology, just as the personas we project to the outside world are often formulated with the virtual aids of social media. Furthermore, successful human interactions that take place in person are frequently accomplished via the employment of one or many specific identities that exist within every single individual. As the theorist James Paul Gee states, we have many identities utilised for different circumstances and which inform one another in the act of playing a game:

Of course in the real world I have a good many different non-virtual identities. I am a professor, a linguist, an Anglo-American, a middle-age male baby boomer, a parent, an avid reader... Of course, these identities become relevant only as they affect and are filtered through my identity as a video-game player... And indeed any of my real-world identities can be engaged whenever I am playing. (Gee, 2014, p.55)

This forms part of Gee's argument that the act of play involves three main separate identity sub-sets that inform the process of interacting with a game: the first is the virtual identity of the player – the character assumed by the player within the game; the second is the real world identity (which is of course a composite identity comprising many facets); and the last is what Gee refers to as his

projective identity, playing on two senses of the word 'project,' meaning both 'to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character'...and 'seeing the virtual character as one's own project in the making', a creature whom I imbue with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want that character to be and become. (Gee, 2014, p.56)

Gee's analysis would go against the binary conception of play as confined to an outside/inside opposition that the magic circle implies, by refusing to focus entirely on either the identity of the player outside the magic circle, or the virtual identity of the player's character. Rather, Gee understands the importance of both these identities as they interact to form the third *projective* amalgamation of these personas. In other words, Gee understands identity as, in many ways, half-real, and it is the space between the real and unreal identities that makes up the relationship between our 'real' selves and our avatar – that allows us to remain in some way a

homogenous whole self – where the real potential lies. As Zach Waggoner writes about Gee in his work *My Avatar, My Self*:

Even though he never uses the word itself, Gee’s description of projective identity as the bridge between the real-world and virtual identities suggests that he sees the projective identity as liminal space. Liminality, from the latin word meaning ‘threshold,’ was used by Van Gennep in 1908 as part of his three step sequence describing rites of passage: separation, liminality, and reincorporation. Liminality, the middle stage, was the phase where one belonged to both and neither of the other two phases: a phase of transition during which normal limits to self understanding are relaxed thus opening the way to something new. (Waggoner, 2014, p.15)

Thus, in exploring the potential of video RPGs it is important to understand not only the disruptive potential of the game experience but also the nature of the game space as a place of immanence and innovation. Here, we might be tempted to interpret the liminality of projective identity as a form of Agambenian *suspension*, separate and yet also connected to both elements of the imagined opposition of avatar and self. Yet, although these two elements appear *suspended*, approaching indifference, the liminal space between them speaks to new *becoming* rather than fading into obscurity; projective identity appears as a threshold of innovation rather than the beginning of gradual decline into *inoperativity*. Deleuze’s philosophy of *becoming* is more compatible with this understanding of the process of video game play and its ambiguous potential. Deleuze’s philosophical works, for instance, have always cited the importance of play and its relationship with his own wider system of immanence.

In one of his most famous and significant works, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes of the ‘child player’ as a key aspect of the final step in his philosophical system that described the movement of virtual events and ideas into the realm of the actual. In this early work, he tracks the movement of intensities (potential flows that exist initially only as possibilities) from the virtual realm to the actual. His system describes in great detail the way ideas and events materialise as they journey from the virtual through imagination, memory and thought – what Deleuze calls the “three passive syntheses” – before culminating in real world events and ideas (see Joe Hughes’ description of this process in *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition*, 2009, 86). This movement is a highly complex one involving many steps, the final one of which includes what Deleuze calls the “child player” that participates in what he

describes as “the divine game”. This last process in the journey from virtual to actual relates to the way in which the future is produced through the nature of difference and repetition (perhaps the central thesis of Deleuze’s philosophical project).

The system of the future...must be called a divine game, since there is no pre-existing rule, since the game bears already upon its own rules and since the child-player can only win, all of chance being affirmed each time and for all times. ... [S]uch a game entails the repetition of the necessarily winning move, since it wins by embracing all possible combinations and rules in the system of its own return. (Deleuze, 2004a, p.142)

As a given intensity moves through imagination a memory repetition occurs, each time with a difference. By the time the intensity moves into the third synthesis of thought the potential for something truly new to be produced is apparent as the new ‘thing’ (thought, work, event) begins to free itself from the mere repetition of memory and imagination that are essentially processes of mimicry. Here the work moves towards something resembling pure difference, into the space of the future that has no pre-defined rules and is capable of establishing these for itself without deference to the old systems of the present or past. These rules are the *divine game* forming around the *child player* who is the only one capable of “winning” because of their readiness to accept new challenges and address them creatively. Though this process is undeniably ambiguous – for example, what does winning *the divine game* truly entail? – the *child player* appears as a figure of pure potentiality in Deleuze’s philosophy that acts as a driving force, propelling the intensity that arises out of the virtual into the future and into an actuality of genuine innovation. We might draw a parallel here between Deleuze’s *child player* and Gee’s understanding of projective identity. The *child player* is a tool that facilitates becoming within the *divine game* just as an avatar allows the player to experiment with ideas, strategies and even ethical dilemmas within the game space, and just as in the case of the divine game the interaction between player and video game has the potential to produce new ideas and ways of being.

Like the *child player*, play within the virtual world of the game, interacting with a dynamic system of rules which, particularly in the case of challengingly designed video RPGs, allows the player a level of experimentation and creative expression that may culminate in the real world as an actuality. Here, the video game space can

be considered as a quasi-virtual one in which players come into contact with intensities of narrative, strategy experimentation, exploration of the game world, etc and then act as a conduit for these intensities to travel through their own processes of imagination, memory and thought.

Furthermore, the video game itself reflects the process of the *divine game* by producing in tandem with the player a game experience that is different every time the game is repeated/replayed, or every time a saved game is loaded when the player's avatar dies; the player then repeats the same section of the game again, this time employing a different strategy in order to overcome whatever obstacle defeated them previously. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, Jonathan Boulter writes similarly on the act of stopping and starting a video game: "the player [is] always in a structure of loss and return: we lose the sense of posthuman extension and power when we break off from the game but we can always return" (Boulter, 2015, p.4). Thus, video game play can be described as an activity that is an expression of continued repetition and yet characterised by difference, of returning continuously yet never the same, always moving forward and always *becoming*. At the same time the act of playing a game may itself be considered a moment of interaction with an object that provokes an intense reaction within the player subject, beginning the movement of an intensity through the genesis of virtual to actual, passing through the passive syntheses into concrete reality.

Later, Deleuze and Guattari would discuss play in a more straightforward manner in their collaborative work *A Thousand Plateaus*. In this work they describe play as more simply an activity unbound by rules and rather characterised by pure chance. Moreover play cannot be easily separated from the game itself which is discussed as the more rigid rule based system, for Deleuze and Guattari both represent (to varying degrees) potential, and interact with one another in an interchange relationship. Echoing Juul and other theorists, Deleuze and Guattari describe the two concepts as a free-form mode of experimentation and becoming versus a more rule oriented space (respectively). However, they do not juxtapose the two, as Tael Harper states: "Deleuze and Guattari offer a more nuanced view of the emancipation potential of play, which avoids the binary of the magic circle = bad, real play = good" (Harper, 2009, p.135). Rather, the two writers understand that play and the game are

connected and necessary for one another. They are *molar* and *molecular* lines of becoming, the rigid rule oriented game and the freer more experimental line of play within the limits of the game, discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus* in relation to the terms smooth and striated which are associated with those same categories of *molecular* and *molar* discussed in previous chapters – essentially divisions of freedom and rigidity. For Deleuze and Guattari the game and player interact valuably to produce genuine change when the game is designed in such a manner as to provoke play conducive to becoming. I believe their discussion of the different types of game and the level of player/game interactivity they encourage best illustrates this. Deleuze and Guattari compare the games of Go and Chess, citing the creative potential of the former simplistic game compared to the highly structured aspects of the latter, the rules of which, they suggest are embedded with the rigid rhetoric of political and social structures:

Chess is a game of State, or of the court: the emperor of China played it. Chess pieces are coded; they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive. ... Go pieces, in contrast, are pellets, disks, simple arithmetic units, and have only an anonymous, collective, or third-person function: 'It' makes a move. 'It' could be a man, a woman, a louse, an elephant. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p.411)

For Deleuze and Guattari, Go is more conducive to valuable experimentation and creativity; like a well-designed video RPG it encourages meaningful play, working in tandem with the player. This in turn reveals the true significance of the child player and the divine game emerges as aspects of the smooth and the striated which constitute becoming. The *child player* is like the *girl/becoming-woman* discussed in the previous chapter, the final crucial stage in the process of becoming actual through which all intensities must pass before emerging in reality. The *divine game* can be understood as the many *assemblages* that form along *molecular* lines and lines of flight that emerge from the virtual and are in turn influenced by nodes of becoming, whether we call these nodes the *girl*, *becoming woman*, or the *child player*. Furthermore, the term I employed in the previous chapter, *becoming gynoid* can also be added to this list, as this mode of becoming, like Deleuze's *becoming-woman*, is at the centre of all becomings while also including an emphasis on the becoming inherent in the growing indeterminacy of human and machine which is

reflected and preserved in the image of the female cyborg and/or gynoid. For the purposes of discussing video games and specifically science fiction video games in this chapter it seems fitting then to utilise this term once more later on in this section.

Deus Ex Machina: Playing at the Threshold

Games specifically designed to encourage philosophical or political thought, or to question certain ideologies, assumptions or social injustices are the kinds of games Deleuze and Guattari advocate and which reflect the nature of the *divine game* itself that produces becoming in cooperation with the *child player*. Consider the *Deus Ex* series of games whose plot, as in the case of the *Mass Effect* and *Fallout* games, requires a startling amount of philosophical and moral engagement in order to progress. Unlike these other series however, the *Deus Ex* games – technically all first person shooters with RPG elements – are not open world games that offer a wide range of factions/quests/experiences. Rather, the *Deus Ex* games follows a much more linear path with a much more obviously prescribed selection of story outcomes. Despite this, the games offer a great many opportunities for customisation in other areas; while the games' narrative structure cannot be significantly altered as a result of the player's decisions, the way they choose to complete missions or which dialogue options they select during conversations do offer a meaningful interactive experience where the player's choices provide the player with a sense that their actions are significant. Many critics have praised the *Deus Ex* franchise's merging of genres to form a shooter-RPG-adventure game hybrid, which is significantly due to the fact that the game offers many possible routes to overcome obstacles and progress through the game. For example, the player may choose to complete a mission by going in all guns blazing, or they can choose a stealth approach – or even something in between the two. There are many pathways the player can take as they make their way through levels, and some are more ethical than others – for example, the player can decide to kill all the guards or use a non-lethal approach. These choices offer players a profound sense of meaningful play as they are forced to consider the way they engage with the game and complete missions knowing that different actions will alter the way in which the world receives them. Thus players are encouraged, even forced, to make the most of the game environment in emergent ways.

In the original *Deus Ex* game (Ion Storm: 2000) the player takes on the role of JC Denton in, a slick government agent augmented with bionic implants that give him superhuman abilities. Working as an operative for the fictional “United Nations Anti-Terrorist Coalition” in the year 2052 the player gradually discovers that UNATCO is really involved in a global conspiracy involving the insidious plague known as the “Gray Death”, from which much of the population suffers. By distributing a vaccine “Ambrosia” (claimed to be in limited supply) only to the rich and powerful, the secret society, known as Majestic 12, controls global politics from behind the scenes (*Deus Ex*, Eidos Interactive: 2000). As Shaw and Sharpe discuss, midway through the game the player begins to unravel the conspiracy and is called upon to ‘choose’ whether to side with his brother and fellow UNATCO agent who has begun working with a terrorist group in order to expose the secret organisation and the crimes for which they are responsible: “the apparent *choice* to switch sides and support Denton’s brother in the first *Deus Ex* game seemed like a very significant and very individual choice” (Shaw and Sharp, 2015, p.350). Even though this has little effect on the overall outcome of the game (which always climaxes with a choice of three endings no matter what decisions are made by the player), *Deus Ex* (and the sequels that follow it), by its unique blend of gaming elements, encourages the player to return again and again, experimenting with different modes of play within a captivating politically and ethically charged narrative backdrop. Unlike enormous open world RPGs such as *GTA V* (Rockstar Games: 2013), the *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Softworks: 2011), etc. where the fictional world of the game provides a colourful arena for the player to experiment in, creating (largely) their own unique story – even choosing to ignore the central quest entirely if they choose – in *Deus Ex* the strong central story cannot be escaped by the player. Experimentation is encouraged (within certain limits) which propels the movement of becoming in a partially prescribed manner. This is *the divine game* exactly, a rule-oriented apparatus yet free from stagnant traditions, emerging on its own terms as the *child player* interacts with those rules, always winning by producing a unique mode of being and *becoming* simply by creatively interacting with those game rules of the future as they gradually arrange themselves as, to borrow the title of the earlier cited article, smooth spaces of play (Harper, 2009).

Returning to Gee's work on *projectivity*, we can see how the steps he outlines for this process of a player identification closely mirror the process of *becoming* in Deleuze and Guattari. Echoing the movement of the passive syntheses, Gee discusses how a "good video game" like Deus Ex demands that the player engage with the game in a certain way through the following four step process:

1. The player must *probe* the virtual world (which involves looking around the current environment, clicking on something, or engaging in a certain action).
2. Based on reflection while probing and afterward, the player must form a *hypothesis* about what something (a text, object, artefact, event, or action) might mean in a usefully situated way.
3. The player *reprobes* the world with that hypothesis in mind, seeing what effect he or she gets.
4. The player treats this effect as feedback from the world and accepts or *rethinks* his or her original hypothesis.

(Gee, 2014, p.90) (italics his)

This system is inescapable in challenging RPGs like Deus Ex because they strongly encourage or move the player towards critical analysis and therefore a kind of becoming. The player is forced constantly to search their surroundings for clues of how to progress and to listen closely to dialogue in order to comprehend missions well enough to complete them. Gee cites the example of data cubes – essentially PDAs¹ in the game's imagined future or the equivalent of the modern ipad – which can be found all over the game anywhere from offices to toilet cubicles. As in real life, government officials are remarkably lax when it comes to securing sensitive information like government computer passwords or key codes to armouries so it is quite easy for the discerning player to hunt around a little bit in the early stages of a mission for data cubes that may, for example, contain door codes that will save them a great deal of time (and lockpicks) later on:

To make sense of them [the information contained in datacubes] you must fit them into an emerging plot and virtual world you are discovering and helping to build. And you must do this actively, since you have choices about where to go and what to do. Every potentially

¹ Personal Digital Assistants

meaningful sign in a game like *Deus Ex*...is a particular sort of *invitation to embodied action*. (Gee, 2014, p.85)

Deus Ex is smooth in its creative potential for players, and striated in terms of its relatively linear storyline – the nature of the narrative itself is reflected in the striated elements of the game: *molar* forces of totalitarian governments, secret societies operating behind the scenes, vast corporations of huge power and influence and fanatical religious orders all appear in the *Deus Ex* games. The game ‘watches’ the player, observing their actions like the conspiratorial political and corporate forces of the game world, which in itself adds to the game’s emergent potential by further immersing players in the game world, making their decisions within that world feel all the more significant.

Furthermore, this immersive quality of the original *Deus Ex* game was deliberately designed by the game developers in order to foster creative and emergent play; Warren Spector, one of the main designers, explains that *Deus Ex* is

an immersive simulation game in that you are made to feel you’re actually in the game world with as little as possible getting in the way of the experience of ‘being there.’ Ideally, nothing reminds you that you’re just playing a game – not interface, not your character’s back story or capabilities. (Spector, 2000, p.2)

The immersive quality of the game was largely achieved by making the JC Denton avatar as characterless as possible. As part of the effort to produce this effect, Spector asked the voice actor for JC Denton, Jay Anthony Franke, to record all of his lines in a monotone without any emotional intonation so that players could project their own thoughts and feelings onto the events of the game, rather than be influenced by the reactions of the voiced avatar (Game Informer, 2012). This is part of the *becoming-gynoid* aspect of the game that flows through the player to the avatar. The characterless nature of the avatar further facilitates a becoming relationship between the player and Denton, allowing the player a great deal of freedom when creating their own projective identity such that the gender of the player in relation to Denton becomes irrelevant. That is, the significance is limited to the fact that it creates a potential for the player to forget about gender difference as a fact of social and political life and engage in a kind of post-gender form of play in a simulated world that is similarly not only post-gender but post-human eclipsing

sexual or other socially imposed difference based on biology. The bare biological fact that I as a woman am playing a male avatar becomes meaningless distinction within the context of the game as I, a female interface with my console and my male, cyborg avatar who – as a cyborg – also inhabits a space of contested maleness as he inhabits a space of contested humanity, infected, as he is, by nano-augmentations that make him just as much a machine as a man. Thus, through Denton, I become a cyborg myself or more accurately, I experience a form of *becoming-gynoid* through my proximity to the avatar, the *Deus Ex* narrative and the console controller in my hands.

For games like *Deus Ex* it is the quality of the gaming experience and of the interchange relationship encouraged between the game and the player that is most important rather than the level of agency truly afforded the player. Boudreau writes “as the player is in a constant cycle of networked actions, they repeatedly cross the threshold of embodiment between their physical bodies and the virtual body of the in-game avatar” (Boudreau, 2012, p.84), arguing that the interchange relationship between player and avatar occurs during every video game play experience. If so, the *Deus Ex* games accentuate, and even draw the player’s attention, to this process through its ludic qualities and the specific nature of its narrative. In the original *Deus Ex* game, players were actively encouraged by the developers to immerse themselves and capitalise on the immanent potential of player/avatar *projectivity* outlined by Gee. *Projectivity* is what facilitates the player’s potential becoming in *Deus Ex* as they progress through a game that is itself concerned narratively with becoming and post-humanism. As the player projects their idea of JC Denton – the person they as players/avatars wish him to be and the values they decide he should reflect through dialogue options and the player’s own unique style of gaming – the imaginative coupling of play and game as the player projects meanings onto the digital world and characters presented.

The nature of an RPG encourages this kind of introspection combined with creative character development and this occurs in tandem with the games mechanics of ‘building’ one’s character through the selection of various augmentations. As the player progresses through the game, they acquire nano-augmentation canisters that modify the body of the avatar to give it new abilities or enhance existing ones. The

player projects an identity onto the Denton avatar as they build and reconstruct his very biology, entering into an in-game becoming post-human as they themselves also enter a state of becoming via the avatar and via the technological device of the PC or games console. Boulter explains this process in relation to video games generally, whilst bearing in mind *Deus Ex* as an example:

The digital game, insofar as it instantiates, thematically, the narrative of becoming posthuman...and as it instantiates the player's own coming-into-being as the posthuman (as he plays that is), holds out the state of being posthuman only as a state of possibility... Another way of putting this...is to suggest that the posthuman, the state of being the posthuman, is a state of *becoming*: we enter into the cyborged relation with the game console in order to alter what out (sic) present reality is. (Boulter, 2015, p.4)

For Boulter, to play a video game is to enter into a “cyborg” relationship with the console and the simulated world of the game, a relationship that anticipates the futuristic world often represented in video games like *Deus Ex* where sophisticated AIs and augmented humans blur the lines between human and machine, acting as an image of the possible future, where the player holding the console controller appears as the very image of the divine game producing itself with the child player:

Hence the game, as a story of what it might mean to be posthuman, and as a story of what can only occur at some point, *not now*, becomes a parable. As I play, as I enact the game's very thematization of being the posthuman, I become that parable of possible future being. (Boulter, 2015, p.4)

To play the original *Deus Ex* (as well as the subsequent games in the series which also employ the mechanic of bodily customisation) is to enter a uniquely post-human experience, where many cyborg becomings occur simultaneously. Firstly, the game demands that the player progress their Denton avatar through bodily customisation, building the character's hybrid flesh, assemblage by assemblage, knitting together body and machine in order to complete the game's goals. This aspect becomes all the more visually intriguing in the later *Deus Ex* games, where numerous cut-scenes allow the player to see the surgery being performed on the player's avatar in a manner that verges on body horror. Secondly, there is the fact that the player customises their cyborg character, as they – the real world person behind the avatar – enter into a cyborg relationship between themselves, the game console and the

simulated world of the game itself, forming an interchange relationship with both console hardware and virtual video game software. Lastly, it should be noted that *Deus Ex* is itself often described as “generically, mechanically and narratively a cyborg of the games industry” (Orlando and Schwager, 2015, p.97), which in turn offer the player a hybrid gaming experience that includes the solving of puzzles, role playing, shooting, stealth, etc.

This brings us back to nature of becoming through the human-machine synthesis which inevitably must pass through Deleuze’s *becoming-woman* (as with all becomings) and therefore through *becoming-gynoid*. Although we are not given the opportunity to play as a female cyborg or gynoid in the original *Deus Ex* game, or the more recent instalments in the franchise *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Interactive: 2011) and *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* (Eidos Interactive: 2016), the player as the Denton avatar exists in a game world filled with women both augmented and not, each of which represents a *becoming-gynoid* in their own right by virtue of their power as characters and also the significant role they play in the story. In *Deus Ex* (Eidos Interactive: 2000) One of the main villains, “Maggie Chow”, is a Chinese millionaire with great influence in the mafia underworld, and another non-augmented woman, “Beth Duclare” is a significant ally Denton encounters and who aids him in bringing down Majestic 12. She is able to do so because of her connections within the Illuminati (her mother was one of the organisation’s leaders before being murdered by the Illuminati splinter group Majestic 12). This is to cite only a few examples.

In other words, the existence of these women in a post-human world populated by powerful cyborgs and gynoids, renders gender differences irrelevant to the extent that the being of women (whether mechanised or not) now exist in the world under altered conditions. The opposition of male and female is eclipsed by the growing *indiscernibility* of mankind and machine. There are no skimpily dressed, shrieking, swooning damsels for your avatar to constantly protect, and while some women do require your help at certain points your missions also frequently involve saving men; in fact, the first mission of the game involves an optional objective of rescuing a male, fellow UNATCO agent being held by terrorists. The agent in question,

Gunther Hermann is a huge, muscular cyborg whose appearance and voice resemble Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Deus Ex*, Eidos Interactive: 2000).



Figure 3: Anna Navarre, (left) and a Woman in Black (right), *Deus Ex*, Ion Storm, 2000 (accessed from Deus Ex Wiki and Villains Wiki respectively).

By contrast the female cyborgs – gynoids – encountered in the game, though they are certainly powerful, are not necessarily positively empowered as equals. Rather they are portrayed in that ambiguous (sometimes dubious) manner so often associated with the feminine machine (as discussed in the previous chapter); they are characterised by a powerful strangeness, a fearful otherness that sets them dramatically apart from their male counterparts. The female cyborgs in the original *Deus Ex* include Anna Navarre, a ruthless and highly bionically modified UNATCO agent, and several Women in Black (WiB) – along with their male colleagues, the Men in Black, the latter pose as government agents but are really Majestic 12 operatives that have been heavily psychologically conditioned and augmented with pharmaceutical techniques to produce extremely strong, emotionless agents with unquestioning loyalty (*Deus Ex*, Eidos Interactive: 2000).

Both Navarre and the WiB are villains and are represented as cruel and psychologically unbalanced: characteristics that are appropriately combined with their deathly pale physical appearance and, in the case of Navarre, a morbid Frankenstein-esque mishmash of body parts infused with robotic limbs (see image above). She also sports a large prosthetic eye which glows red, reminiscent of the humanoid robots of the *Terminator* films. Though Navarre works for an organisation that is ostensibly a police force in the business of keeping peace – UNATCO – she thrives on violence and enjoys the use of deadly force: her in-game character profile describes her as “your old fashioned cold-blooded killer” who is “always happy when she shoots someone” (*Deus Ex – Anna Navarre character description*, Eidos Interactive: 2000). It is a classic sf trope to emphasise a female character’s power and ruthlessness through the visceral portrayal of a female yet inhuman body. A cyborg woman in visual media often takes the form of a deformed woman, terrifyingly ambiguous by virtue of the absence (or partial absence) of her female physicality which in turn is inextricably linked with femininity itself, that is also inevitably removed or at least distanced from the female cyborg/gynoid. As Navarre is a woman only in general appearance and voice, this raises several questions as to the nature of her character. In what sense can she be said to be a woman? What part of her womanhood remains when so much of her body is mechanised? This uncomfortable ambiguity compounds her aura of cruel inhumanity where her physicality as a cyborg reflects the inhumanity of her character, reinforcing the idea that a cruel or powerful woman is somehow more horrific, more shockingly inhuman than any male equivalent. In turn, the cyborg female often represents inhumanity itself – the denigration of humanity through technology is personified by a female entity whose physical femininity has been warped by technology in some way.

The same can be said of the WiB who are often portrayed in similarly emotionless and tyrannical terms. One specific WiB, Mari Hela, is described by some Majestic 12 operatives under her command as “a harpie roosting in its nest” (*Deus Ex*, Ion Storm, 2000), and another called simply Adept 34501 aspires to be just as merciless. A player who finds her “testament” learns that she regrets having feelings of empathy, believing they will prevent her from ever rising above her current rank (*Deus Ex - Adept 34501's Testament*, Eidos Interactive: 2000). While the gynoids of the original *Deus Ex* game are portrayed negatively, their ambiguity does

nevertheless contribute to a *becoming-gynoid* by virtue of the implications of such strong women unhindered by any physiological difference. At the same time it could be argued that the presence of these gynoid characters was to provide a stark contrast to the JC Denton Avatar and his brother Paul Denton, where both reflect a complicated mix of the positive and negative results of human/machine amalgamation. Though it is perhaps unfortunate that a preponderance of negative cyborg connotations should be associated with the female machine entity rather than the male, if we consider the entire *Deus Ex* franchise we can see the representation of the gynoid evolving towards a more complex conception of the potential of the female machine as a conduit of ambiguity but also equally of positive becoming.

The second game in the series, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, offered a much more nuanced portrayal of gynoids, whose presence in the game was continuous and a constant reminder of the larger political forces at play. Early on in the game, the player encounters both the pilot Ava Johnson and the pop star AI NG Resonance, however the player does not at first know that Ava is an AI. After the great communications and technology “Collapse” which occurs at the end of the previous *Deus Ex* (Eidos Interactive: 2000) game, the Denton brothers and their companion Tracer Tong were separated and unable to find each other and the player now discovers that Ava is an AI construct designed to locate the Dentons. As a result Ava is a highly single minded gynoid, focussed unwaveringly on her mission; neither good nor bad, she is merely bound to her programming. When you meet her she will offer to fly you anywhere in the world free of charge and will be an ally and companion to your Avatar, Alex D. At the end of the game you discover that JC Denton (combining another ending from the previous game) has merged with the AI communications network Helios and means to link all of humanity up to an enormous telepathic grid routed through the Denton-Helios entity. The intention is to bring about a true and flawless democracy where the desires of every human on earth may be brought to a satisfactory consensus instantaneously through the ‘benevolent’ control of Denton-Helios. If the player sides against the Dentons at the end of the game, Ava Johnson will have no hesitation in trying to killing the player. The intentions of the Dentons, though theoretically noble, seem bound to result in a form of totalitarianism where all privacy is sacrificed to a machine-god, the *Deus Ex Machina* come into being.

The Dentons cast a shadow over the post-human, positive associations with the potential of *becoming-gynoid* and this raises questions for the player (as they choose which ending to select) regarding the direction of human technological advancement; that is, how far is humanity prepared to go on the post-human trajectory, how far is desirable and exactly what does mankind hope to gain by doing this? Is totalitarian control a fair price for democracy? To become gynoid must we lose all sense of ourselves as humans and/or as individuals? How far must the assemblage we know as mankind fuse with the machine assemblage for the combination to be valuable rather than nightmarish? The Denton-Helios ending can be understood as the ending of the BwO (Deleuze's *Bodies without Organs*) of the unfettered *becoming-gynoid* spiralling out of control as a line of flight, an ideal soured by a failure to control its potential (*Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Eidos Interactive: 2004).

As a result, Ava Johnson – as an operative of the Dentons – takes on the unexpected dual role of liberator and oppressor, since a choice to follow the machine-god ending, while it ensures the destruction of the malevolent and oppressive Illuminati, brings about another all-powerful and all controlling regime. Thus the player is tasked with choosing between two oppressive governments, two *molar* structures each of which subtracts freedom from the masses in marginally different ways. Ava Johnson represents one of these regimes, NG Resonance is associated with the other. Apparently an AI construct for fans of the pop star of the same name, she is also capable of gathering information from those who interact with her and passing it on to the relevant authorities, essentially making her a government spy disguised as a harmless form of popular entertainment. In *Deus Ex: Invisible war* the focus shifts from a rather tired portrayal of female mechanised flesh, as embodying the threat of the inhuman and the negative aspects of the posthuman, to a far more evolved concept of female machines as complex heralds of potential futures both positive and negative in various ways: the possibility of greater human freedom held in ambiguous balance with either its misuse by government authority – in the case of NG Resonance – or of its potential to dominate mankind as a tyrannical power in its own right.

Yet, as these specific, ambiguous gynoids take leading roles in the game's narrative, the player is also surrounded by a plethora of more minor female cyborg characters

and female scientists furthering research and development of cyborg technologies. These range from students (Klara Sparks and Billie Adams) at the Tarsus Academy where the player avatar is trained as a government operative and has biomodifications installed, to Leila Nassif (responsible for the biomodification experiments that lead to the player's own augmentations). These women are complex characters in their own right, all playing varied roles in the ongoing production of an uncertain world. The avatar, simply called Alex D, can be played as either male or female, adding another dimension to the *becoming-gynoid* nature of the game, encouraging a further emergent becoming with the game on a level somewhat more sophisticated than the original *Deus Ex*.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution and the second prequel *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* continues this theme by similarly including a large number of female characters and gynoids, presenting mixtures of both negative and positive traits. Though the avatar is a man, Adam Jensen, the player engages with the game's virtual world as a man in a world of gynoids that are full of *becoming-gynoid* possibility. These include the new anchor, Eliza Cassan, who appears in both games, and is discovered to be an AI construct designed and manipulated by the Illuminati in order to control public opinion. Echoing female AIs of the earlier *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, like the NG Resonance AI that collects information on private citizens for government use, Eliza is morally ambiguous and perhaps, as a machine, incapable of being more. As a method of controlling the populace, she comes to represent the spectre of the uncertainty in society (like her AI counterparts in previous *Deus Ex* instalments) in a world that is growing increasingly reliant on technology, and thus increasingly vulnerable to the skills of astute hackers, whether they work for governments or corporations. Once again, the female machine here is used to represent ambiguity, a loss of control, a fear of the unknown. However, Eliza also chooses to help the main character at points, leaving him clues to the nature of the Illuminati's conspiracy (*Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, Eidos Interactive: 2011). Once again, the gynoid represents both the terror and awe of the future; yet, here, she does not portray only the *inhuman*, in the same way that Anna Nevarre did in the original *Deus Ex* game, she also represents the sublime of the potential of the post-human – qualities which is felt throughout the game. Adam Jensen famously "didn't ask for this," (*Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, Eidos Interactive: 2011) – that is, didn't ask to become a cyborg

even though the company he worked for gave him implants in order to save his life when he was mortally wounded. However, he and the player are offered a unique opportunity to enter a world of the “augmented” post-human, a world of a possible future where gender norms are less, or even entirely, irrelevant and where the nature of humanity itself is drawn tantalisingly into question. Adam Jensen’s world is a world of *becoming-gynoid*.

These kinds of gaming environments provide the most meaningful experiences, perhaps, when played with an awareness of the kinds of becomings that are taking place in the virtual landscape, and how this process affects and augments the identity of the player: “when recognized by the player, it is often a sense that there is something more between themselves and the player-character than its role as a vehicle for their gameplay choices and more than the sum of its affordances designed into the game” (Boudreau, 2012, p.84). Boudreau explains that hybrid player-avatar identity emerges partially through an understanding (though equally, the player may be oblivious to this process) that there is an aspect of the play experience that cannot be easily traced back to the player or the avatar: a disembodied identity. In this sense there is an *indiscernibility* between the two selves that culminates in a third identity. Boudreau’s understanding of hybridity in gaming helps to conceptualise more clearly the way in which *becoming-gynoid* might function for players: that is, as part of a shifting, intangible self that cannot be held by the self/avatar opposition and which adds to the Deleuzian multiplicity that constitutes identity itself (as a mass of many personal facets), facilitating the multitudinous nature of evolving, becoming identity, pulling it in new *deterritorialising* directions. It is perhaps more accurate then to describe the process of *becoming-gynoid* as a liminal activity within the context of video gameplay: “within the context of virtual reality, liminality refers to the space between the physical user and the disembodied space of virtuality...there is never any materialization between body, action and virtual space – there is no end; just the infinite process of interaction between spaces” (Boudreau, 2012, p.83). According to Boudreau’s definition, liminality is similarly in a constant state of change, never “ending” and always oscillating between player and avatar, virtual and physical space. However, in doing so the liminal *becoming-gynoid* is never moving in a linear manner. It does not move simply between one place and another (between the virtual and physical); rather, it invades many forms of interactions as it affects the player’s

own conceptualisation of self and their interactions with others in the physical world. In this way the barriers between the real/unreal, virtual/physical dichotomies begin to fall away towards a moment where we can conceptualise all these interactions as part of the same multiplicity of human engagement with the world, as well as being in the world as such.

Video games provide powerful tools for exploring not only the ways in which specific *paradigms/assemblages* are arranged and maintained by various political systems but also for understanding those building blocks that produce the paradigmatic or the *molecular/molar* apparatus itself on a more general scale. The video game raises the player's awareness of these processes particularly by demanding our attention in specific emergent ways that have the potential to give rise to valuable critical thought that might similarly be acted upon in the real world, after pre-emptive experimentation in the testing-ground of a simulated world. Some video games (and again I confine my comments to video RPGs) offer a more pure form of free experimentation within a relatively unlimited virtual space (*Fallout*) allowing the player to revel in a simulated environment and in doing so to stumble across opportunities for creative exploration of strategy, or even ethics or politics. These explorations, highly interactive in their nature, may lead to a heightened sense of the *suspension* such games communicate, reflecting real-world processes of *indistinction*. Our project as players and critics is perhaps to be aware of these mind-altering moments of meaningful play and to channel these moments of realisation into a vision for new ways of being in our own real world, allowing the virtual (as it always inevitably does) to bleed into the real or physical world, in a positive, valuable manner – in a way that allows us to learn, imagine, reconsider, remember, think, produce and bring all these geneses together to create – in Deleuzian fashion – new ideas or events. We must strive to be child players, we must try to win the divine game as and among gynoids.

Conclusion: Playing with *Paradigms* and Assembling New Formations in Science Fiction, or How to Build a Woman That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later

Philip K. Dick's famous essay, *How to Build a Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later*, on the building of fictional worlds, discusses the challenge of creating viable universes for his novels to take place in. The title is deliberately misleading, however, as very quickly Dick makes it clear that he has little interest in stable, ordered worlds, and instead favours chaos – building worlds that *will* fall apart, so that he can see, much like a casual spectator at the site of an accident, what his characters will do:

[U]nceasingly we are bombarded with pseudorealities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not distrust their motives; I distrust their power. They have a lot of it. And it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind. I ought to know. I do the same thing. It is my job to create universes, as the basis of one novel after another. And I have to build them in such a way that they do not fall apart two days later. Or at least that is what my editor's hope. However, I will reveal a secret to you: I like to build universes which *do* fall apart. I like to see them come unglued, and I like to see how the characters in the novels cope with this problem. I have a secret love of chaos. There should be more of it. Do not believe—and I am dead serious when I say this—do not assume that order and stability are always good, in a society or in a universe. The old, the ossified, must always give way to new life and the birth of new things. Before the new things can be born the old must perish. ... What I am saying is that objects, customs, habits, and ways of life must perish so that the authentic human being can live. And it is the authentic human being who matters most, the viable, elastic organism which can bounce back, absorb, and deal with the new. (Dick, 1997, 262-3)

The kind of “chaos” that Dick describes, as an integral part of his worlds that are destined to “fall apart”, gestures towards Agamben's paradigmatic system whose properties also dictate the inevitable erosion of the *paradigm* through suspension. Furthermore, the distrust toward organised power that Dick relates here reflects both men's hatred of the nature of power as it is currently established and maintained – power that is, for Agamben, unsustainable, and maintained through the bolstering of fictional and illogical and oppositions. The paper also speaks to Agamben's somewhat optimistic neighbouring concept of *inoperativity*, as a possible catalyst for change through *potentiality*, given that Dick views his unstable worlds with such enthusiasm.

For Agamben, as for Dick, the chasms of crumbling realities have the capacity to give rise to the new – to let other possibilities flourish in the wake of destruction. In this way Dick not only reflects some of the sentiments of Agamben’s philosophy, but also the wider satirical and analytical project of the sf genre as a whole, whose strange and ambivalent relationship with reality gives it the capacity to explore while simultaneously mimicking and critiquing actual truths, institutions, laws and customs. Sf mirrors reality so that its fantastical narratives are connected with our own world in such a way that a space of exploration and creativity is opened that is not purely fanciful (as is often the case in fantasy literature), but somehow grounded and valuable to understanding, and even reforming, the actual status quo. Darko Suvin’s description of this somewhat complex relationship between reality and sf offers the most accurate summary of the dual mechanisms of the genre. Suvin concedes that many elements of sf “are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror to the world” (Suvin, 1972, 374). However, he also observes what is most crucial about sf – that is, what makes this mimesis relevant and powerful: “the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible” (Suvin, 1972, 374).

However, Dick’s extreme confidence and anticipation in his *inoperative* realities, which his writing implies, does not entirely coincide with Agamben. Though his philosophy implies a vague potential for his system of *signatures* – the never-ending process of paradigmatic *suspension* followed by the formation of a ‘new’ yet equally powerful *paradigm* taking the former’s place – this aspect of his philosophy is rather insubstantial. Agamben’s work in this area has an unfinished quality that largely subsumes any hopeful quality. This is where Deleuze’s philosophy in many ways completes the project begun by Agamben’s work, by sketching a possible pathway towards genuinely innovative systems – *assemblages* – that might overcome the limitations of the old. In this way, Deleuze harnesses the experimental, inquisitive aspects of sf which, rather than fixating entirely on the dismantling of “the old, the ossified.” Here, Dick’s words echo Deleuze’s understanding of *assemblages* as malleable artefacts that make up the apparatuses on which political and social systems are based. Unlike the *paradigm*, the *assemblage* can be altered; like a machine comprising many parts, it can be taken apart and modified in such a way that it may perform new functions and connect with other *assemblage* machines in new ways. For

Deleuze, this is how we evolve and move on from stagnation and towards the *Body without Organs (BwO)*: that is, the *indiscernible* line of creativity and unfettered change. Dick's words resonate so well with Deleuze in various parts of the essay that he might have been describing the *BwO*, or what Deleuze and Guattari also call the *line of flight*, when he wrote: "The old, the ossified, must always give way to new life and the birth of new things. Before the new things can be born the old must perish" (Dick, 1997, 262).

This is not to say that an exposing and a deepened understanding of the power structures that underpin society and politics is not highly useful, even if Agamben's work has yet to invent concrete solutions to the self-renewing aspects of his paradigmatic system. Perhaps the most important discovery to come out of his work is his nuanced understanding of *bare life* and how its situation is achieved as a consequence of the illogical biopolitical structures that form the basis of government. I have argued in previous chapters that the exemplary historical figure of *bare life*, the original *homo sacer* - he/she whose killing may be sanctioned by the state - is womankind. The systematic, universal abuse and oppression of women throughout history that has been so unquestioningly sanctioned socially and politically seems almost undeniable proof of this fact. As I have previously argued, Woman is the archetypal sacrificial figure, and - though she is strangely absent from Agamben's philosophical works - she acts as a perfect illustration of paradigmatic *suspension* that can be easily identified in the workings of everyday life. Similarly, all forms of *bare life* must therefore be understood as reflections of the situation of female oppression.

What is required now, to make true progress, is a new framework for understanding and working through the intricately complicated paradigmatic mess of gender and sex that historically has been, and still is, so embedded in the fabric of Western biopower and traditional Western social constructs. The complexity of gender and, more specifically, the position of women, cannot be reduced to dichotomous relationships or simplistic deference to absolutist theories of biological determinism. Rather, we must attempt to start from scratch with a new awareness of the pitfalls of the kinds of paradigmatic thinking and organisation that have allowed us to conceptualise gender in such damaging ways for so long. This is where Agamben's philosophy is indispensable, for it helps us to gain insight into the nature of gender as a *paradigm*

that can be exposed, understood and hopefully undone – rendered *inoperative*. However, once we understand the functioning of the *paradigms* that make up gender what can be done then? As previously discussed, Agamben’s philosophy can only take us so far; even his theory of *inoperativity* leaves us with many answered questions and without a complete plan of action for moving forward.

This is where Deleuze’s philosophy can be utilised, as a means of forming the basis for a new understanding of gender dynamics – not merely as a means of understanding gender as it currently exists, but more importantly for ascertaining how it might evolve in the future and how we might guide and control this process in order to transform gender into the kind of *assemblage* we want and need it to be. We need to see the gender *assemblage*, the woman *assemblage*, the man *assemblage* and all the desiring machines that bind them all together, as interconnected, fluid, organic processes that are capable of being moulded and influenced. The next step is to begin creating, analysing, playing with current structures – disassembling them and then remaking them in new creative, exploratory, even silly ways. We need to try to learn how to build a woman that doesn’t fall apart two days later, that has no secrets or underlying conspiratorial agendas hidden within her supporting framework. The current model for womankind *does* fall apart two days later and that’s alright – Dick was correct to be excited about realities that crumble (in fiction at least) because this exposes the truth: the flaws in the blueprints. The sf novel allows us to try things out, to test, to learn from mistakes by experimenting with real-world *assemblages* in a fictional environment. However, it also gives us the capacity to do more than simply learn from past mistakes. We have learned from the imperfections of the previous Woman machine and now it is time to go back to the drawing board and redesign her. Returning to Suvin’s words, it is time to make use of sf not only as “mirror” but also as “crucible”.

Having said this, this work has already partially begun, and it just so happens that in order to redesign the metaphorical Deleuzian machine of Woman, we must literally begin to transform her into a literal machine, or at least, a form of *becoming-machine*: *becoming-gynoid*. To recap from previous chapters, my term, *becoming-gynoid* is based largely on Deleuze’s conception of *becoming-woman* and I consider it *becoming-woman*’s next logical step in the process of moving beyond the current problem of gender binarism. Deleuze’s philosophy of difference and repetition is

based on a system of gradual becoming over time where the new and the innovative emerge through a kind of repeated mimesis that is not true mimesis because the repetition is never truly the same as what it repeats. This means that the movement of *assemblages* as they pass through time is constantly changing, constantly rebuilding and reforming – even if only in minor (possibly unnoticeable) ways. The term *becoming-woman* refers to what Deleuze calls a *molecular line* (a significant but not destructive change through time that is relatively gradual). As women in the West have gained new freedoms and entered new spheres in education, workplaces, etc., Woman's being has invaded these spaces and imbued them with aspects of the *assemblages* that constitute her. That is, the socially constructed aspects of womanhood that have for so long constituted her as an other are now being reincorporated into the spheres of the world from which she has historically been excluded. Thus she is changing the world to accommodate her, and is in turn being altered by her experience of that world.

This concept of course has its limitations since it assumes that the world should accommodate a *becoming-woman* that is based on a patriarchal fiction of presumed feminine and or female traits. This means that as woman makes room for 'herself' she is really making room for a patriarchal ideal, rather than an authentic individuality. Thus, *becoming-woman* is a necessary step in the process moving towards a new situation of gender reclamation in a form of a new and freer *assemblage*; however, *becoming-woman* can only take us so far. She can make room for women as they currently are – fragmented subjects that have been grouped together as political tools under both patriarchy and feminism in a manner that did not offer them real freedom or the capacity to seek individuality separate from a gendered identity. Rather, women have historically been forced to understand themselves only in the shadow of gender identity and *becoming-woman* does not solve this problem.

Becoming-gynoid, however, is my understanding of what it means for women and men to gradually move away from archaic conceptions of binary gender and begin to reach for something new in the context of our increasingly technological world of AI, robotics, computers and the increasing proximity of these various machines to the human body. Donna Haraway is famous for her understanding of the cyborg as a growing *paradigm* of the post-human, and furthermore as an emancipatory figure that

offers new possibilities for woman in terms of being (Haraway, 1991, p.149). Citing the long-standing relationship between humans and technology or tools (for example the use of a pen, the wearing of glasses or the aid of a replacement hip, knee, etc), Haraway argues that the cyborg, as an entity that is neither human or machine, offers a further level of *indistinction* by being neither exactly male nor female (Haraway, 1991). As a result, the cyborg is something of a virgin *paradigm*, untainted by many of the preconceptions imposed on most beings, and thus the female cyborg offers a unique opportunity to make use of this fluidity, to self-style herself as whatever kind of female machine she wishes by making herself into a hybrid woman-machine *assemblage* that is more difficult to biopolitically control.

However, the cyborg or android is not completely bereft of negative associations. While the cyborg is ambiguously post-human, *indeterminate* sexually and *undecidable* in terms of gender and identity, it is also associated with many neighbouring *assemblages* – *paradigms* of otherness – that limit its potential: the machine, the slave, the universal, inhuman other. These associations are bound largely to the male cyborg, however, who, as a (in some sense) *male* being – endows the cyborg figure with a kind of gendered viability. As Man represents the human so too does the male cyborg represent the race of the machine and/or human/machine hybrid. The female android or gynoid, however, is utterly ambiguous in her capacity to represent anything – she is completely *undecidable* because of the many unanswered or unanswerable questions she raises, both about the nature of herself, as a female machine, and the nature of womankind more generally. The gynoid is female but also not a female, since all those characteristics that constitute Woman as such may very well not apply to the gynoid. The gynoid or female cyborg, as represented in sf media, is often physically stronger than both the average man and the average woman – meaning that the conception of Woman as physically weak cannot be associated with the gynoid: for example the cases of the female cyborg, Seven of Nine, in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995), the female “Cylons” of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004), or the runaway “Replicant”, Pris, in *Blade Runner* (1982). The other central defining characteristic of womanhood also hangs uncertainly over these ‘female’ mechanical figures in the form of a question that is often left unanswered: can these female cyborgs or gynoids have children? If the answer is no, or if the way they procreate is wildly different from the way human women procreate, then in what sense can these cyborgs be said to be women? Yet they

are understood to be in some way female which makes them already other to men. Moreover, they cannot be described as human, in the traditional sense, so inhabit a space of double otherness that further complicates their being.

The gynoid has the effect of filling a narrative's audience with a profound sense of uncertainty that highlights the nature of her potential as a disruptive social and political force. She offers alternatives for actual, human women, portraying new ways of being and of female self-conceptualisation in a world still largely separate into spheres of masculine and feminine, male and female. The idea of *becoming-gynoid* is the notion that through the medium of sf the gynoid is able to influence the *assemblages* of the outside world through her *undecidable* nature, by posing the difficult questions through her very presence: what am I? What is female? Why does female exist? What other possibilities might there be? The desiring machines of woman-man, woman-child, the *assemblages* that make up woman and tie her into the neighbouring *assemblages* of the household, the family unit, the male/female dichotomy suddenly are disrupted by the prospect of a 'woman' who does not necessarily have these traditional relationships. Thus the gynoid *assemblage* enters into ambiguous relationships with other social and political machines that surround women, and the process of *becoming-gynoid* begins to alter and confound them – forcing them to become disrupted, altered and eventually reformed entirely.

The power of the gynoid however, is not limited to literature or film and TV sf. The gynoid exists everywhere. She is and has been emerging, *becoming*, within women for many years since the advent of the contraceptive pill, followed by the invention and mass use of contraceptive implants. This has given women the power to regulate and take full possession of their reproductive capabilities and even, in some cases, suppress their menstruation cycles. As the research and development of mechanical prosthetics continues to expand both men and women are gaining opportunities to enter a posthuman state, and furthermore as these prostheses become more readily available on the open market who knows where such technological developments might take the evolving nature of Woman as *becoming-gynoid*?

It is important to acknowledge that the cultural influence of the female cyborg or female machine in popular sf and culture is not the only development currently influencing and contributing to the gender conversation. Largely as a result of young

transgender people in recent years feeling emboldened to publically display a range of non-binary gender identities (which are at odds with more traditional conceptions of transgender individuals) a broad dialogue has erupted regarding the nature of gender, sexuality, the relationship between the two and the myriad of possible identities that can be said to exist between the male/masculine and female/feminine or straight and gay ends of the gender and sexuality spectrum (*glbtq Encyclopedia*, 2012). Emerging so called genderqueer identities such as bi-gender, tri-gender, pangender, transfeminine, transmasculine, third-gender and two-spirit (to name just a few) are increasingly being adopted as descriptors by the millennial generation to describe their feelings towards their gender and/or sexual orientation. A recent poll by Fusion showed that half the US millennials surveyed agreed that gender could not be distilled down to the two categories of male and female; furthermore, the fact that social media companies Facebook and OkCupid now offer a range of gender identity options for their users shows a response to a market whose self-identification practises are beginning to shift (Marsh and readers, 2017). That is, those identities that were perhaps initially considered solely or mainly terms used to describe members of the trans community are now being assumed by people of many different gender expressions, sexual orientations or biological (or assigned) sexes¹. As a result one could arguably say that these new methods of gender self-expression have emerged as a result of a kind of *becoming-trans* that has begun to spread among the millennial generation and beyond as genderqueer concepts diffuse into popular culture and cross-generationally.

Though not all young people are choosing to adopt, and/or participate, in it, this new trend of gender neutrality and fluidity has introduced of a range of terms to express different personal feelings about, and identifications with, gender and sexuality into mainstream culture (particularly online and through social media). As a result these genderqueer identities have succeeded in broadening the debate and opening up the complex issues surrounding gender to a wider audience. This process is similar to those debates and questions that are set up by the process of what I call *becoming-gynoid*, though these identities do not involve the same invariably technological dimension. Despite this it is a cultural phenomenon that is developing alongside our growing interconnectivity with technology as well as our increasingly complex

¹ Consider, for example, intersex people (who do not conform to one of the binary physical categories of sex) and who have their sex chosen for them.

relationship with social media and online personas which, in conjunction with whatever gender identity we assume (or feel is innate within us), feeds into our overall conception of self: a self that is rapidly becoming inseparable from technological mediation.

The process of gender neutrality and/or gender queering can be read as part of the wider process of becoming-gynoid in fact, for it is the advent of the internet and social media and the increasingly interconnected nature of youth culture that has allowed these notions of gender identity to become so public, and thus to thrive. Women are not the only ones *becoming-gynoid*, because the gynoid's interconnectivity with the rest of the world, in a manner that is constantly growing and changing through difference and repetition, is altering the *assemblages* around both men and women. *Becoming-gynoid* is changing the relationships between male and female, between women and children, and even between men and children, as women are further empowered through technology, and as their new positions and capacities in society alter the nature of the world around them. *Becoming-gynoid* has already begun to partially emancipate women and men from the stagnant *assemblages* of patriarchy that have dominated both (in differing ways) for so long².

Yet the next steps in the physical liberation of women through cyborg technologies are still quite far off. We are a long way from realising the actual gynoid or female cyborg in any way approximating their portrayal in sf. However, the process of *becoming-gynoid* does not relate primarily to a physical alteration of the female body, but refers more to the influence of the ideas surrounding the way in which the gynoid will/might affect and mould society for the better. However, the ever-diminishing gap between humans and technology, as smartphones, tablets, smartwatches and other various forms of technology continue to alter the nature of our lives, should not be ignored, as technology continues to mediate and/or dominate our interactions with each other, with the outside world and even with our own conception of ourselves. One of the most valuable and fascinating of these technologies in relation to the

² In this thesis I have largely confined my discussion of gender to the political and social position of women, and mostly cisgender women. However, the changing nature of gender identity in millennial culture of course has wide-ranging implications for cisgender men and the whole plethora of existing trans- and intersex identities. The broader ramifications of this in relation to Agamben's concept of *indistinction* as well as Deleuze's *becomings* bears exploration and will form the basis of further research in the future.

changing position of women, and one of the most intriguing facets of the *becoming-gynoid* process, is the sphere of video games.

Humans and machines connect in a hybrid relationship when players engage with a game through a console or computer and form what James Paul Gee describes as a *projective* connection with their in-game avatars. The possibilities of this in relation to women seem almost limitless when we consider the potential of virtual worlds to be unconstrained by gender norms and definitely free from by any physical, biological restrictions. When viewed as a process of *becoming-gynoid*, we can understand the experience of video gameplay as culminating in an “identity that emerges from the interactions between pre-designed avatars, the players that play them, and the technology that mediates the gameplay” (Boudreau, 2012, p.16). Specific games that include a strong narrative surrounding the concept of the post-human, such as the *Deus Ex* series, are very relevant here and offer great avenues for research as well as many meaningful play opportunities for the discerning gamer. As the political journeys of the characters in the game’s narrative reflect the process of *becoming-gynoid* that is apparent throughout the physical world, the player experiences a fusion of self and avatar, physical human activity (using a console) and virtual, (inhabiting the game space). What becomes clear is that the barriers between our virtual and physical selves are gradually breaking down so that the identities which emerge as a result of playing a game become facets of our overall real-world identity as composed of many selves that are employed in different situations. As a result the assumed difference between virtual and physical identities may well disappear, revealing their *suspended* position as making up a false dichotomy. The avatar(s) we utilise in virtual situations eventually become integrated into our understanding of ourselves as fundamentally both virtual and physical beings, in such a way that the boundary between these categories can no longer be clearly delineated. *Becoming-gynoid* is part of this process, as the post-human nature of gaming and interacting with the virtual becomes more and more commonplace and accepted as an integral part of human experience and being in the world. This is an extremely hopeful prospect from a Deleuzian perspective: as the technological and the simulated (as akin to Deleuze’s *virtual*) become part of everyday existence their potentiality may continue to valuably inform the nature of human interactions, relationships, desiring machines. Though this process of *becoming-gynoid* is not necessarily limited to this specific virtual space, the virtual

world of gaming environments has the potential to alter the fundamental nature of social constructions (until recently fully bound to the physical world) that is, male/female relationships, romantic encounters, family relationships. The game space is a place where, theoretically, gender need not matter – where physical obstructions do not exist and in which it is possible to view gender in a fundamentally different manner: in a context that is not bound to the purely physical world, with its biological constraints, social prejudices and oppressive political institutions.

Sf video games, like those of the *Fallout* series, hold a Suvinian “mirror” up to our own world while offering players the opportunity to play with its artefacts and rebuild them to form new objects, institutions, ideas. In *Fallout*'s bombed-out, post-apocalyptic setting, the junk of disused *paradigms* is scattered at our feet, ripe for experimentation, the making of new *assemblages*, facilitating new becomings, acting as the Suvinian crucible (Suvin, 1972). In many ways these games follow exactly the project of Dick's writing, outlined in his essay *How to Build a Universe* quoted above: “I like to build universes which do fall apart. I like to see them come unglued, and I like to see how the characters in the novels cope with this problem. I have a secret love of chaos” (Dick, 1997, p.262). In the wake of world-wide nuclear warfare, the *Fallout* universe definitely has fallen apart – in other words (given *Fallout*'s similarity to our own world and its institutions) *our* world has, in a sense “come unglued” – and the subsequent experience of the game is one where the player gets to see how they “cope with the problem” of living in a fractured reality. To do this takes creativity, a willingness to experiment and to think thoughtfully about the experiences of the game. *Fallout* and other games I have mentioned in this thesis, such as the *Deus Ex* and *Mass Effect* games, encourage and even demand this level of engagement: so much of the pleasure of the game – and even its successful completion – can elude the player if they fail to pay attention to the thought-provoking and critical aspects that are central to the game's experience (see previous chapter). Ultimately the way we avoid the situations which Deleuze and Agamben's philosophy warn us of – the stagnation of the *molar* line, the rampant *BwO* or the terrifying *bare life* as a result of the destructive governmental apparatus – is through the use of play. We must have the courage to play with everything that is ‘sacred’, that is considered above the reach of ‘common use’, to be suspicious of that which is considered unquestionable. We have to pick these things apart and the virtual worlds of gaming environments can help us

to do this, by making things malleable, experimental, playful, and so, making them into toys. Finally, we must make the most of the sf genre when we do all these things, never being afraid to imagine the possible in the way that the genre demands we do. Sf, in whatever medium, helps us to play with the ‘sacred’ through its capacity to make everything at once sublime and ridiculous: deadly serious through its often philosophical subject matter, and yet delightfully mad with its inclusion of the fantastic through absurd alien races, or technology so advanced it almost might as well be magic. Dick once said that he loved sf for these characteristics, for its ever-present “my God; what if” and because: “the Martians are always coming” (Dick, 1997, 92). But, more than this, we should be inviting the Martians, building robots (or gynoids), boldly going in our flying saucers.

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