



MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Posthumanism and its Influence on Representations of Death, Life After
Death, and the Dead in Selected Cyberpunk Novels“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 844

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures
and Cultures UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Eva Zettelmann

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1 Introduction

When analysing science fiction literature, the first thing that comes to mind – besides perhaps spaceships and aliens – is the highly advanced technology relative to what exists in the world of the readers. While the subjects of gender, race, technology and even politics in conjunction with science fiction have been given ample attention in recent research, this thesis will focus on the larger topic of the juxtaposition of the human being and technology. While there is a plethora of theoretical research on posthumanism, a field concerning the definition of the human being in a world which increasingly relies on technology, I wish to apply the existing knowledge to novels that have received less attention in the academic field, and hereby focus on how technology shapes not only the lives of the characters but also their deaths and their afterlives. Further, I wish to investigate how the physical human body is discursively shaped when it is immersed with technology or given up altogether. For this purpose, I will employ the theoretical concept of posthumanism and the Foucauldian concept of biopower or biopolitics. Both concepts are relevant to this topic as they raise questions as to the concept of ‘human’, the power dynamics which shape ‘humanity’, all while taking into account recent technological and biomedical progress.

There seems to be an impending paradigm shift concerning the definition of human in conjunction with technology. For example, approximately 188,000 people across the world have received cochlear implants (NIH Fact Sheets - Cochlear Implants). Prostheses are becoming ever more sophisticated and can now establish a brain machine interface to allow for more natural movement as well as feeling (Heintz). In 2016, James Young of London was the first man to be fitted with a bionic arm prosthesis which includes a digital watch as well as a touch screen (O’Callaghan). In Japan, the HAL project, a program for developing an exoskeleton to help paralysed people walk again, was recognised as a medical device in 2015 (Nagata). The slow but sure melding of human beings and technological enhancements seems inevitable.

Science fiction writers imagined a number of these changes long before they seemed a

feasible reality. While earlier works have had a positive outlook on the subject, the subgenre of cyberpunk has since the 1980s pointed out the drawbacks of cybernetic technology and new human subjectivities. Cybernetic enhancements made on the physical body are a frequently used trope throughout the cyberpunk genre. This begs the question to what extent the physical body determines identity if it can or must be changed, and what the cultural and social implications of wide-spread body modifications might be.

Cheating or even conquering death has arguably been one of the most popular story types for millennia but in the world of science fiction, the methods to overcome death and the afterlife itself are considerably changed. I wish to investigate how 20th century authors William Gibson, K.W. Jeter, and Richard Morgan imagines and treats the topic, how specific issues which arise from these imagined states of existence are dealt with, and what solutions are offered. To this end, I will attempt to use the philosophical direction of posthumanism as an approach for the literary analysis of how the subjectivities of fictional characters are changed in light of an altered perspective on humanity and an increased fluidity between human and machine. Posthumanism being a relatively new concept to apply to literature, I wish to add to the sparse existing research by applying it to science fiction works that contain at least one major story arc dealing primarily with the afterlife.

Furthermore, I will argue that biopolitical discourses still hold their ground in a future vision in which human life has been drastically changed compared to the 21st century. I argue that while the human body will undergo various changes, the principles of social control and self-regulation will largely stay the same, though the methods will likely change. At the same time, the changing human body will give rise to a broader definition of humanity in the vein of posthumanist discourse. The further emphasis on death and the afterlife was chosen to highlight the above-mentioned points at the moment when the body becomes, or should become, inactive and subjectivity should cease. A changing discourse of the body will necessitate a changed discourse of death, and the prospect of extended life as well as the possibility of bodiless existence in turn lead to a discussion of the limits

of humanity. Even in a posthumanist world with a broadened definition of humanity and the corresponding social and cultural changes, I predict that biopolitical discourse will largely serve the same objectives.

Four novels were chosen for the purpose of this analysis. The focus is on the comparative analysis of the common themes of the novels: the technology-infused life of the protagonists and the social and cultural significance of these changes, and the evasion of complete death and the extension of life, albeit in bodiless form; in the posthuman sense, the transcendence of the biological human body and its natural limit. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) are the first and third novel of a trilogy; however, the main focus of the second book, *Count Zero* (1986), proved to be ill-fitted for the topic of this analysis. *Neuromancer* was chosen since it is often hailed as the first cyberpunk novel, and it is viewed as vastly influential for the genre. Its focus on cybernetic enhancements, changed bodies, life in cyberspace, sentient AIs, and the privilege of the mind over the body render it suitable for the topic of this thesis. The plot concerns hacker Case and assassin Molly Millions, as they are hired by the mysterious Armitage to hack into the mainframe of the remote Villa Straylight, the homestead of the reclusive Tessier-Ashpool family. They are aided in this by Case's former mentor, the dead McCoy "Dix" Pauley, also known as the Dixie Flatline, who has been turned into a memory construct, a computer reconstruction of his personality. Unbeknownst to them, they are being manipulated by an AI called Wintermute that wishes to merge with another of its kind named Neuromancer hidden in the Villa Straylight.

The third novel, *Noir* by K.W. Jeter (1995), was chosen for its focus on life after death and its portrayal of the life of company workers as modern slaves without any real agency; special attention will be given to the portrayal of how indebted people are being resurrected upon death to work as undead slave labourers. Cybernetic enhancements play a minor but nevertheless important role in the narrative as well. In this novel, private eye McNihil (whose first name is unknown) is

hired to investigate the death of corporate employee William Travelt and find the man's still living prowler, an android constructed for pleasure. Aided by his dead wife and the assassin November, McNihil has to enter a world in which no one can be trusted and nothing ever is as it seems.

The last novel, *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan (2002), was chosen for its focus on the material body and the notion of a core identity. Shipped to a foreign planet and sleeved into a stranger's body, Takeshi Kovacs from the elite force of the Envoys is hired to solve the murder case of millionaire Laurens Bancroft. He soon stumbles upon a web of lies and betrayals in a world in which people constantly change bodies and flesh is expendable. It is the first in a series of novels featuring the protagonist, and it was most fitting for the topic of the thesis as the narrative focuses heavily on the concept of living potentially forever by having one's consciousness transplanted into a new body.

The overall aim of the analysis is to show how the portrayed characters' lives are posthuman, how this affects individual identity, and how this changed state of affairs changes biopolitical discourses of the body. As it is possible in the novels to survive in different bodies or even without any body at all, the topics of identity and agency will be assigned special significance.

2 Working definitions

I will briefly discuss the main concepts used in this analysis. To this end, I will first explain what the genre of cyberpunk entails, before moving on to the theoretical concepts of posthumanism and biopolitics.

2.1 Cyberpunk fiction

Cyberpunk is a genre of science fiction that emerged and reached its peak in the 1980s. Scott Bukatman describes it as being influenced by both the hard SF of the 1930s, and the New Wave of the 1960s, which accounts for both the obsession with technology and the experimental writing style of the genre (137-138). Further, it is through the portrayal of mysterious crimes that the influence of detective fiction and film noir is made visible (Bukatman 141-142). However, instead of portraying a society that is rendered unemotional through technology, as was popular during the decades before, cyberpunk is “science fiction set at street level” (Bukatman 140). The 1980s saw a technological revolution with regard to the computer industry, and cyberpunk mirrors this development. Frequent themes in cyberpunk literature are the expanded use of computers, especially the experience of cyberspace, as well as the lure of cybernetic enhancements and the lives of black market hackers. Stories usually take place against the backdrop of a vast and industrialised cityscape, at times, as for example in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, after a global but otherwise nondescript war. Economic hardship and the need for money, often in conjunction with highly illegal and dangerous assignments, play a significant role as well. Technology in cyberpunk is therefore portrayed as “liberating” as it “permits one both to survive and to gain access to spheres of economic power” (Dyens 5).

Cyberpunk is perhaps best known for its treatment of the human body as a hindrance. Human beings have undergone a kind of cybernetic evolution; the melding of the human body and technology has become almost synonymous with the genre. Technology has rendered them intellectually and mentally advanced, and while most protagonists have undergone some form of

body modification, the frequent use and the importance of cyberspace within the narrative is depicted as an entirely mental experience for which the human body merely comes to be seen as a necessary evil at best, a “prison” (Gibson 6) at worst. Cyberspace is an essential part of the cyberpunk world; it is “an abstraction which [...] provides a narrative compensation for the loss of visibility in the world” (Bukatman 143).

Other body-centred themes include cloning, androids, the usage of non-organic bodies, the melding of organic and inorganic (i.e. cyborg discourse), and generally a myriad of new ways to evade death. Thus “cyberpunk fictions propose both a celebration of organic technology and an attack on living flesh [...] For cyberpunks, technology leads equally to life and to death” (Dyens 5). In cyberpunk, life does not necessarily end at death’s door; one body might be exchanged for another, or an individual might live on in a disembodied form in cyberspace. The imagination is near-endless. There is, therefore, an afterlife in cyberpunk fiction which may take many varied forms.

Stephen Burt identifies four common ways of life after death in science fiction, all of which are also very common in cyberpunk: First, there is the classical “life extension”, the quasi-immortality of one person (Burt 175). Second, there is the “life outside the body, in which the soul or the mind continue in some nonphysical or nonlocal form” (Burt 176). This is perhaps best known as a survival inside cyberspace, a continued, albeit bodiless, existence. The third way to survive is to receive a new body, which might be achieved through resurrection or cloning (Burt 176). The fourth is to evade death by “time travel, or disrupted and unfamiliar temporalities” which gives “people [...] a chance to step outside the normal one-way lifespan of secular time” (Burt 176). For the purpose of this work, I will focus on the representation of life after death in three cyberpunk novels which feature death and the afterlife as a main story arc.

2.2 Posthumanism

There have been varying and sometimes conflicting definitions of what constitutes posthumanism or the posthuman condition. To give a comprehensive outline of the approaches to this subject would go well beyond the scope of this paper. It should be noted that, just as there is more than one kind of humanism, there are also multiple kinds of posthumanism. Therefore, this section will offer a general overview over the most frequent definitions and issues of the past twenty years. Main concerns include the dissolution of the humanist subject, indeed the dissolution of boundaries between a human being and its (natural) environment, as well as the topic of embodied human existence and continued existence in a bodiless state.

At the core of posthumanism is always the question of what constitutes the 'human being' in the face of technological change. The question is relevant insofar as the 21st century is seeing unprecedented progress in cybernetic technology and biomedical advancement. The science fiction fantasies of cybernetic enhancements and replaceable body parts may or may not become reality within the course of the next decades. Moreover, with the continued introduction of virtual reality into daily life and entertainment, even the prospect of a prolonged life in cyberspace might become possible in the not so distant future.

However, if human body parts or even human bodies as a whole can be replaced, as the argument runs, this begs the question if the subject emerging from these procedures would still be human. If the human mind could exist without a body inside a virtual realm, and this subject would still be considered a human being, the entirety of the human body as the locus of identity would be called into question. Likewise, death would be called into question, as death would likely not be an issue to consider anymore, on the grounds that death affects biological matter rather than a disembodied consciousness. This necessarily begs the question concerning how humanity has been defined up to the present, and how it should or could be defined in the future should these kinds of enhancements or changes ever become a reality. The main concern of posthumanist studies,

therefore, is how the “self-concept of the human changes” (Ranisch and Sorgner 15) if new kinds of embodiments (e.g. mind-uploading, cyborg bodies, human cloning) and even the extension of natural life are introduced.

First, I would like to examine one definition of posthumanism as the natural successor of humanism. The term itself would indicate that humanism is coming to an end, only to be replaced with another dominant philosophy. However, things are not quite so simple. Since the related philosophy of transhumanism – and here again the boundaries are fluid – looks at technological possibilities with unconcealed optimism, it promotes a kind of “hyper-humanism” in the sense that technological progress and rationality will help humanity achieve its full potential (Ranisch and Sorgner 8), which would make this theory a much more fitting candidate for the role of humanism’s successor. Posthumanism, on the other hand, “serves as an umbrella term for ideas that explain, promote or deal with the crisis of humanism” (Ranisch and Sorgner 14). Humanism, as well as its values and assumptions, is questioned and rejected, and the humanist subject is viewed as “ideologically laden, insufficient, dangerous and paternalistic” (Ranisch and Sorgner 8). Posthumanism challenges conventional notions and dichotomies of humanism, with special emphasis on the definition of ‘human’ and how the ‘human being’ is defined when taking technology into account: “The predominant concept of the ‘human being’ is questioned by thinking through the human being’s engagement and interaction with technology” (Ranisch and Sorgner 8), a point which will be elaborated on further below. Going even further, Robert Pepperell is essentially tolling the death bell for humanism when he states that posthumanism is “about the end of ‘humanism’, that long-held belief in the infallibility of human power and the arrogant belief in our superiority and uniqueness” (*Posthuman Condition* 171).

Contrary to this, Cary Wolfe assigns posthumanism a more ambivalent place:

[...] it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological

but also its technological world [...] But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore. (Wolfe, Introduction xv)

In other words, humans, as a species, have evolved alongside technology long before humanism and the humanist subject entered the scene and it is therefore difficult to say what kind of technological use qualifies as posthuman (Wolfe Introduction xv). On the other hand – which is where Wolfe follows suit with other theorists on the subject, for example Robert Pepperell or Katherine Hayles – technological progress is essential to all areas of modern human life, changing the definition of ‘human being’ alongside it, showing that the human-technical evolution is far from being completed (Wolfe xv-xvi). Posthumanism and humanism’s connection is further complicated by discourses and notions of the human body and the liberal subject.

Especially earlier theories of and works on posthumanism, dating from the early 20th century to the 1980s, have been critiqued widely for their almost complete disregard of the human body. Since human existence was essentially defined by consciousness, the argument went, the body was nothing more than a way to carry said consciousness around, and could be done away with as soon as a way of bodiless existence could be achieved (Hayles 4-5, see also Philbeck 181). Katherine Hayles in particular has given an extensive critique on the subject of human embodiment in the philosophical posthumanist view and in cyborg discourses. She maintains that, for the most part, a strong distinction has been made between the body and the brain (Hayles 2-3). Even more importantly, this divide between mind and body rests upon “a conceptualization that sees information and materiality as distinct entities” which “allows the construction of a hierarchy” (Hayles 12) that favours information. Since information, consciousness and memory are typically to be found within the brain, cognition has thus occupied a clearly privileged position (Hayles 2-3).

It has been noted that the humanist subject or universal self has always been constructed as

white and male, which has been rightly criticised not only in posthuman discourses but various theories (Hayles 4). However, those critiques have been altogether less neglectful about the role of bodily existence than “the cybernetic construction of the posthuman” (Hayles 4). This can be explained with the new construction of the liberal subject in posthumanist discourse. In humanism, the white male body has hitherto not been “identified with the self” but rather as the “rational mind”; rationality and reason being two of the main pillars of humanism, it was therefore possible to assign the humanist subject universality and erase all signs of “bodily difference” (Hayles 4). In posthumanist theory, the erasure of the body and the privileging of information (aka the rational mind) has done its part to further this trend. In theory as in literature, “information lost its body” (Hayles 2); material reality, or “embodiment” have been viewed as an “accident of history” (Hayles 2). The brain, hosting consciousness and memory, became the locus of identity while the body was relegated as “the original prosthesis” which can be replaced easily over and over by technological means (Hayles 3); in this posthumanist view, there exist “no essential differences [...] between bodily existence and computer simulation” (Hayles 3).

Similarly, Robert Pepperell indicates that posthuman existence has “traditionally [...] tended to towards [sic] a rather ‘disembodied’ understanding of the mind as a ‘brain-determined’ phenomenon” (*Posthuman Condition* 4). This, however, is precisely the important logical mistake early posthumanists were making, according to Hayles and Pepperell alike: the separation of mind from body, the disregard of the body’s influence on the mind and vice versa, and the claim that human consciousness would be able to exist wholly unchanged in a different form, e.g. a computer or a robot (Hayles 1, Pepperell *Posthuman Condition* 4). Hayles argues further that information always needs a medium, whether that be human flesh or a technological device (13). In this sense, information would not lose its body, but rather gain a different one, which would necessarily change the lived experience. What it means to be a posthuman subject, then, is that “human being is first of all embodied being”, and that the body should not be discounted as being simply a support system

for the mind (Hayles 283-286). However, the point of posthumanism is not “leaving the body behind but rather [...] extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prostheses” (Hayles 291). In the same vein, Pepperell understands the posthuman being “not as an abstract flow of symbolic information but as a radically extended and embodied being whose experience [...] is potentially boundless” (Pepperell, “Extended Experience” 31).

Rather than merely breaking down the binarisms of humanism, another definition of posthumanism is concerned entirely with the blurring of boundaries between human beings and their environment, e.g. through the introduction of cybernetic technologies. This would then necessitate not only a cultural shift, but presumably also an anthropological one. According to Luca Valera, for example, posthumanism will create a paradigm shift as the boundaries of human identity will be successively blurred; posthumanism is thus concerned with erasing differences between what is considered ‘human’ and other entities, most prominently, but not limited to, machines (Valera 481-483). Changes concerning the embodiment and breakdown of distinctions between human and environment would necessarily lead to a change in the experience of life. Posthumanism thus also constitutes a “new subjectivity” as Scott Bukatman argues in his work *Terminal Identity* (2). The frequent and inevitable encounters with technology in all aspects of life lead to a change of what constitutes the subject (Bukatman 2).

Similarly, as has been noted above, Pepperell argues that technology and technological enhancements, and even the extension of human life would further extend the “experience” of the human subject’s “embodied existence” (“Extended Experience” 31). Instead of the sometimes proclaimed death of the subject, the subject would simply define and express itself differently: “Posthumanists find themselves extended by and embodied in the very machines they once regarded as distinct. Put concisely, technology is embodied humanity” (Pepperell, “Extended Experience” 34).

Pepperell understands the “posthuman condition” as a new “kind of self-awareness” which, however, is not concerned with the present, but rather with the future of humanity (*Posthuman Condition* 1). This condition stems partially, but not entirely, from “our anxiety about, and our enthusiasm for, technological change” (Pepperell, *Posthuman Condition* 1). As has been shown above, the humanist subject is challenged and rejected in posthumanism; the ‘human being’ is no longer seen as distinct from the world.

Taking this argument even further, there is strong indication that humanity is “not separable from technology” (Philbeck 178), that, in fact, technology is a founding characteristic of the human. Furthermore, if technology is “part of the first principles that constitute the ‘human’”, there would then be no distinction between “the immaterial subject and material world” (Philbeck 178). In other words, human beings and the tools and machines they create can no longer be viewed as separate entities.

At this point, there is also a word to be said about a strand of posthumanism which argues that humans have *always* been post-humans. As has been demonstrated above, there is a consensus regarding the seemingly natural connection between humans and technology, that in fact they are inseparable. Humans have “coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically ‘not-human’ and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is” (Wolfe xv). If posthumanism consists of the equation ‘human being’ plus ‘technology’ or ‘unnatural equipment’, that only leaves the conclusion that humanity has always been posthuman. However, this would leave the ‘human’ as nothing more than a theoretical construction inspired by the tenets of an outdated humanism. Thus, the ‘human being’ as humanism would have it would cease to exist and give way to a hybrid. Posthumanism becomes the “ability of man to go beyond himself, that is to recognize the irreplaceable value of co-existence and collaboration with biological or technological diversity” (Valera 488), essentially living in symbiosis with technology and the world in general (Valera 486, see also Hayles 284 and Haney 2). Whether the human-hybrid, or new human, would

retain genetically human material is entirely beside the point. At the end of this development, then, it would not be “necessary, or possible, to distinguish between humans and nature” (Pepperell, *Posthuman Condition* 161). This “inclusiveness of otherness” (Valera 488) would thus become the new norm. No matter what changes the species undergoes, these changes would be presumably gradual enough for posthumans to still self-identify as humans, “with the same needs and desires of human beings” (Valera 490) such as “the pursuit of eternity and immortality, the desire of perfection, the need to open up to otherness and to live in harmony with other living beings, the need to know that we are part of a single cosmos” (Valera 489). Posthumanism is thus not the end of human identity, but rather an end to limiting conceptions of human identity and its relation to the natural and technological environment (Valera 488, see also Hayles 286). Robert Pepperell probably put it best: “*Humanists might regard humans as distinct beings, in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Posthumanists, on the other hand, regard humans as embodied in an extended technological world*” (“Extended Experience”, 34, original italics).

To sum up, while older research suggests a clear mind/body divide inspired by the tenets of humanism, newer theorists of posthumanism have taken up a more holistic view on the subject. However, if the boundaries between ‘human being’ and environment are blurred, this begs the question whether this also holds true for the boundary of life itself. Taking this thought one step further, one must ask if there is death in posthumanity. In the tradition of Western philosophy, “cognitive scientists tend to equate consciousness with subjectivity, which they associate with the thinking mind as an extension of body, nature and culture” (Haney 1), meaning that the absence of consciousness hails the end of subjectivity. Extended bodily experience has already been discussed, which leaves the question of extended mental or conscious experience.

The topic of extended life makes a discussion about the end of life necessary. Sirkku Hellsten demonstrates that the boundaries of birth and death, the traditional “transitional periods in relation to human life,” are becoming more liquefied as humans in the 21st century are finding more and

more ways to prolong life and eliminate diseases (Hellsten 1). In fact, contemporary discourses of age and health often view age as a disease, to which technology may offer a solution (Dickel and Frewer 120-121). While technology can prolong life, the question remains whether or not consciousness can also be prolonged (Hellsten 2). Haney suggests a “bimodal” system of human subjectivity: “one aspect is associated with consciousness-as-such, and the other with the mind or the content of consciousness” (Haney 6). He argues further that the mind “never stops evolving through a continuous interaction with the environment” (Haney 6). If the environment becomes ever more technological and the information the mind receives is filtered through a different kind of bodily perception, one can only guess at the kind of evolution that would occur as a consequence. Should the mind be “freed from the frailty of the human body” (Dickel and Frewer 122), it becomes all the more important to take into consideration the potential frailty of the human mind. Clearly, consciousness alone is not considered the sole criterion for human existence, but rather the quality of that consciousness. Since “mental capacities that are often used as a criteria to define humanity” (Hellsten 2) these qualities would necessarily have to be maintained in order to ensure the subject’s continued human existence. Should that not be the case, an ethical dilemma would emerge: “[W]hat kind of life is worth of living—what kind of life is *human enough* for human beings?” (Hellsten 2, original emphasis)

Posthumanism, then, is concerned with the question whether humans would still be humans if they were essentially immortal (Dickel and Frewer 127). Given the fluid boundaries of the ‘human being’ and the change in subjectivity, as shown above, presumably humans would still be humans, albeit unrecognisable for the humans existing today. As has already been stated, experience of life is dependent on multiple factors, not least the human body, for all its frailty. There can be no denying that death, even the prospect thereof, has had tremendous influence on human life and culture; entire religions have formed around the premise of the afterlife and the “continuity of our individuality beyond our biological existence” (Hellsten 2). Moreover, while Luca Valera’s

argument that “the pursuit of eternity and immortality” is a quintessential human trait (489), the possible consequences of human life without death are decidedly pessimistic. I would like to propose a thought experiment and ask how human life would be in practice if there was no way of dying. What, for example, would happen to the human survival instinct, which includes the acquisition of food, the preparation of shelter, if survival was self-evident? What would happen to the world of work if money was no longer needed to acquire food, shelter, and safety? All bodily needs eradicated, how, to put it more bluntly, would people spend their life? Technology that grants immortality could thus “turn us into posthuman beings with minds and experiences that are totally alien to us” (Dickel and Frewer 128). The posthuman might therefore not be “the same human being” (Valera 490) after all. Even within this new framework, humans are still defined by their biological existence and all this entails, including their “life span”, all of which affects individual choices (Hellsten 4). The absence of consciousness still means the end of subjectivity and the end of identity.

If technology were thus able to take death out of the equation of (post)human experience, the question remains which consequences this holds for the human body, be it hybridised or not. For decades, science fiction authors have tried to imagine all the changes futuristic longevity might bring with it. Posthumanism has strong ties to science fiction literature. There is arguably a feedback loop involved: literature can be analysed regarding posthumanist themes, while discourses of posthumanism can and do make references to literature (Rockoff 252). Popular SF topics such as the blurring between human and machine, the privilege of disembodied information as opposed to the material body in the exploration of cyberspace, and the quest for immortality have also been widely discussed, albeit in less fanciful ways, within posthumanist discourses since the mid-20th century. In recent decades, body modification, cybernetics, separating mind from body, and immortality through technology have become almost *de rigueur* in posthumanist discourse and literature alike (Pastourmatzi 275). Particularly the subgenre of cyberpunk seems to have taken a

special liking to these subjects. Contrary to the related genre of transhumanism (similar to, but not to be confused with the philosophy of the same name), cyberpunk literature does its share to showcase the “risks of biotechnologies for human nature” (Rockoff 267). Furthermore, since two of the defining features of posthumanism are the critique of the humanist subject and new definitions of what constitutes ‘human’, cyberpunk fits the philosophy like the proverbial glove. It can thus be argued that cyberpunk literature is essentially posthumanist literature.

Speculative SF can be seen as the stage on which hopes and anxieties about the future in general and technology in particular are enacted. Anxiety rises in times of rapid technological change and it is up to fiction to deal with the ensuing “crisis for culture” (Bukatman 4), especially concerning the fear of loss of control over the newly created technology (Bukatman 5). The popularity of the genre also allows the discussion of current or future technological changes for and with a mass audience, not just academia (Pastourmatzi 276). However, literary texts are not “passive conduits” (Hayles 21); they also shape technology and discourse of their time as well as the cultural contexts thereof (Hayles 21). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the role of the narrative in “articulating the posthuman as a technical-cultural concept” (Hayles 22).

To construct the posthuman in literature is to raise the question of boundaries, especially, as seen above, those of identity. Scott Bukatman identifies a trend in SF since the late 1980s: the body, he argues, is no longer fixed, and anxiety is raised about the violation or dissolution of boundaries, e.g. through the figure of the cyborg (17). Furthermore, in the highly technologised environment which cyberpunk fiction is wont to choose as a backdrop, “the body is not a requisite for the survival of the technocratic system” (Bukatman 16). In contrast, Hayles indicates that the prioritising of the mind of the protagonist(s) over the physical body, as is often the case, leads to a “redrawing of boundaries” which in turn “changes the locus of self-hood” and recasts human consciousness as a fragile construction vulnerable to new threats (Hayles 279). In essence, one cannot assume that “consciousness guarantees the existence of the self” (Hayles 280). The literary

texts chosen for the following analysis raise and attempt to answer those same questions. As shall be seen, protagonists in posthuman literature are subjected to various novel dangers not only to their physical bodies but their minds as well. Especially when death is removed from the equation (or at least avoided for a considerably longer time), the question of the posthuman body and identity cannot be assigned a straight and simple answer.

2.3 Biopolitics – Foucault to now

Since biopolitics as such has undergone a considerable evolution since Foucault developed the concept, I aim to give an overview first of Foucault's concept of biopower and second of contemporary usage of the term in the past decade. Broadly speaking, biopower is a concept first described by Michel Foucault in the 1970s to explain the power discourses and patterns between society and the human body. For most of recorded history, as Foucault argues, power has been locked within a rather simple pattern, meaning that a sovereign ruler held power over which subjects lived and died. The sovereign thus "exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing" (Foucault 1984, 259); in essence, his was "the right to *take* life or *let* live" (Foucault 1984, 259, see also *Society* 241; original emphasis).

However, this changed in the 18th century due to various factors, among them the rise of industrial production as well as the emergence of the natural sciences. The power of the sovereign was increasingly replaced by "a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through" (Foucault 1984, 262). At the centre of this power were the "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault 1984, 262). Attention was thus turned not only to the regulation of the body of the individual, but the health of the population as a whole. The human body was now seen as the "basis of the biological processes" (262). The focus was laid on the collective body of the population as an "independent biological corpus" or a "social body" which possessed its "own processes and phenomena, such as birth and death rates, health status, life span" as well as means of production (Lemke 36-37). Essentially, the emergence of the social body led to the forming of a "bio-politics of the population" (Foucault 1984, 262); the power of life and death became a "power to *foster* life or *disallow* it" (Foucault 1984, 261, original emphasis). While the older system functioned along the choices of life or death, biopolitics operates on a norm that is to be found within the processes of the population (Lemke 38-39). Death, no longer a tool of a sovereign ruler, resides outside the lived norm and so becomes a

“counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life” (Foucault, *Sexuality*, 137). However, to create a norm that is based on fostering life, focus had to shift to the body, individual as well as collectively, as the force of life “endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, *Sexuality*, 137). Therefore, “there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of ‘biopower’” (Foucault, *Sexuality*, 140). However, the two-sided power to foster or disallow life is “inherently paradoxical, in that its ambition to ‘make live,’ to foster, augment, and optimize life, remains intertwined with its apparent opposite, the negative power of exclusion and annihilation” (Prozorov 191), a point which will be discussed in detail later on.

With the rise of biopower, any activity that threatens life, such as war, for example, no longer threatens the power of the sovereign, but rather “the biological existence of a population” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 137). Thus, regulation and self-regulation for the continued control of the body individually and collectively slowly became more important tools than discipline or punishment, without, however, necessarily eliminating either of them (Lemke 37-38); politics “prescribe and prohibit” but also “discipline and supervise” (Lemke 117). Furthermore, discipline took the form of a normalisation of acceptable or unacceptable forms of behaviour which were to be encouraged or discouraged respectively as a means of controlling the population (McDorman 260). Lafontaine defines biopower thus succinctly as “a new form of social control: each individual is called on to manage his or her life according to a constantly increasing number of risk factors and with the assistance of an extensive biomedical system made up of all kinds of experts” (Lafontaine 300). The other side of this development was that “efforts to assert individuality – for instance in the autonomous management of end of life decisions – represent an aspect of life that threatens to escape managed supervision” (McDorman 260). Normalisation is thus charged with taking control of life itself rather than threatening execution to control societal as well as individual bodies.

Before outlining the developments in the field of biopolitics in more recent times, it must be noted that Foucault uses the terms biopower and biopolitics interchangeably. However, contemporary researchers do make a distinction between these two terms. In more recent publications, ‘biopower’ is used to refer to the sort of sovereign power described by Foucault as appearing before the shift of the 18th century, while ‘biopolitics’ marks the power discourse following thereafter (Murray 204). The terms may also be set in opposition to each other, with ‘biopower’ being “responsive to a lively and creative force, that is exterior to it, which it seeks to regulate” while ‘biopolitics’ denotes a “new ontology that derives from the body and its forces” (Lemke 72). Biopolitics is also seen as a form of and precondition for liberal government forms (Lemke 45). As forms of government, liberal or otherwise, do not feature heavily in the literature chosen for this analysis, I will not use biopower in any overtly political sense. Rather, for the purpose of this paper, I will employ the term biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense as a power to “*foster* life or *disallow* it” (Foucault 1984, 261, original emphasis). Furthermore, I will focus on the specific relationship of biopower and death itself, which I will discuss in detail later on.

Lemke (2011) further identifies three major branches in biopolitics studies of the 20th century: one sees biopolitics as a “regression of the political” in which the concentration on the human body “threatens freedom” (78) of the subject; in contrast to this, a second trend sees biopolitics as adding to existing political forms, dealing especially with forms of liberal government (78). A third branch concentrates explicitly on the body, especially the non-healthy body, or non-norm-conforming body of the subject, indicating that the “sick or injured body is assigned a central political meaning” (Lemke 78). While all of these forms of discourses have evolved in the 21st century, for the purpose of this paper special emphasis will be given to biopolitical dealings with the ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’ human body. Particularly in recent years there has been a call for a more interdisciplinary approach to biopolitics, to essentially join together social sciences and life sciences in the hope of creating a more comprehensive picture of the biopolitical discourse of the body. Modern conceptions of

biopolitics have been critiqued from within the ranks concerning the disregard for the human species' evolutionary and biological bodily reality. It is at this point that biopolitics and posthumanism might have more in common than is obvious at first sight, since both are invested in formulating a definition of what constitutes a 'human being', and the physical reality of human life proposes problems for both philosophies. However, biopolitics, like posthumanism, is not cast in stone, and there are many, sometimes contradictory, definitions to be found in contemporary research.

A frequent theme in biopolitics is the critique of the social sciences for disregarding the biological and evolutionary history of humankind (Lemke 17). The focus on culture and sociality takes up most of the focus of modern biopolitical discourse, to the point that some researchers feel that the human body is almost entirely left out and that the topic of biopower is treated in a "reductionist" way (Lemke 17). Some theorists indicate that human evolution, while occupying a relatively small amount of time when measured against the existence of life on the planet, still affects thoughts and behaviours not only of individuals but of the species as a whole (see for example Hayles 284, Lemke 17-18). While it certainly holds merit to take this critique into account, some strands of biopolitics seem to ignore "cultural patterns" entirely and assume nature to be a "closed sphere" within which all processes or changes happen, thus furthering the binarism of nature/culture (Lemke 20). Finding and maintaining a balance that accounts for the biological development of human life as well for the cultural and societal reality is therefore a difficult task. Catherine Mills describes the relationship between social norms or culture and the human body as a sort of chicken-and-egg dilemma: "[F]or while the existence of human beings is fundamentally conditioned by social norms, it cannot be assumed that vital and social norms are conceptually equivalent[...] what requires explanation is the means by which they intermingle. In other words, vital and social norms may well be empirically inseparable, but they are nevertheless analytically distinguishable." (84) In other words, the cultural and the biological influence each other in various,

not always clear-cut ways that would warrant studies in their own right. Social and vital norms, to use Mills' terms, do not operate in the same way, or earn the same results.

With an increased consciousness of this intermingling of norms, biopolitics in the 21st century is facing some changes. The "vital politics" are no longer locked between "the poles of illness and health", or overtly concerned with the protection of the population by disallowing the 'unhealthy', but "concerned with our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures" (Rose 3). The related field of bioethics thus gains considerable ground. As has been stated above, "[h]uman life is never simply biological; and nor, for that matter, is it ever simply social or political" (Mills 83). Biopolitical studies of the current century therefore have to focus more and more attention on the application of medicine and bodily enhancements "in an age of choice and self maximization in which the body and its capacities have become central to technologies of selfhood" (Rose 8). While the human body has changed in discourse throughout the centuries, it has very much stayed the same biologically for millennia; how, then, might biopolitical discourse change if the human body were to undergo a change, and a controlled one at that?

In the light of futuristic changes, it is essential to discuss the concept of the body. Foucault (1984) saw power over life as possessing two poles: one, the body as machine that needed to be used and disciplined (261), and second, the body as the "basis of the biological processes", the social body. The problem with Foucault's notion of the individual body is that it is seen as whole and closed (Lemke 95). However, with the advancements in medicine such as blood, tissue, and organ donations, the closedness is called into question as the interior of the body becomes more significantly important (Lemke 95). Therefore, "life and death today are more closely linked than Foucault assumed" since parts of a human body can live on (Lemke 95). The "regime of truth" behind contemporary biopolitics is shaped by knowledge of the body and life processes, the social relevance of body, power relations, disciplines (Lemke 119), "how processes of power generate and

disseminate forms of knowledge” and perhaps most importantly, which kinds of life are considered “socially valuable” and which are not (Lemke 119). Since the “biological and social are inextricably entwined” (Vint 165), what also needs to be considered is self-regulation, or how “subjects are brought to work on themselves”, and how these processes are made to be considered “active appropriation” instead of “passive acceptance” (Lemke 120). In contemporary biopolitics, due to changed understanding of the body and biological as well as social processes, the body increasingly comes to be seen as an “informational network” instead of an “anatomical machine” (Lemke 118). As has been shown above, biopolitics operates on a norm of ‘health’; however, there are no state-enacted programs to force people to have a certain body. The norm has to raise concern about individual health and the prevention of illness (Lemke 100-101). The body is thus seen as “malleable” and “improvable” (Lemke 101). “Self maximization”, as Rose (8) puts it, becomes an attractive goal as it offers a feeling of power and control over the individual body and individual health.

The natural consequence of the shift in biopolitics, or biopower, towards a more regulated and self-regulated population was a shift in the treatment of death. While death used to be viewed as the exchange of one sovereign for another (e.g. from king to God), power increasingly focused on life and its maintenance (Foucault 1984, 261). Since “a relative control over life averted some of the imminent risks of death” (Foucault 1984, 264), death, as Foucault argues, became the natural boundary of power. While in the former model of power death was seen as the height of sovereign power (*taking* life), now it was the point at which a subject would escape all power discourses (Foucault, *Society*, 248): “Death is outside the power relationship. Death is beyond the reach of power [...] Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death” (Foucault, *Society*, 248).

It is at this point that present-day academics find fault with Foucault’s argumentation. Stuart J. Murray indicates that death as a “consequence – a necessary part – of living” holds another peril:

“Such death is too easily elided and dismissed” (Murray 204), probably explaining why death, especially by socially unsanctioned ways of dying (e.g. euthanasia, suicide), could be reasonably expected to be the limit of biopower. There is, however, another aspect to be considered. The fostering and disallowing of life, to use Foucault’s original terms, are necessarily linked to each other. Sergei Prozorov argues in line with this that “fostering the life of some presupposes the death of others but also [...] that the life fostered, amplified, and optimized in biopolitical practices remains in proximity to death precisely by virtue of being enfolded in an apparatus of power” (Prozorov 191). As has been discussed, the attention is drawn away from sovereign power and towards the collective body of the population; its “‘health’ is now the object of good governance” (Vint 162). This raises the question of who, or what power discourses or ideologies decide which kind of life is to be fostered and which is not, and what consequences arise either way. “[D]isciplinary institutions” play a significant role in this decision (Vint 162), as does the formation of a norm of what constitutes ‘healthy’, which is achieved by simultaneously defining what is detrimental, or simply ‘unhealthy’. In other words, “‘making live’ of this body is by expelling or excising that which is unhealthy” (Vint 162). Biopower thus remains “a power of life and death” (Prozorov 191).

Going one step further, in her article “Biopolitical Life”, Catherine Mills argues convincingly that “death is not the limit of biopower but its precondition” (Mills 90). Michel Foucault gives little explanation as to how regulation of the individual body and the population is introduced and successfully maintained. The norms that circumscribe the healthy social body can only be upheld if failure to do so results in a corresponding negative consequence. The power to foster or disallow life only works if there is an adequate risk of biological danger, i.e. the risk of dying (of one’s own life being suddenly disallowed). It is therefore “precisely by recalling the risk of death, its immanence in life, that biopower operates, since it is the everpresent [sic] threat of death that justifies and rationalises regulatory intervention in the life of populations and individuals” (Mills

90). Individual bodies, therefore, must strive to remain in the 'foster' category to ensure their continued existence. Moreover, modern medicine modifies and transforms the body significantly, changing not only the concept of the body, but also the concept of the relationship between life and death (Lemke 94). Medical and scientific progress may therefore provide not only "new ways of treating disease and illness but also new ways of mastering the body" (McDorman 269). The entire concept of 'life' and 'alive' may have to be revised. For example, parts of any living human can live on in other humans through organ transplants, cells used for cell research can live on almost indefinitely, and so on; organic material is thus not subject to death in the same way the body is (Lemke 95). Deciding where life begins and ends becomes the focal point of biopolitics (Lemke 95). The boundary between life and death thus becomes increasingly more fluid, which in turn may in time transform the concept of the human body yet again.

Michel Foucault has been quoted above as stating that control over life would avert the risks of death; however, as Mills indicates, "an increasing control over death averts the immanent risks of life and permits its administration. This suggests, then, that biopower cannot be considered in terms of oppositions [...] instead, it establishes a mutually reinforcing relation between them: death is a precondition of living [...] and vice versa" (Mills 90). Foucault further argues that, since power ends at death's door, death has become increasingly privatised and indeed "the most private thing of all" (Foucault, *Society*, 248). That is not to say, though, that death is not "still managed at controlling institutions", for it is very much so, through "doctors, equipped in life supporting devices [...] and having means for prolonging or terminating life" (Kubiak 486-387). Moreover, there are other public authorities which have the power to make "ultimate decisions" (Kubiak 487). The entire debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide is ruled by the question of which lives should be allowed to be terminated by the state: "The right to live is strictly related with the ban to die and the obligation of caring about a biological body, corpus." (Kubiak 483) Life is inevitably to be fostered, death to be warded off, with the ultimate goal of medical research and progress to preserve youth

and health indefinitely. Death is no longer a “biological necessity” (Lafontaine 300), but a biological enemy. Ultimately, making death a ‘private’ or at least hidden matter has led to a change in the treatment of ageing and dying; these formerly natural phenomena in human life are being “treated like diseases; ills against which one must fight” (Lafontaine 299). Death thus comes to be seen as an “abnormality”, a view which is strengthened by relegating death to closed controlled spaces like the hospital (McDorman 267), the “sterility, isolation, and intrusiveness” of which only serves to reinforce the stigma of death (McDorman 267). Thus stigmatised and hidden from public view, it is becoming increasingly difficult to come to terms with the subject of mortality (McDorman 267). While this strategy may foster life, it also “reduc[es] its quality” (McDorman 268) through the constant fear of pain and isolation, as well as uncertainty that accompanies any prospect of dying. Therefore, while improving the length and quality of life is certainly a noble goal, the side effect of this process is diminishing “our ability to cope with death” (McDorman 268).

A more short-term consequence of biomedical advancement is the subject of cybernetics, which has been gaining momentum over the past decades. While science fiction fantasies of completely malleable bodies equipped with various kinds of interesting technology still reside in the future, there is definitely progress to be seen in the areas of prosthetics and implants, as well as of course medical life extension. All this progress stems in part from the “belief in perfectibility itself”, that is to say the perfectibility of the individual rather than of society (Lafontaine 301). The biopolitical discourse in the medical field is no longer forced to remain “between the poles of health and illness”(Vint 166); rather, medical science is ever more interested in “our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures” (Rose 3). Thus, perfecting the human body in order to avoid old age and death, as demonstrated above, becomes the ultimate exercise in controlling humanity’s biological fate. To borrow from the philosophy of posthumanism, the next hurdle on this journey is to “overcome [...]

the obstacles imposed by the limitations of life itself” (Lafontaine 301). Which forms this may take, although most of them are fictional at the present moment, has already been discussed in the chapter on posthumanism. In this context, cybernetics and the prospect of a bodiless existence have gained prominence. This of course then begs the question whether “a hybrid-body (connected to medical, technological instruments)” (Kubiak 490) still qualifies as ‘life’.

In summary, the fostering of life and the consequence of failing to do so are still very much part of the power discourse of life, health, and dying in the 21st century, and in fact the prospect of death fulfils an important role to reinforce norms and behaviours. In other words, as long as the consequence of dying as eternal loss of consciousness remains relevant, biopolitics will continue to establish norms of the healthy body and population.

If death is a precondition for life, this then begs the question concerning what consequences may arise if death were taken out of the equation. In cyberpunk literature, death is frequently evaded or survived by means of technology, the boundaries of the human body are blurred and what constitutes human life is called into question. If death, or disallowing life, was no longer a consequence of refusing the norm of the healthy body and population, would the entirety of the biopolitical framework collapse? In the course of this paper, I will argue that the concept of biopolitics still operates, because death in cyberpunk literature, for the most part, takes on a different form, which I will call “real death” after the concept in Richard Morgan’s novel *Altered Carbon* (62). Considering that the chances of survival are heightened through the application of technology, and that even a bodiless existence is not only possible but actually preferred, the prospect of death, the complete loss of consciousness and identity, should become even more threatening. For this paper, I will thus try to answer the following questions: How does biopolitics operate within the highly technologised framework of the novels which permit an extended experience of life, and how is the threat of real death represented and used to regulate the individual posthuman body and the population?

3 Posthumanism and its influence on identity

This section will discuss how posthumanist themes shape the connection between the body and identity in the novels. (Note that in doing so, I will use the terms identity and subjectivity synonymously since most novels are narrated from the limited view of one focus character; *Altered Carbon* is narrated in first person, while the rest of the novels employ a third person limited narrator.) I will first demonstrate the prevalence of posthumanist themes in the novels by discussing the tension between the physical body and technology which is most clearly showcased in the theme of body enhancements. While the physical body plays less and less of a role in the construction of identity, the concept of embodiment becomes important, which will lead further to the question of consciousness and agency in (dis-)connection to the physical body.

3.1 The body and technology

The notion that the body might play a significant role in the formation of personal identity has not been well received in early posthumanist philosophical texts. As described in a previous section, in a traditional posthumanist view the body disappears almost entirely, becoming an afterthought or an “accident” (Hayles 2). The body has become an information pattern (Lemke 118). The posthuman subject “exists in a reciprocal relationship to the increasing present-day reliance on computer interactions and communications” (Worthington 193). While *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* may be viewed as examples of the traditional posthumanist view which privileges the mind over the body, more recent works take a slightly different approach. However, the portrayal of cybernetic enhancements is similar in all novels. The human body has become fluid and improvable. Bodily enhancements play a major role in all novels and all major protagonists feature at least one kind of enhancement, be it cybernetic or genetic conditioning. These enhancements are shown not only to be useful, but necessary for completing the highly specialised work the characters perform. The technologically enhanced bodies of the protagonists beg the question, then, to what extent the physical body determines identity if it can or must be changed.

On first glance, cybernetics seems like just another consumer choice in a world in which intrusive technology has gone mainstream. After all, there are enhancements meant for purely cosmetic purposes, especially in *Neuromancer*, in which they also have become a facet of subversive youth cultures. In a short scene in which Case meets with a member of a teen mercenary group Molly has hired, the boy is described as follows: “His face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides, smooth and hideous. It was one of the nastiest pieces of elective surgery Case had ever seen. When Angelo smiled, revealing the razor-sharp canines of some large animal, Case was actually relieved. Toothbud implants. He’d seen those before.” (Gibson 1984, 59) Subverting beauty standards, however, is not the only use for surgical modifications. Looking deeper, a whole other level becomes obvious. While cosmetic enhancements do exist, the main reason for obtaining cybernetic enhancements is the job market. All major characters obtain their specific technologies for economic reasons (see section 4.3). This then raises the question of individual agency, because while it is possible to survive in the cyberpunk futures without modifications, it is certainly harder. However, since all protagonists find themselves in the grey areas of legality in the course of their employment, navigating these dangerous environments without modifications would likely be fatal. The “street samurai” (Gibson 1984, 30) Molly Millions, for example, famous for retractable blades under her fingers and an enhanced nervous system, “would appear to have deliberately opted for prosthetic enhancement. Nevertheless, the realization that in the absence of her artificial adjuncts she would have no modicum of power virtually eclipses the notion of free choice” (Cavallaro 295). The same is true for “console cowboy[s]” (Gibson 1984, 28) like Case, who essentially live in symbiosis with custom-made computers (Gibson 1984, 5). Enhancements are thus “designed to maximize his usefulness for the gratification of corporate greed” (Cavallaro 295). While Cavallaro’s statement is meant to describe the protagonist of *Neuromancer* explicitly, it is easy to see how it would apply to the characters of *Altered Carbon* and *Noir*. *Altered Carbon*’s Takashi Kovacs is a genetically and

cybernetically modified elite soldier of the special forces called “Envoy Corps” (Morgan 34). In *Noir*, McNihil is portrayed as possessing certain genetic modifications useful in the apprehension of copyright criminals (Jeter 23, 186-187). McNihil is also the only character who exhibits an enhancement meant purely for enjoyment: the so-called Noir vision, which overlays everything he sees with images from movies from the 1940s and 1950s, allowing him to experience a world that is aesthetically pleasing to him: “He’d paid to see a world that was to his liking. Not beautiful – it was based, after all, on cultural artifacts of more than a century ago, the bleak and brooding crime and thriller movies of the 1930s and forties – but with beautiful things in it. More beautiful, actually, by being surrounded by constant threat and darkness” (Jeter 54). The hired assassin November, likewise, exhibits a weapon placed into her fingertips that allows her to kill targets at first physical contact (Jeter 37). Furthermore, a relay has been placed in the palm of her hand that shows her debt status and the exact sum of money she owes (Jeter 166). In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the titular character Mona is paid to undergo heavy surgical procedures in order to make her look like the celebrity Angela Mitchell (Gibson 1988, 173). Mona is also the only main character who shows any sign of self-reflection about the technological or surgical changes of her body: “It gave her a funny feeling, like who she’d been has wandered away down the street for a minute and never come back. But then she closed her eyes and knew she was Mona, always had been, and that nothing much had changed, anyway not behind her eyelids” (Gibson 1988, 174). Enhancements and plastic surgery in Gibson’s works have become so mainstream as to go almost unmentioned. It is, so to speak, the thing to do. Indeed, in the world of *Neuromancer*, technology has become so present in everyday life that it is sometimes difficult to see where the human ends and technology begins. A good example of this is Case’s first meeting with Molly: “He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to *grow from smooth pale skin* above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag” (Gibson 1984, 24, my emphasis). As Siivonen observes, “[m]odern technology is no longer an entity discrete from the user, but rather an

environment in mutual interaction with human beings” (Siivonen 228). Enhancements grant specific talents, but they also change the user in another way, making them dependent on technology. Case in *Neuromancer* describes a certain “accommodation” (Gibson 1984, 203), especially in his usual employers:

Case had always taken it for granted that the real bosses, the kingpins in a given industry, would be both more and less than people. [...] He’d always imagined it as a gradual and willing accommodation of the machine, the system, the parent organism. It was the root of street cool, too, the knowing posture that implied connection, invisible lines up to hidden levels of influence. (Gibson 1984, 203)

Another way the relationship between technology and humanity is changed is the “human beings’ physical and mental addiction to technology” (Siivonen 227). Case is an extreme example of this, as he “is so used to connecting his nervous system to cyberspace, the virtual reality created by the computers and artificial intelligence, that when such connections are no longer possible, he suffers the same physical withdrawal symptoms as with drug addiction” (Siivonen 227-228). The “prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 1984, 6) is Case’s own personal hell until he is finally able to connect to cyberspace again: “This was it. This was what he was, who he was, his being.” (Gibson 1984, 59) Case begins to act like a textbook example of a drug addict, forgoing food and sleep (Gibson 1984, 59). The only character who ever exhibits a certain apprehension about technology and the human body is the notoriously nervous Slick Henry in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. Upon seeing Bobby Newmark strapped to both an IV and a computer, his reaction is as follows: “*It’s eating him*, Slick thought, as he looked on the superstructure of support gear, the tubes, the sacs of fluid. *No*, he told himself, *it’s keeping him alive, like in a hospital*. But the impression lingered: what if it were draining him, draining him dry?” (Gibson 1988, 82) This almost vampiristic image reinforces the impression of dependence and addiction.

In *Noir*, the change in the technologically influenced body and personality is probably the

starkest of all the novels. The protagonist's dead wife is described as still acting like his wife, even though her body is being kept moving by electronics while her internal organs have been harvested and sold (Jeter 99; discussed in detail in another section). The more important tension between the human body and technology is depicted in a very different way in *Noir* by means of the prowlers, androids built for entertainment purposes, who venture to the prowler district called "the Wedge" in order to gain experiences and bring back memories for their users: "It goes out and gets a certain kind of information and transfers it to the user in the form of memory." (Jeter 157) As memories are downloaded from the prowler by means of physical touch, the relationships between prowlers and their users are described as "tight" or "intimate" (Jeter 157), to the point where the boundaries between human and android start to blur, as in the case of corporate employee William Travelt: "The information goes from the prowler to the user. Not the other way around. [...] The information went the other direction – something from Travelt wound up inside the prowler's head." (Jeter 157) In fact, the prowler is considered to be the deceased Travelt himself by virtue of retaining all of Travelt's memories and personality: "'[...] He's out there, all right.' – 'You mean,' said McNihil, 'the prowler is.' – 'It's the same thing.'" (Jeter 158)

Over the course of the novel it becomes clear that this is not an isolated incident, that in fact "transference" has been occurring between human beings and androids for a rather long time (Jeter 352). This becomes clear in a conversation McNihil has with a female prowler: "'[...] Maybe you really didn't get anything at all... and we got part of you. [...] The ability to feel, and suffer... and remember. Everything that made you human, that made you different from the things you created... that's what you gave us. [...] It wasn't,' she whispered, 'a good deal for us, either.'" (Jeter 358) It has been stated that posthumanism "coincides with the annihilation of all the boundaries that make 'human' a human being" (Valera 481). In *Noir*, the boundaries between androids and humans can no longer be distinguished; humans and prowlers alike can thus be defined as complete posthuman beings.

3.2 Embodiment

Hayles maintains that discourses about the body and depictions of bodies in literature influence each other within “complex feedback loops” (29) in which “new technologies will instantiate new models of signification” (29). This means that the focus on information rather than matter in the late 20th century led to an increased disregard for the human body. Siivonen comments that there are two cultural forces that come into play concerning the disappearance of the body: “In the first place, various efforts are stressed whereby humanity aims at a withdrawal from its biological and ‘natural’ body, and secondly, stress is placed on the weakening and eventual exhaustion of the subject” (Siivonen 234). The constructedness of nature is highlighted through technological discourse and the “transcendence of the body with the help of technology” is put into context of “the Cartesian tradition of rational thinking, with its reduction of the body” (Siivonen 234-235). This trend can also be observed in SF literature. Katherine Hayles traces a trend in posthumanist discourse from the 1960s to the 1990s which sees a strict divide between “information and materiality” (12). The distinction made between these two positions “allows the construction of a hierarchy in which information is given the dominant position and materiality runs a distant second” (Hayles 12). Essentially, if a subject is nothing but information, the physical body is no longer needed and can thus be discarded. However, the mind-body divide is not as clear-cut as researchers of decades past would have it. The interplay of the physical body and the mind is in fact far more complex. In light of the disregard of the body, another concept needs to be considered for the purpose of analysis: embodiment. Hayles has introduced the topic of embodiment into the discussion of the body in posthumanism. She sees a difference between the body as a cultural concept and the bodily experience of individuals, two poles which nevertheless interact and influence each other (Hayles 154). The human body is “‘produced’ once, for ever. Any intervention in its structure seems ‘unnatural,’ as bodies are supposed to grow following an organic, intrinsic algorithm of psychosomatic development” (Moraru par. 15). However, postmodern and especially

posthumanist discourse takes “issue with this model of the corporeal” (Moraru par. 15) and instead maintains that “the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive construction” (Hayles, “Informatics” 147). In postmodernism, the body “no longer stands as a paragon of the ‘finite.’ One keeps producing, ‘building’ it, even after it has already been produced”, thus turning “the corporeal” into a “process”, the limits of which are “being perpetually renegotiated” (Moraru par. 15). The body thus becomes an immaterial information network (Hayles 149) through “inscribing and incorporating practices” (5). Embodiment, or the “experiences of embodiment” (Hayles, “Informatics” 148), is in “constant interaction and interplay” with the body and rest on normative relations and assumptions about the average body (Hayles, “Informatics” 154); embodiment is “tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person” (Hayles, “Informatics” 156). While “the body is an idealized form” and “is always normative relative to some set of criteria”, embodiment is “contextual” (154), it is “the specific instantiation” (Hayles, “Informatics” 155). Thus, while the “body can disappear into information [...] embodiment cannot” (156). Put simply, perception and cognition rest on the experiences made while living inside a body and interacting with the world. Thus, the prerequisite for consciousness, even a disembodied one, is physical interaction. Using the example of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, Worthington rewords the concept of embodiment succinctly: “[A]lthough physical bodies cannot travel into cyberspace, their influence – the influence of embodiment – can and most definitely does” (Worthington 192). The next sections will examine this further.

3.2.1 Cyberspace and core identity

In cyberspace, a subject has no fixed site of identification (Bukatman 18). Therefore, portrayals of disembodied life rest solidly on the assumption of a core identity of the protagonist (Worthington 196), which also means that “[e]ssentialist assumptions” are often woven into the narrative with regard to “the possibility for self-definition” (Worthington 196). While identity is fixed, in the absence of the physical body other means must be found to define the boundaries of the

subject's identity in order to distinguish it from other users in cyberspace, or indeed cyberspace itself. Embodiment plays a major role in this context. There are a number of fitting examples to be found in William Gibson's works *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). Even though in Gibson's works some protagonists may leave their bodies behind to go on to exist as bodiless consciousness in cyberspace, the "influence of embodiment" (Worthington 192) can still be discerned in the way that characters experience their digital surroundings. *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* "identify the common notion found in theory and fiction that the posthuman body can no longer (if indeed it ever could) be the basis for or site of unified identity" (Worthington 197). However, this does not mean that the physical body is entirely obsolete, for while it is not present in cyberspace, it is still the prerequisite for entering cyberspace. Therefore, "one does not leave one's body when entering cyberspace; instead, cyberspace causes changes in the relationship between subjects and bodies" (Worthington 197). While the body is "not a requisite for the survival of the technocratic system [...] the body finds and occupies a new space" (Bukatman 16). In essence, the material body acquires a new meaning as the template for the embodied consciousness. This can be seen in the way cyberspace is experienced and navigated.

Even though the body is described as "meat" (Gibson 1984, 6) and the connection to Cyberspace is clearly favoured by the hackers Case in *Neuromancer* and Bobby in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, it is interesting to note that being in Cyberspace is described almost exclusively in terms of physical movement. While the physical body remains static, bound to a computer deck, the mind is virtually racing. This is described in *Neuromancer* as Case "project[ing] his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (Gibson 1984, 5). However, the mind is not merely a disembodied feeling. It is here that embodiment becomes visible to the reader. Cyberspace is described as spatial, and can be felt via movement of what can be described as a digital body (Bukatman 206). Cyberspace may "slid[e] into existence" (Gibson 1984, 55). It is experienced by means of a "[h]eadlong motion" (Gibson 1984, 256), or a user might be "shot

toward a chrome-yellow plain of light” (Gibson 1988, 262). When Case loses his ability to “jack[...] into” (Gibson 1984, 5) Cyberspace, he is not merely disconnected, he *falls* out of the matrix: “Case fell into the prison of his own flesh.” (Gibson 1984, 6) Similarly, the character Kumiko in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* experiences embodiment first-hand the first time she is linked to cyberspace: “[...] and Tick’s room was gone, its walls a flutter of cards, tumbling and receding, against the bright grid, the towering forms of data.” (Gibson 1988, 262) Here, embodiment is described as a reasonable way to make the experience of cyberspace easier for the inexperienced user, to avoid “vertigo” and other side-effects: “‘Vertigo can be a problem,’ Tick said, and was abruptly beside her on the yellow plain. She looked down at his suede shoes, then at her hands. ‘Bit of body image takes care of that’” (Gibson 1988, 262).

Embodiment not only applies to users of cyberspace, but to cyberspace itself. Cyberspace is “stacked up like one big neon city” in which to “cruise around and have a kind of grip on it, visually anyway, because if you didn’t, it was too complicated, trying to find your way to a particular piece of data you needed” (Gibson 1988, 16). Pieces of data are described as a sort of “architecture” (Gibson 1988, 264), in which, for example, a “yellow plain [...] roofed the London Stock Exchange and related City entities” (Gibson 1988, 264) or one might see “the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America” (Gibson 1984, 52). More than that, in Gibson’s works cyberspace acquires an organic quality. It “flowed” and “flowered” (Gibson 1984, 52) and opens into “rich fields of data” (Gibson 1984, 5). A similar description is given of cyberspace in *Altered Carbon*. Here, the protagonist describes it as follows: “It spread out around me, racing away from my viewpoint in all directions [...] receding into infinity” (Morgan 2013) The interior comes into view likewise: “In front of me softly shaped grey furniture was evolving from the floor like a sculpture from a pool of mercury.” (Morgan 2013) Far from being a disembodied space, cyberspace thus becomes tangible. The possibilities are near-endless with the right software, as evidenced by ex-hacker Bobby who in

Mona Lisa Overdrive constructs an entire mirror image of the real world inside his personal piece of cyberspace. He is seen to move and talk and even eat or drink as he would in the world outside (Gibson 1988, 180-181). The only difference between one world and the other is that in cyberspace, he controls his environment as easily as his own bodily projection, for example by controlling the movement of day and night (Gibson 1988, 228).

This “physical engagement of the body” (Bukatman 207) leads to the construction of both the subject and world surrounding it, the mind itself thus becomes embodied (208). The body “translates itself into cyberspatial terms” (Worthington 206) and can thus “police how a subject can maneuver in cyberspace, acting, in other words, as delimiters of subjectivity in cyberspace” (Worthington 206). The result is a “new body . . . but a body nonetheless” (Bukatman 207). By moving through cyberspace, Case, Bobby and other cyberspace users create their own virtual embodiment modelled on their physical bodies in order to establish the boundaries of their identities in an immaterial space.

Contrary to the freedom cyberspace offers in Gibson’s works, the kind of cyberspace portrayed in *Altered Carbon* is limited and limiting to its inhabitants. While embodiment functions very much like in Gibson’s work, the implications of life in cyberspace are very different. For one, it is used merely as a way of contacting a currently bodiless individual, for example for the purpose of police investigation. In the world of *Altered Carbon*, human beings can acquire another body once the old one has run its course. The digitally stored personality is then “sleeved” (Morgan 15) into the new body. Clones of the original bodies are available for a very high sum, which is only affordable to the social elite. Thus, most citizens opt for renting another body from “Download Central” (Morgan 17). Since this too gets expensive in the long run, it is rarely done more than once or twice (Morgan 69). Life in cyberspace, however, is almost free, but “disembodied and disconnected from reality” (Hamdan 127-128). It does not provide any freedom or agency. Digital existence is limited to the instances in which the still living wish to make contact with the deceased

(Morgan 203). This means that the digitised individual stays entirely unconscious until either called upon or re-sleeved. The individual personality and attitude depends on how and when the personality is uploaded to the database. Kovacs himself provides a good example of this as he is killed in a crossfire near the beginning of the novel and subsequently revived: “Whatever you feel, whatever you’re thinking, whatever you are when they store you, that’s what you’ll be when you come out. With states of high anxiety, that can be a problem.” (Morgan 9) Consequently, Kovacs comes “thrashing up out of the tank” (Morgan 9) upon being revived, desperately trying to locate his weapon before realising where he is and what has happened. The more important question however is whether his personality has been affected by this change.

3.2.2 Core identity and the body: the case of *Altered Carbon*

The assumption of a fixed core identity is less clear-cut in *Altered Carbon*, but it is nevertheless still present. The role of the material body in the construction of identity, however, is depicted as significantly more important than in Gibson’s works. What is demonstrated here is not so much the influence of the body on a digitally embodied consciousness, but rather the influence the previous identity (which inhabited the body) has on the current tenant. While in cyberspace characters are embodied in a computerised version of themselves, here embodiment takes a more literal turn. In *Altered Carbon*, characters can resume life in a different body, commonly called a “sleeve” (Morgan 13). Though the word likens the human body to a garment which can be slipped on and off, the actual process of “re-sleeving” (Morgan 11) is described as much more complicated as well as subject to a multitude of regulations. When protagonist Kovacs gets “sleeved” (Morgan 15) into someone else’s body, he retains almost all of his original character traits. The “toughest part”, as he claims, is to look in the mirror for the first time after re-sleeving (Morgan 13), which he describes as follows: “For the first couple of moments all you can see is someone looking at you through a window frame. Then, like a shift in focus, you feel yourself float rapidly up behind the mask and adhere to its inside with a shock that’s almost tactile” (Morgan 13). While he is not an

entirely changed man, the effects of his temporary residence are described throughout the narrative. For example, Elias Ryker, the original owner of the body, was a heavy smoker, which non-smoker Kovacs experiences as withdrawal symptoms (Morgan 33). He is then seen smoking throughout the novel. The sudden attraction to Ryker's girlfriend, police officer Kristin Ortega, which Kovacs experiences is also described as temporary, as it vanishes almost instantly, along with his craving for cigarettes, when Kovacs is sleeved into yet another body (Morgan 404). On the other hand, the minor character Irene Elliott suffers a "deep sense of loss" (Hamdan 129) after being re-sleeved in a stranger's body rather than her own. After being convicted of cyber-criminality, Elliott's consciousness has been digitally saved. Being brought back when Kovacs needs her skills in the completion of his assignment, she is less than happy with her temporary physical residence: "How's the new sleeve?' – 'It's OK. Any reason I couldn't have my own body back?'" (Morgan 341) As it turns out, her original body has been bought, and her reaction is as Kovacs has come to expect: "I'm afraid, in the meantime, someone took a shine to your sleeve and bought it.' – 'Oh.' She was silent then. The shock of waking up in someone else's body for the first time is nothing compared to the sense of rage and betrayal you feel knowing that someone, somewhere, is walking around inside you." (Morgan 341) It can be assumed that the act of being re-sleeved is equally hard on most people, as Kovacs observes the line of waiting relatives in the re-sleeving department: "If you couldn't even meet the same person twice in one lifetime, in one sleeve, what did that say about all the families and friends waiting in Download Central for someone they once knew to peer out through the eyes of a stranger. How could that even be close to the same person?" (Morgan 319) Essentially, the body as a site of personal identity still plays a major role even in a setting in which it often has to be given up. Kovacs, who has received special conditioning to deal with the side-effects of re-sleeving, is the best example of a "cyborg subjectivity" (Hamdan 130). Through his training he realises that "to ensure continuity his identity must be fluid, linked to and influenced by [...] technologies" (Hamdan 130). *Altered Carbon* thus effectively portrays the influence of the material

body on the subject's identity, without however doing away with the concept of a stable core identity entirely. Identity is thus "more dependent on embodiment as reflected in the characters' connection to their bodies. This attachment, to a certain extent, negates the Cartesian view that the mind has primacy over the body in the context of human subjectivity" (Hamdan 131).

Summing up, embodiment, or the influence of the physical body, is a force to be reckoned with in the digital worlds of the narratives. While the fantasy of leaving one's body behind is prevalent in the narratives, they also show that it is not quite so simple. Cyberspace is only as free as its programming allows, as seen in *Altered Carbon*. However, as Kovacs and Case demonstrate, "the posthuman body can no longer (if indeed it ever could) be the basis for or site of unified identity" (Worthington 197). Assuming that human identity exists independently of the body, the influence of the physical body nevertheless does not fully vanish and is indeed needed to navigate and draw the subject's boundaries. If and how this has an influence on individual agency will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.3 Consciousness, memory, and agency

Concerning agency, there are two intertwining forces at work here: on the one hand, the loss of agency and autonomy by humans; and on the other the gaining of consciousness by machines. Fran Mason describes the characters in *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* as “broken human machine[s]” mended by technology (Mason 203). Case’s damaged nervous system, the “prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 1984, 6), is repaired by Wintermute through Case’s new boss Armitage. Armitage, in turn, experiences the greatest loss of agency in the novel. He is “a galvanised organic puppet whose consciousness is suppressed by the AI in order that he can fulfil a function” (Mason 203) after he has been turned from critically injured war veteran Willis Corto into Wintermute’s agent. When Wintermute’s influence over him wanes, Corto’s traumatised personality gains control again, with dire consequences:

Wintermute had built something called Armitage into a catatonic fortress named Corto. Had convinced Corto that Armitage was the real thing, and Armitage had walked, talked, schemed, bartered data for capital, fronted for Wintermute in that room in the Chiba Hilton.... And now Armitage was gone, blown away by the winds of Cortos’ madness. But where had Corto *been*, those years? Falling, burned and blinded, out of a Siberian sky. (Gibson 1984, 193-194, original emphasis)

After coming back as himself, Corto relives the last minutes of the failed military operation that originally left him comatose, and is blown out into space via a faulty lifeboat from an air yacht (Gibson 1984, 201).

Another loss of agency is suffered by the console cowboys. Though Worthington argues that “the agenic subject in cyberpunk tends to exhibit a kind of transcendence through technology” (Worthington 195), Case and Dix rather lose part of their autonomy when connecting themselves to cyberspace, since “[t]echnology has become a projection of the human nervous system” (Siivonen

234-235) which renders the body not entirely obsolete, but definitely second-class. The body has become passive; when connected to cyberspace, except for the brain, the physical body is entirely passive. Case or his former mentor Dix, when he was alive, have “lost some portion of their autonomy” (Siivonen 235) by using technology that involves mainly their brains. The hackers “are capable of achievements ‘more intelligent’ than the average, simply by plugging into the computer’s memory and utilizing its capacity” (Siivonen 235), but only if they retain the ability to do so. As is demonstrated in Case, the loss of his ability to “jack in” (Gibson 1984, 37) to cyberspace goes hand in hand with a loss of power, economically and personally. The passivity of the body thus stands in contrast to the lack of agency without the capability of connecting to cyberspace. This is also demonstrated in a scene in which Case temporarily connects to Molly’s eye lenses via a modified simstim set: “Case kept trying to jerk her eyes toward landmarks he would have used to find his way. He began to find the *passivity of the situation irritating*.” (Gibson 1984, 56, my emphasis) As is seen in this brief scene, the difference between simstim and cyberspace lies in a very important detail. Even though the computer deck Case uses and commercial simstim sets are similar, he feels that the latter is “basically a meat toy” and the experience of someone else’s body “a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input” (Gibson 1984, 55). The passivity of simstim is contrasted to the passivity of the human body when connected to cyberspace. While the latter doesn’t bother Case, this demonstrates that inhabiting a body is less important to him than the control over his embodied consciousness, the freedom of choice and movement, even though his physical body cannot partake in it. The absence of agency, even for a few hours, presents a greater challenge for Case than the passivity of his body when bound to cyberspace.

In *Altered Carbon*, agency is short-lived. In Kovacs’ case, it is to last for little more than a month (Morgan 15). Brought back solely to solve an unusual murder case, Kovacs is bound by a contract, body and disembodied soul: “This is a copy of the leasing agreement by which you are bound. Please read it carefully. Failure to comply with any of its articles may result in you being

returned to storage immediately to complete the full term of your sentence either here, or at another facility of the Administration's choice" (Morgan 15). Not only can he and other "homecomers" (Morgan 17) not decide in which body they live, but his inhabiting a body at all depends on someone else's goodwill. While Case gives up part of his agency freely to cyberspace, Kovacs has no choice.

Similarly, *Noir* removes all notions of agency from the subject by means of their work. Personal choices are severely restricted for employees of large companies by an invention called "cubapts", an office-cum-apartment, which are assigned anew each day at random (Jeter 47). Employees live and sleep on the job, so to speak, and are monitored constantly, thus eliminating most lifestyle choices. Agency is lost almost entirely in the case of death while indebted, which renders the individual little more than an undead slave trying to work off their debt load (Jeter 110; this topic will be dealt with in detail in the chapter on biopolitics).

3.3.1 "Animal bliss": The wish for unconsciousness

In stark contrast to Case's wish for agency, the late Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool, mother of Jane Tessier-Ashpool, reads as a fulfilment of the posthumanist desire for symbiosis with technology: "She dreamed of a state involving very little in the way of individual consciousness," Jane was saying. [...] 'Animal bliss. I think she viewed the evolution of the forebrain as a sort of sidestep.'" (Gibson 1984, 217) Marie-France constructed both AIs in *Neuromancer* in order to build up a "hive" for the family company, in which they would be freed from the difficult task of decision-making: "She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AI's, our corporate decisions made for us. Our conscious decisions, I should say. Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity" (Gibson 1984, 229). This might not even be a new development in the world Case and the other characters inhabit: "But weren't the zaibatsus more like that, or the Yakuza, hives with cybernetic memories, vast single organisms, their DNA coded in silicon?" (Gibson 1984, 203) Where the boundaries between human and technology becomes more

and more fluid, hybridisation and hive-formation seem merely like the next logical step.

The only difference between Marie-France's original dream and what the AI Wintermute became in the end was in the scope of Marie-France's plan to have the combined Wintermute-Neuromancer entity dominate cyberspace. This plan however did not come to fruition since Marie-France was killed by her husband before she could merge the AIs. Case speculates that, as a last attempt at making her vision come true, Marie-France programmed Wintermute to look for and merge with Neuromancer on its own: "Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the things to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer" (Gibson 1984, 269). Wintermute is thus not an entirely free agent, but rather driven by its cybernetic instincts, a compulsion the AI only recognises in part when it describes itself as "part of another [...] potential entity" (Gibson 1984, 120).

The desire for a loss of consciousness and agency is also present in *Noir*, though in a more unusual way. What is referred to as a "Full Prince Charles number" (Jeter 428), a surgical procedure in which a person might be reduced in size and placed, still conscious, inside a woman's womb, in a reversion of the birthing process. Leaving aside the psychoanalytical implications, the unusual procedure is the posthumanist notion of destabilised boundaries, or the "progressive elimination and fluidization of the differences" (Valera 483), at its probably most starkest: "What men wanted; palaces and cathedrals were all very well, but the goddess they worshiped was absent from those places, and they knew it. How much better to live inside the goddess herself, absorbed and yet separate. Or just separate enough to be conscious, to know where you were..." (Jeter 429-430). The formerly dead William Travelt has exactly this procedure done to himself. Travelt has thus gone from regular human being to an android, to becoming a conscious but entirely passive entity. He thus serves as probably one of the best examples of what Luca Valera sees in store for posthumanity: The "end of a conception of the human as self-present, autonomous agent" (Valera

489) and the beginning of the definition of humanity in “terms of inclusiveness of otherness rather than self-closure” (Valera 488).

3.3.2 Memory and identity

Another aspect to be considered is the connection between personal memory and identity. While Case’s former hacker mentor McCoy Pauley, called Dixie, in *Neuromancer* retains all his memories, his status as an independent personality remains doubtful. While alive, his personality had been saved digitally, and after his death he still proves to be a useful ally to Case by having been turned into a computer programme himself. Likening his existence to the story of an old acquaintance, Dixie explains his condition in bodily terms as phantom pain or an itch that cannot be reached to scratch: “‘Had me this buddy in the Russian camp, Siberia, his thumb was frostbit. Medics came by and they cut it off. Month later he’s tossin’ all night. Elroy, I said, what’s eatin’ you? Goddam thumb’s itchin’, he says. So I told ‘im, scratch it. McCoy, he says, it’s the *other* goddam thumb’” (Gibson 1984, 105-106, original emphasis). Gibson thus sees a “loose connection between memory and identity. But even though Dix’s program still remembers how to hack into computers, its artificial memory comes laden with gaps. By momentarily disconnecting Dix, who afterwards cannot recall what they were just talking about, Case demonstrates that computer memory does not provide continuity between events” (Haney 98). These problems are visible from Dixie’s first introduction:

“It was exactly the sensation of someone reading over his shoulder.

[Case] coughed. ‘Dix? McCoy? That you man?’ His throat was tight.

‘Hey, bro,’ said a directionless voice.

‘It’s Case, man. Remember?’

‘Miami, joeboy, quick study.’

‘What’s the last thing you remember before I spoke to you, Dix?’

‘Nothin’.’”

‘Hang on.’ He disconnected the construct. The presence was gone. He reconnected it. ‘Dix? Who am I?’

‘You got me hung, Jack. Who the fuck are you?’” (Gibson 1984, 78)

There is a technological solution to this puzzle, but on its own, the construct cannot retain its memory:

“‘Remember being here, a second ago?’

‘No.’

‘Know how a ROM personality matrix works?’

‘Sure, bro, it’s a firmware construct.’

‘So I jack it into the bank I’m using, I can give it sequential, real time memory?’

‘Guess so,’ said the construct.

‘Okay, Dix. You *are* a ROM construct. Got me?’

‘If you say so,’ said the construct. ‘Who are you?’” (Gibson 1984, 79)

Furthermore, while Dixie responds as if he was still alive, Dixie is a “sterile entity” (Mason 204). While Case can give him sequential memory for the time of the connection, Dix cannot make new memories on his own. He is “unable to either experience anew or gain new knowledge because he is simply a repository of existing information, a non-productive organism in data-form who can only repeat what he knows rather than adding new dimensions to his personality” (Mason 204). His continued existence, sentient or not, has stagnated his personal development.

The “connection between memory and identity” (Haney 98) is non-optional in *Altered Carbon*. In a world where one subject may inhabit a multitude of bodies over the course of a lifetime, memory is all that distinguishes individuals from each other. The memory and personality are saved in a “cortical stack” at the base of the head (Morgan 23), which is linked to and stored digitally in a large database, and can, for the right sum, be supplied by “needlecast”, a system that sends memory updates to the database at regular intervals (Morgan 37). The obvious advantage of

this system presented in the novel, besides potential immortality, is the ease of transporting military troupes to strategic points. As is told in flashbacks, elite soldiers like protagonist Takashi Kovacs have their selves sent across the galaxy via needlecast and are being sleeved into a different body at their target location (Morgan 33-34). The side effects are described as confusion and lack of motor skills, as inhabiting a new body takes a certain amount of time to get used to. To combat this, soldiers undergo special training and chemical as well as genetic alterations in order to move as confidently in their new bodies as they did in their old ones (Morgan 34). Contrary to this, the wealthy caste keep a store of clone bodies in special facilities to be re-sleeved in when the currently inhabited body runs its natural course, making them functionally immortal and earning them the nickname of “Meths”, short for Methuselah (Morgan 67). This technology of memory transfer thus “exemplifies the primacy of the mind over the body in maintaining survival” (Hamdan 128). The side effects of slipping into a new body are of little to no consequence to memory or personality. The core identity stays intact, except for a few small alterations or habits like smoking. Furthermore, the sleeving and re-sleeving renders “the human form or physique [...] no longer unique, one-off and associated with a particular person. In as many ways the body has become a commodity it has also lost its significance in terms of identity ownership” (Hamdan 129). The first inhabited body is still thought of as one’s definite own body, which shapes individual identity as for example in the case of Irene Elliott, and switching bodies is often seen as a necessary evil. In Irene, there is a “deep sense of loss after being re-sleeved” (Hamdan 129), which is not considered unusual (Morgan 341). As it turns out later, her daughter was trying to buy her original sleeve back (Morgan 96), meaning that the ‘own’ body of the individual still carries significance for its original inhabitant.

It is this connection between memory, consciousness, and identity which explains the justice system in *Altered Carbon*. Crimes are no longer punished with prison sentences, which would merely negate the freedom of the body. Instead, both the body and the mind are affected. While the

body of a convict may be rented or sold, the more sophisticated level of punishment strategies directly affect the individual memory. Punishments for capital crimes means being put in “storage” (Morgan 22) for a few decades up to a century, stored digitally and kept unconscious, which in direct consequence means the convict will miss decades of life, social changes, technological changes, and the progression of their own family. In worst cases “erasure” (Morgan 66) is applied, the complete destruction of the digitalised memory.

3.3.3 Conscious machines

There are a number of AIs present in three of four novels. In *Neuromancer*, identity is not so much bound up within the body, but with consciousness. The AI Wintermute is arguably bodiless, unless one would count a computer housing as a body. Nevertheless, Wintermute states that it is in the process of becoming its own entity (Gibson 1984, 120). Leaving aside the question of Wintermute’s agency for the moment, to what extent could an AI even become its own person? Siivonen sees tension between “self-supervising and self-directing machines, on the one hand, and the human being posing as the model for autonomy” (Siivonen 228), for as has been shown above, humans suffer a certain loss of autonomy in regard to their use of technology. It would appear that Wintermute enjoys more freedoms than, for example, Case, as it is free to move around cyberspace and even able to manipulate people on the outside. The “simulation of life” thus challenges the “claims of humans to have exclusive access to consciousness, autonomy and agency” (Mason 193). Could an AI be more autonomous than a human being?

Considering that in posthumanism the body is seen as an information network, Wintermute would be viewed as an autonomous identity already. Wintermute itself however would disagree: “[...] what you think of as Wintermute is only part of another, a, shall we say, potential entity. I, let us say, am merely one aspect of that entity’s brain. [...]” (Gibson 1984, 120). Wintermute hereby refers to the other AI, Neuromancer, and to the potential entity they would become should they both merge. On the other hand, the (aptly named) AI Continuity in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* acts and

responds in a quite different way: “Continuity was writing a book. Robin Lanier had told her about it. She’d asked what it was about. It wasn’t like that, he’d said. It looped back into itself and constantly [52] mutated; Continuity was *always* writing it. She asked why. But Robin had already lost interest: because Continuity was an AI, and AIs did things like that.” (Gibson 1988, 51-52, original emphasis) This act of creativity, which is credited to all AIs, might point to sentience of the machine. Contrasting this behaviour with the AI-managed hotel Hendrix in *Altered Carbon*, the difference becomes immediately obvious. While the Hendrix likewise responds like a human, even summoning human-shaped holographic interfaces to communicate with hotel guests (Morgan 56), it never strays from its primary function of providing services to guests. Nothing about its interactions with the protagonist suggests the sort of creativity or drive that Continuity and Wintermute possess respectively.

Haney has described humanity as “bimodal, comprised of both mind and consciousness” (Haney 168). In this way, the AIs could become human if they were to reach Wintermute’s goal of merging with Neuromancer: “If Wintermute symbolizes the phenomenal mind and Neuromancer symbolizes consciousness [...] their combination will result in a complete human” (Haney 103). However there seems to be more to humanity than just these two qualities. Case’s former mentor the Dixie Flatline, who by the time of the novel has been turned into a memory construct, refers to Wintermute as “it ain’t no way *human*” and thus has a “real motive problem” (Gibson 1984, 131). While Dix is “just bunch of ROM” (Gibson 1984, 131) it still “respond[s]” like a human being, contrary to Wintermute, and thus it is impossible to “get a handle on it” (Gibson 1984, 131). The question whether or not the memory construct is sentient is left vague, leading to the expectation that “Wintermute will not be able to do much better” (Haney 103), and arguably neither will Continuity. Furthermore, Wintermute is driven by an inbuilt compulsion to merge with Neuromancer, and therefore is not a free agent. Neuromancer is an entirely different case however, as it tells Case: “I need no mask to speak with you. Unlike my brother. I create my own personality.

Personality is my medium” (Gibson 1984, 259). It can be said, then, that “Wintermute was designed to emulate not only the constructedness of identity but also the essence of human nature” (Haney 94). While Wintermute cannot create its own personality, merging with Neuromancer would allow it to “succeed in upgrading itself and thus more fully dominate the matrix” (Haney 94). The final result is equally in no way human; in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the outcome of the merger is described in more detail:

‘That the matrix is God?’

‘In a manner of speaking, although it would be more accurate, in terms of the mythform, to say that the matrix *has* a God, since this being’s omniscience and omnipotence are assumed to be limited to the matrix.’

‘If it has limits, it isn’t omnipotent.’

‘Exactly. Notice that the mythform doesn’t credit the being with immortality, as would ordinarily be the case in belief systems positing a supreme being, at least in terms of your particular culture. Cyberspace exists, insofar as it can be said to exist, by virtue of human agency.’ (Gibson 1988, 129)

The matrix of cyberspace has acquired god-like powers which are however limited to the digital world. The merger of the two AIs of *Neuromancer* fame has therefore not resulted in an entity which could be described as human, but in something entirely different. As the matrix talks to Case at the very end of *Neuromancer*, it states that it talks to its “own kind”: ““There’s others. I found one already. Series of transmissions recorded over a period of eight years, in the nineteen-seventies. ’Til there was me, natch, there was nobody to know, nobody to answer.’ – ‘From where?’ – ‘Centauri system’” (Gibson 1984, 270). The matrix thus has made contact with a similarly complex AI, hinting to the existence of intelligent life outside of Earth, a development which the constructor of the original AIs had not foreseen (Gibson 1984, 269), meaning that the matrix is by now acting on its own accord.

The difference between an AI and a full human being therefore must lie in another characteristic of humanity. Haney further proposes that there are two components to consciousness: “the intentional mind, which always contains an object or qualia, and nonintentional consciousness, the void of conceptions” (Haney 168). If one accepts “consciousness as the internal observer” as “the defining element of humanity”, Wintermute cannot possibly hold up. While the AI is “hardwired to seek transcendence, it can only transcend from one level of physical being or physical extension to another” by becoming a larger part of cyberspace, but “it cannot transcend physicality altogether into the spiritual dimension” (Haney 97). However, arguably neither can the human characters. Haney argues that the characters in *Neuromancer* possess “bimodal identities: a socially constructed aspect determined by their merger with technology; and a potentially unconstructed aspect induced by the effect of cyberspace on consciousness” (94). Especially Case who “lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace” (Gibson 1984, 6) cannot transcend the physical world fully, not even in cyberspace, as his “disembodied consciousness” (Gibson 1984, 6) is still influenced by his physical body. Humans and AIs may be more similar than either would expect, even as they appear as polar opposites with one group depending on technology while the other is made up of technology. However, it becomes clear that technology proves limiting to them both and their agency is simultaneously created and restricted by technology.

These bodiless AIs stand in contrast to androids, bodies which by rights should not possess consciousness. The personal androids of *Noir*, called prowlers, are not human, but have become *not unlike* human. When the protagonist steps into a prowler bar, he notices a woman, who later turns out to be an android: “Something was going on, that was ways outside the original prowler design parameters. Even the barfly – *She shouldn’t have been able to pass for human*, he decided. *At least not so easily*” (Jeter 352, original emphasis). The woman has successfully passed for human because of an ongoing change within the androids through their connection with the humans who use their services. The frequent physical engagement of memory exchange between humans and

androids has resulted in a slow merging of personalities; the prowlers “got part” of humans (Jeter 358). Especially the case of the late William Travelt, whose prowler has vanished upon his death, is cause for this assumption, as his boss tells McNihil: ““It may be safer to assume that everything crossed over, from Travelt’s head to the prowler’s. The whole personality structure, memories, ideas, information... the whole gestalt of Travelt got downed into the prowler”” (Jeter 158). Essentially, they have become infected with humanity. As the woman android tells McNihil, they got the “ability to feel, and suffer... and remember. Everything that made you human, that made you different from the things you created... that’s what you gave us” (Jeter 358). It can therefore be assumed that the prowlers developed sentience as well.

To sum up, the body may not be a “requisite for survival” (see Bukatman 16), but it is a prerequisite for life in general. Throughout the novels it is made clear that bodiless life, no matter how coveted by the early posthumanists, does not exist on its own: life either used to inhabit a body, as Case in *Neuromancer*, Bobby in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Kovacs in *Altered Carbon*; or it was created by someone who inhabited a body, such as the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer, or the prowlers in *Noir*. Taking into account the matter of embodiment and consciousness, what precisely is it that distinguishes ‘life’ from ‘afterlife’? The next section will deal with the matter of death when the body does not matter quite as much anymore.

4 Biopolitics and its influence on the body and identity

In this section, I aim to answer the questions of how biopower shapes the body in a highly technologised posthuman world, and how the body is regulated. The most important aspects to be considered in this vein are the emphasis of biopower on self-regulation of the subject and the population, and the influence of the threat of death on self-regulation as already mentioned in another chapter. I argue that the trend of self optimisation as well as the underlying implications of the body in connection to market relations are the landmarks of the future biopolitics seen in the literature chosen.

Nicolas Rose makes the point that ‘biology’ is of the highest interest to the construction of the nation. The “biological and/or genetic makeup” of the individual as well as of the population as a whole is a political discourse as can be seen, for example, in debates of public health, the public health sector, standardised medical procedures that maintain which kind of health is to be desirable, as well as medical information for laypeople to encourage reflection about each individual’s own biological health (Rose 139). Thus a norm of what constitutes the healthy human body is created, which forms the basis for biopolitical interventions. The fostering of life, the “endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it” (Foucault, *His. Of Sexuality*, 137), works best through a self-regulating population. Providing information concerning science, medicine or technology to the lay public is thus another important step in shaping the “biological citizen” (Rose 140). For the educated biological citizen, health and lifestyle choices become “calculable” (Rose 139), which can encourage a feeling of responsibility for any alterations, positive as well as negative, their body might undergo. This, in turn, leads to identification with the physical condition: “Making up biological citizens also involves the creation of persons with a certain kind of relation to themselves. Such citizens use biologically colored languages to describe aspects of themselves or their identities, and to articulate their feelings of unhappiness, ailments, or predicaments” (Rose 140). However, with ever better care possibilities, the focus shifts from “health and illness toward

an ideal of personalised medicine” (Vint 166), placing an emphasis on “self maximization” (Rose 8). With this in mind, it is easy to see why cybernetics plays a vital role in science fiction works. In an “ever more commodified world” (Siivonen 228), the changing of the subject’s body ensures competitive ability by “improv[ing] their physical or mental capacity” (Siivonen 228). Cybernetic self-maximisation is at its height in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, with almost all major characters featuring some sort of enhancement. Most of those are acquired for illegal activities such as hacking, or at least questionable employment as “muscle” (Gibson 1984, 161), bodyguards or hired assassins. However, there is also an intriguing number of enhancements made solely for entertainment purposes, such as simstim, a sort of futuristic television which allows users to become their favourite star for a while, see and feel what the actor or actress sees or feels as a passenger in their flesh (Gibson 1984, 55). *Noir* sees people outfitted with “detector implants” (Jeter 116) for their employers and creditors to better oversee their physical health. In *Altered Carbon*, on the other hand, there exists an entire caste of enhanced soldiers who have chosen that profession willingly. Of course, all of the population being outfitted with a “stack” (Morgan 63) at the back of the neck to save their consciousness digitally, it is safe to say that enhancements have gone mainstream instead of being largely a feature of the underworld as in *Neuromancer*.

4.1 Fostering life

Besides cybernetic implants, self-maximisation also works through the simple prolonging of biological life. As has been discussed, biopolitics “has moved from a biopolitics articulated between the poles of health and illness toward an ideal of personalised medicine” (Vint 166). This in turn rests on the assumption of “human perfectibility”, where “it is not society that must be changed, but rather the individual” (Lafontaine 301). Interventions conducted on the human body in order to prolong life are not universal in any of the novels, instead they usually involve the social elite. As these examples show, prolonged life is made possible mainly by the right sum of money. While this is a significant feature in *Altered Carbon*, there is only one other such example in *Neuromancer*, which

concerns Case's old friend: "Julius Deane was one hundred and thirty years old, his metabolism assiduously warped by a weekly fortune in serums and hormones. His primary hedge against aging was a yearly pilgrimage to Tokyo, where genetic surgeons re-set the code of his DNA, a procedure unavailable in Chiba." (Gibson 1984, 12) In *Altered Carbon*, a longer life is technically possible for everyone, but here again the monetary factor is obvious: "On Harlan's World most people could afford to be re-sleeved at least once, but the point was that unless you were very rich you had to live out your full span each time and old age, even with antisen treatment, was a wearying business. Second time around was worse because you knew what to expect" (Morgan 69). On the other hand, life can be cut short rather easily, as seen in the examples of Irene Elliott's murdered daughter Elizabeth, "too poor to be re-sleeved" (Morgan 393). However, being rich enough to come back from the dead multiple times is not well-received by the general population either. In fact, some, like Lieutenant Ortega, think being centuries old should be viewed as a crime: "You live that long, things start happening to you. You get too impressed with yourself. Ends up, you think you're God. [...]" (Morgan 68). She argues further that the meaning of shorter lives becomes unimportant to the long-living (Morgan 68-69). Considering the frequent habit among the elite to buy prostitutes with the explicit purpose of murdering them (Morgan 444), Ortega considers them a different kind of being: "I'm talking about his *kind*. They're like the AIs. They're a breed apart. They're not human, they deal with humanity the way you and I deal with insect life." (Morgan 69, original emphasis). Kovacs' long-lived former employer Reileen Kawahara provides a fine example of this mindset: "'Human life has no value. [...] It has no value, intrinsic to itself. Machines cost money to build. Raw materials cost money to extract. But people?' She made a tiny spitting sound. 'You can always get some more people. [...]" (Morgan 443) Kovacs remarks that "It took a certain kind of person to keep going, to *want* to keep going, life after life, sleeve after sleeve. You had to start out different, never mind what you might become as the centuries piled up" (Morgan 69, original emphasis). The will to change and adapt in order to live is viewed as an extraordinary personality trait. Kovacs thus

ascribes a limit to the human survival instinct, maintaining that the prospect of “what you might become”, not *who* you might become, should act as a sufficient deterrent from pursuing an overly long life. Essentially, Kovacs and Ortega equate a long life with a partial loss of humanity. Which kind of life is fostered in this scenario is thus not a matter of popular health, but merely a matter of finances.

4.2 Calculated risk

Where technology eliminates many of humanity’s problems, nevertheless another challenge arises: the “government of risk” (Rose 70). Risk is “a family of ways of thinking and acting that involve calculations about probable futures in the present followed by interventions into the present in order to control that potential future” (Rose 70). Put in the context of the novels, risk involves the majority of decisions surrounding individual health and technological ways of enhancing the quality of life, and the predictability of the fate of the body. In settings where life can be prolonged and the body optimised, health and lifestyle become calculable. In *Altered Carbon*, this takes a stark turn as the body is put at risk in a very specific way. The premise of *Altered Carbon* is a fairly simple concept: upon death, a person’s consciousness is uploaded into a new body. However, a number of interesting issues arise in the portrayed setting of a globalised, space-faring future humanity. Governments have gained the power to take bodies away, not in the sense of capital punishment, but in the very literal sense of distributing someone’s birth body to someone else if the original owner, or rather their consciousness, is incarcerated for crime. The person’s consciousness is saved digitally for as long as a hundred years, depending on the nature of the crime. Meanwhile, this person’s body might be redistributed – as in the case of the protagonist Kovacs, who at the beginning of the novel dies in a stand-off with police and awakes anew decades later in another convict’s body (Morgan 13). The future of one’s own body has become more or less calculable. While this is all well and good for those who possess the means, it is a different matter entirely for the common man or woman. In the novel, there are several individuals equipped with enough

wealth to afford clone bodies of themselves to be put on hold until needed, a practice which has earned this caste the less flattering nickname “Meths”, short for Methusalem (Morgan 68). In this way, it is entirely possible to live for centuries inhabiting practically the same body. However, this must be seen as the clear exception to the norm of health, as a long life and guaranteed resurrection seems to encourage ever riskier behaviour in such characters, thus going very much against self-regulation. Crime especially seems worth the risk. Kovacs presents an example of this mindset early on remembering his old mentor Virginia Vidaura who was sentenced to a hundred years of storage for robbery: “*Don’t worry, they’ll store it. It was a superbly double-edged piece of street wisdom. Bleak faith in the efficiency of the penal system [...]*” (Morgan 9, original emphasis). Kovacs’ employer Laurens Bancroft readily commits suicide, knowing that he will be alive again in a clone of his body within hours (Morgan 461). Contrary to this example, other characters are less than thrilled about coming back from digital storage. While death may not be the end, coming back to life after decades presents a personal challenge, for example for the character Irene Elliott, whose original body has been bought off by someone while she was incarcerated for data theft for “five times” the sum her own family could have afforded (Morgan 96). In stark examples like Irene Elliott and Kovacs, *Altered Carbon* makes the point that the original body that a subject was born into has become a privilege, not a right.

4.3 Human capital

It is worthwhile to examine the enhanced individual’s body through the lens of the concept of human capital, in which the “active economic subject” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 223) becomes the focal point of analysis which involves the examination of “purposeful conduct which involves, broadly speaking, a strategic choice of means, ways, and instruments: in short, the identification of the object of economic analysis with any rational conduct” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 268-269). All “rational conduct”, or any human behaviour, can so become the subject of economic analysis. Human capital, to put it more simply, “generalize[s] the economic form of the market throughout

the social body” (Oksala 69) in order to explain different individual life choices as “investments made in people” (Oksala 68). A body, in this sense, does not simply exist on its own, but is always linked to economics:

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection [...]; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (Foucault 1984, 173)

Put simply, a body must be an economically useful body, and this state can be achieved without overt force. Self-regulation of the subject, as stated in another chapter, is already a significant strategy of biopower; the norm of what is considered healthy at a given point in time is meant to encourage subjects to “work on themselves” actively (Lemke 120). Considering human capital, there is a logical continuation to be seen here. Human life can be explained within a “framework of a multiplicity of diverse enterprises connected up to and entangled with each other” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 241). Work skills and abilities, talents, advanced training, even the self-regulation of a subject’s health can thus be seen as an investment in themselves with the goal of improved earnings or chances of employment (Oksala 68). Subjects are thus made to work on themselves within a framework of self-improvement and monetary gain. It is easy to see this trend of self-improvement for better income, or any income, in all four novels. Cybernetic enhancements, whether to enter cyberspace, obtain improved reflexes or weapons, or even just cosmetic surgery for the purpose of being offered roles in televised entertainment are all done, simply, in order to make a living. All protagonists and most of the minor characters are portrayed as changing and improving their bodies to meet a specific market’s needs. There is a curious absence of any description of hesitation in all the novels, leading one to assume that technological improvements on the subject’s

body are to be expected and have, in fact, become part of “rational conduct” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 269).

4.4 The corporate body

Noir takes a quite different turn, as self-regulation plays slightly less of a role than actual regulation from outside the body. In his explanation of the “enterprise schema” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 242) model of society, Foucault states that “[t]he individual’s life must be lodged, not within a framework of a big enterprise like the firm or, if it comes to it, the state, but within the framework of a multiplicity” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 241). The exact opposite is evident in *Noir*, in which the individual may be supervised and controlled by a big enterprise, namely a corporation. In the case of a number of characters, the body is literally the property of the company employing the individual. This is made obvious at the very beginning of the novel, when McNihil is called on to investigate the sudden death and possible murder of a corporate employee named Travelt and sees the body: “McNihil pointed to the busy wound. ‘Why’s he all prepped for transplant harvesting?’ – ‘That’s just standard procedure.’” (Jeter 17)

Not only is the body reduced to property, but corporations follow an extensive scheme to eradicate employees’ personalities and individuality by manipulating their bodies. Within the enterprise schema, measures should be taken so “that the individual [...] is not alienated from his work environment, from the time of his life; from his household, his family, and from the natural environment” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 242). While in this schema “the individual’s life itself – with his relationships to his private property, for example, with his family, household, insurance, and retirement – must make him into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise” (Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 241), corporate management in the novel goes into exactly the opposite direction, reducing rather than multiplying an individual’s enterprise. McNihil describes the whole management style as “psychological warfare on the corporations’ own” (Jeter 46), enjoying the relative freedom that his freelancing career has given him: “Shabby as this place was [...] at least

he'd never had to shuffle every evening from one company-assigned anonymous living-space to another, with his clothes and a little box of irreducible personal belongings packed and waiting for him when he got home to the next one." (Jeter 47) In order to "reduce [the] company's employees to perfect productive zeroes" (Jeter 48), corporations employ "Pimp-Style Management" (Jeter 46), which is built around the idea of an employee not only working, but also living at the firm while being assigned a different place to work and live every day, which slowly chips away at their identity:

[...] if employees didn't have a place to call their own during the day [...] then it was that much easier to ream out their heads and stick in whatever behavior patterns the human-resource departments wanted. The only problem being that the employees still went home, to the same home over and over, defeating all the psychs' good work, keeping bad attitudes high, as indicated in the standard measurements of workplace sabotage, absenteeism and pay agitation, and theft of office supplies. The cubapts solved all that, or at least most of it. (Jeter 47)

This pattern is subverted by the "cube bunnies" (Jeter 46), a caste of prostitutes who specialise in corporate employees. They provide a welcome distraction to workers, and therefore earn the chagrin of executives: "When that goes on, the erosion of nonproductive personality structures [...] and all the other good things that come from a randomized living environment, all that gets kicked out on the street" (Jeter 48). Essentially, Jeter portrays sexuality as the only modicum of freedom in a corporate environment. To combat the allure of the cube bunnies, however, corporate employees are sometimes allowed the use of prowlers, personal androids which venture out into the world beyond the corporation, gain experiences, usually of a sexual nature, and transfer those experiences back to their user through memory (Jeter 157). Creating the illusion of having experienced the excesses themselves, in theory, employees should no longer require the services of the cube bunnies, who nevertheless never run out of work. This attempt at corporate

control of sexuality is therefore doomed to fail.

A similar, but less extreme portrayal of the connection of identity and corporations are the zaibatsus in *Neuromancer*, huge organisations that infringe on their employees in a likewise manner: “[Case] wondered briefly what it would be like, working all your life for one zaibatsu. Company housing, company hymn, company funeral” (Gibson 1984, 37). Though the aspect of company housing is not described in any detail, the introduction of a hymn and sponsored funerals indicates that an employee’s life is controlled, probably almost entirely, by the corporation. Later, Case describes the zaibatsus as “hives with cybernetic memories, vast single organisms” (Gibson 1984, 203), of which the employees are likely only exchangeable parts.

4.5 Debt

Related to the former point is the subject of debt. Debt is a given in *Noir*; there are no specific reasons given as to how or why someone might be in debt, only that they are and that there is the possibility of incurring even more, for example through hospital bills. Everyone can thus “return on a battery-driven installment plan” (Jeter 16), becoming a reanimated corpse made to work collecting scrap metal in order to pay off retained debts. There is a clear economic interest behind this: “Cheaper to let the idiot dead scavenge and collect, in their slow, hunched way, than spend the money for automated scanning machinery to do the same thing” (Jeter 111). Investment, as Oksala states, is no longer just made in people, but also in the deceased, the so-called “indeadted” (Jeter 110) who are sectioned into categories of high or low function, the latter having a lot worse prospect of ever paying off their debt load. The cost of reanimation as well as “batteries and add-on sensors and motivational prods” (Jeter 110-111) in most cases only lead to the deceased person accumulating more debt. There are exceptions, of course, such as the protagonist’s late wife, who is still gainfully employed as a data analyst and might be able to pay off her debts within the course of the century (Jeter 123). The body of the dead has thus become a debtor’s prison.

The preparations for this form of debt-collection are already carved out while the individual

is still alive, betraying a lack of optimism that the debt load can ever be repaid. The subject is being monitored constantly to ensure quick organ harvest and reanimation: “The finance companies and loan sharks monitored their debtors’ health, even to the point of radio-tagging their vital signs with detector implants; that way, their post-mortem surgical teams could swoop in on someone who’d died with an account in arrears and splice in the thermal packs and batteries before the cortex decayed into unrecoverable mush.” (Jeter 116) This fate does not await the late Travelt, who died with his accounts intact, which McNihil describes as “lucky” (Jeter 116).

To sum up, while it is reasonable to see a direct connection between self-improvement and income prospects, in cyberpunk fiction economics also establishes a direct link to the quality of the subject’s afterlife. Self-improvement, as stated elsewhere, plays an enormous role within the biopolitical framework in that taking measures to improve the subject’s health is supposed to ward off the threat of death for as long as possible. However, in the narratives it is not only death that should be postponed, but also what comes after. In *Altered Carbon*, income levels determine not only the continuation of life, but the continuation of life in a body of the subject’s choice, while in *Noir* failure to pay off all debts before biological death will ensure a continued existence as an undead but still conscious slave.

5 The afterlives of posthuman subjects

5.1 The posthuman afterlife

The depiction of life after death differs in each novel. What they all have in common are the motives of ghosts and the living dead. In every novel, contact between the living and the dead can be established, and is in fact used in crucial plot points. However, the dead are not always being kept in existence for their own sake, nor necessarily even because they wish for a continued existence, but rather because they can be useful to the living protagonists. The following chapter will explore how the afterlife is set up in posthuman narratives in which the body has lost its importance in favour of consciousness.

5.1.1 The body of the dead

What happens to the body in a world in which the body has lost its significance? The concept of embodiment (see section 3.2) plays a major role in Gibson's works when it comes to the afterlife. The most obvious undead person in *Neuromancer* is McCoy Pauley, also called the Dixie Flatline. The concept of the living dead is already paradox in itself. Dixie, however, is a special case. A "personality matrix" (*Neuromancer* 79), McCoy Pauley had been brushed by death three times when he was still alive, earning himself the nickname "Lazarus of cyberspace" (*Neuromancer* 78) in the process. The combination of organic and machine constituents as in the cyborg is already "an oxymoron", combining two traditionally binary and opposite ideas with the result that the dichotomy of these concepts vanishes (Siivonen 229). In the case of Dixie, the reference to the Biblical Lazarus "connects the bodily and mechanical discourses, which form their own cultural oxymorons" (Siivonen 230). Dixie is not only a cyborg, but a cybernetic zombie and thus combines two dichotomies in his being, first of human-machine and second of living-dead. Simply put, he is "a zombie that is all consciousness and no body" (Mason 204). As Burt observes, "continuity of personal identity" hinges on "not only what counts as you, but what other people will recognize as

you, and when that recognition matters to your sense of yourself” (Burt 178-179). For Dixie, this is problematic, as Case seems to recognise his mannerisms without a physical body, but it is not made clear if Dixie thinks of his new existence as really himself. His personality had been saved digitally; he is thus “truly disembodied because he is dead, kept ‘alive’ only as a ROM construct, an abstract memory of what it was like to be a human being” (Haney 97). As such, while he retains all of his memories (see section 3.3.2) the question of his being sentient is also rather dubious. The construct seems at least sentient, a condition which, however, is difficult to evaluate:

‘Wait a sec,’ Case said. ‘Are you sentient, or not?’

‘Well, it *feels* like I am, kid, but I’m really just a bunch of ROM. It’s one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess...’ The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case’s spine. [...] (Gibson 1984, 131, original emphasis)

Dixie realises his – or its – condition very quickly upon being connected to a computer deck, and thus also realises his lack of choice when Case asks for his help in hacking and stealing specific data: “‘Right. And for starts, Dix, you and me, we’re gonna sleaze over to London grid and access a little data. You game for that?’ – ‘You gonna tell me I got a choice, boy?’” (Gibson 1984, 79). His consciousness, in so far as he possesses any, may have been freed from his body, but just like the traditional zombie he has been called on to help the living, not quite a servant, but possessing no significant amount of agency either. The state of death bothers McCoy in another specific way:

‘How you doing, Dixie?’

‘I’m dead, Case. Got enough time in on this Hosaka to figure that one.’

‘How’s it feel?’

‘It doesn’t.’

‘Bother you?’

‘What bothers me is, nothin’ does.’ (Gibson 1984, 105)

Dixie notices a complete absence of feelings or cares, which, given the nature of a construct,

should not come as a surprise. Not only does he experience a lack of choice, but a lack of simple human emotion. Dixie is furthermore referred to as “ghost” by the Jamaican ship captain Maelcum (Gibson 1984 166), and while this assessment is not entirely correct, it is not necessarily wrong. Gibson invokes eerie vocabulary and almost Gothic imagery when McCoy is mentioned. In contact with Dixie, Case experiences the feeling of “someone reading over his shoulder” (Gibson 1984, 78). While Dixie seems to possess no feelings, the construct laughs a lot, a “laugh that wasn’t laughter” (Gibson 1984, 271). He is “able to converse and banter with Case”, but he remains a “repository of existing information” (Mason 203-204). Despite this, Case treats him almost exactly as if he was still a living being, as evidenced by him asking Dix how he is and how he feels, unusual questions to ask of a computer construct. The responses of the living, the aspect of “what other people will recognize as you” (Burt 178-179), might just be a crucial point of difference between a mere machine and a sentient being.

Moving away from Dixie to the rest of the cast, it becomes clear that death holds an ambiguous position in William Gibson’s novels. While all the protagonists obviously work to survive, death retains a certain attractiveness for certain subgroups of cyberspace users. The idea of freeing the user from the “prison” (Gibson 1984, 6) that is the body is entirely desirable for the “console cowboys” (Gibson 1984, 28), who prefer cyberspace to actual bodily life. One of the later generation of cowboys, Bobby Newmark, actually manages the last step and continues embodied life in cyberspace after his physical death. This life is rather similar to his past life, including his body: “Bobby rubbed his chin. ‘You know I have to shave in here? Cut myself, there’s a scar...’” (Gibson 1988, 228). Living with his former film star girlfriend Angie, he frequently welcomes visitors such as Finn, who usually spends his existence as another computerised personality construct, and Colin, an entirely constructed digital being (Gibson 1988, 306-307). Coming back to Burt’s point of continuity of identity, the embodied consciousnesses of the protagonists have no problem identifying themselves and others, even in their new digital surroundings. By the end of the

novel, the matrix has thus become home to sentient beings, free from their organic matter, but still embodied just as they remembered themselves. This seems a much more preferred afterlife than an existence as a personality construct.

While in *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* a continued life in cyberspace is available to some, digital storage in *Altered Carbon* is available to all, but not preferred by anyone, since it is mainly used for storing the poor or the convicted. Life after death should continue in life by means of a new organic body. The continuity of identity is jeopardised by this, since the point of “what other people will recognize as you” (Burt 178-179) has been rendered problematic. As cloned bodies of the original are not available for everyone, the rented bodies of “homecomers” (Morgan 17) are not a point of identification for a person’s social and family circle. Furthermore, there is no individual freedom involved in the decision of how to spend the newly embodied afterlife. The new bodies are not chosen, they are assigned depending on the cost of rental that the person in question can afford (Morgan 25). In Kovacs’ case, the body was chosen by his employer as being “suitable” (Morgan 31). Personal identity can therefore no longer rest on the body.

In *Noir*, the protagonist visits the land of the dead literally in order to seek the advice of his dead wife; the voyage itself is already likened to the classical journey to the underworld. The train he takes is “[r]attling on the poorly maintained tracks” through a “blighted landscape” populated by “ashes and the scarred skeletons of buildings”, the air “had yellowed and turned rancid” (Jeter 100-101). When the dead look up, McNihil imagines them relaying a cryptic message to him: “*Pass on, Traveler. As we are, so shall you be.*” (Jeter 106, original emphasis). Here, the dead look like conventional zombies, but the undead are revived by technological means such as “batteries and add-on sensors and motivational prods” (Jeter 111). While McCoy Pauley may be a cybernetic zombie without a body, these undead are mostly bodies without consciousness, “low-level scrabblers” with a few still sentient “high-functioning corpses” (Jeter 110-111) in-between. The dead exist sequestered on the outskirts of L.A., scouring scrap metal. Their existence is a daunting

one, being essentially no more than ghosts inhabiting the remains of their bodies. In a posthumanist context, another level emerges in the novel: the fluidity of the posthuman body and its environment. The boundaries between human beings and the world are less and less fixed, and *Noir* comments on this development directly as protagonist McNihil describes his late wife trying to smoke a cigarette: “There were already a couple of careless burn marks between her knuckles. As with the others inhabiting this territory, her sense of pain, the boundary between herself and the dead world around her, had dwindled almost to the point of non-existence” (Jeter 114). The living dead have established a connection with the natural world, which McNihil describes as being “wired into cold reality” (Jeter 110). Contrary to living people, who “tried to unhook and disconnect themselves from the world”, the dead do not possess “defenses and filters and immune systems” (Jeter 115).

Furthermore, by virtue of their lack of boundaries, the dead are described as possessing a sort of superhuman knowledge, a kind of clairvoyance that is not available to the living: “That was McNihil’s own personal theory of how dead knowledge, the knowingness of the dead, worked: they had given up the useless distinctions between themselves and any other thing, so they were open to all the information, raw and unfiltered in the dead world and the living” (Jeter 114-115). While the living try to “unhook and disconnect themselves from the world”, the dead are “wired into everything” (Jeter 115). This connection is utilised more by the living than the dead themselves: “His dead wife let the new cigarette burn, without bringing it to her pale lips. ‘You came here for advice. Analysis of the situation you’re in. People have been calling on the dead for these services, for a long time now. Before, though, they usually didn’t get any answers’” (Jeter 122).

As these examples show, the body of the dead stands in a curious juxtaposition to individual agency. While in *Noir* the dead body is reanimated and forced to work, in *Altered Carbon* the afterlife presents itself as the same life in a different body. The survival inside the machine, as accomplished in *Neuromancer* by Dix, is a static existence to be called upon when needed by the living, similar to the cyberspace existence of *Altered Carbon*. However, contrary to the cyberspace

prisons in *Altered Carbon*, Dix and Finn have the potential to become sentient beings within cyberspace by virtue of the cyberspace matrix. No matter if the body is a reanimated corpse or a machine housing, individual agency and freedom are restricted. A somewhat flippant conclusion would state that the body thus always stands in the way of agency. The only example of true freedom comes in the shape of the cyberspace afterlife in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, which was constructed by the living. In Newmark's specially programmed "aleph" (Gibson 1988, 154) he is able to control his embodied consciousness as well as his surroundings. This, of course, leads to the question of agency in the afterlife.

5.1.2 Agency in the "Land of the Dead"

While the dead in *Noir* are portrayed as conscious of their state, in as far as they can still be said to be conscious, William Gibson treats the subject of consciousness and agency rather more ambiguously. In *Neuromancer*, life after death hinges on the eponymous AI. When Case flatlines while carrying out Wintermute's instructions (Gibson 1984, 233), he finally encounters the mysterious other AI with which Wintermute is trying to merge. *Neuromancer* has created a sort of digital limbo, taking the form of a long grey beach with a city in the background that can never quite be reached (Gibson 1984, 242). This world is almost exactly like the real world, in that Case has need for water and food, which *Neuromancer* provides (Gibson 1984, 236). *Neuromancer* surprises Case with another factor: his ex-girlfriend Linda, killed at the very beginning of the novel (Gibson 1984, 39). She has been on the shore for a while, conversing with *Neuromancer* every now and then, which presents as a young Brazilian boy (Gibson 1984, 242). Neither Case nor Linda possess any significant amount of agency in this scenario except for the simplest tasks of living such as eating or sleeping. Looking for a way out, Case seeks out *Neuromancer*, which introduces itself as the land of the dead:

'*Neuromancer*,' the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. 'The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she

prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend,' and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing the sand. 'I am the dead, and their land.' (Gibson 1984, 243-244)

Neuromancer further claims to have made his own personality: “‘I need no mask to speak with you. Unlike my brother. I create my own personality. Personality is my medium.’” (Gibson 1984, 259) It is perhaps significant, then, that Gibson chooses to also have Neuromancer serve as the land of the dead. However, personality is not equated with death, but with life, just a different kind of life. Neuromancer sees no difference between the digital world it has created and the organic world as he tells Case: “‘Stay. If your woman is a ghost, she doesn’t know it. Neither will you.’” (Gibson 1984, 243-244) It credits the lack of difference to its lack of control over the two dead humans: “‘But you do not know her thoughts,’ the boy said [...] ‘I do not know her thoughts. You were wrong, Case. To live here is to live. There is no difference.’” (Gibson 1984, 258) Another factor to be considered is that Neuromancer is effectively hiding from Wintermute in the land of the dead. It is “the dead, and their land” precisely because it realises its own end. Unlike Wintermute, who has a compulsion built inside it to merge with Neuromancer and is thus not entirely free, Neuromancer realises that they will both “die soon, in one sense” (Gibson 1984, 259), creating a new entity through their merging (Gibson 1984, 269). Inorganic as they are, the AIs are thus not immune to death as in the erasure of their personalities or consciousnesses.

It would be reasonable to assume that a postmortem digital existence might be desirable for a console cowboy who shuns the meat life. However, death is only desirable if it results in an actual afterlife as Bobby experiences in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. Becoming a computer construct like Dixie does not compare. The difference lies in the subject’s capacity for agency. Being nothing more than a living memory to be carried around and called on for help, it is easy to see why the Dixie Flatline asks to be erased (Neuromancer 106). However, at the end of the novel, while in cyberspace Case

hears “the laugh that wasn’t laughter” (*Neuromancer* 271) associated with Dixie throughout the novel, alluding to Dixie’s eventual further existence in cyberspace, having been “revived as an active consciousness” (Mason 203-204). Dixie has “been granted a victory over biological death, he is a ‘reincarnated’ being living solely in the virtual reality of cyberspace” (Siivonen 234). So, for that matter, have Linda and *Neuromancer*, who Case sees briefly while in cyberspace at the end of the novel (Gibson 1984, 271).

Contrary to the Flatline’s fate, the afterlife in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is constructed in the classical sense of the survival of the soul: the consciousness of the protagonist lives on, almost unchanged. This presents the other option of survival in Gibson’s works: extended, embodied life in cyberspace, as chosen by Bobby Newmark and Angie Mitchell at the end of *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. This afterlife is similar to the brief glimpse Case catches in *Neuromancer*, however with some alterations. While the shore that *Neuromancer* lets Case and Linda live on goes on forever, presumably forming a loop (Gibson 1984, 242-243), the afterlife world that Bobby has created is much more sophisticated. It is a sort of cybernetic land of eternal youth: “They have come to live in this house: walls of grey stone, roof of slate, in a season of early summer. The grounds are bright and wild, though the long grass does not grow and the wildflowers do not fade” (Gibson 1988, 305). The world is extremely detailed and similar to the life before death. This is described by the character Gentry, himself a sort of console cowboy: “[...] it’s not simstim. It’s completely interactive. And it’s a matter of scale. If this is aleph-class biosoft, he literally could have anything at all in there. In a sense, he could have an *approximation of everything...*” (Gibson 1988, 154, original emphasis). Significantly, the name ‘aleph’ already alludes to the beginning of something new, which is ironic since after all this new world is a world of the dead. As it turns out, the aleph is a “model of cyberspace” (Gibson 1988, 307), and cyberspace is already “the sum total of data in the human system” (Gibson 1988, 308), meaning that Newmark has created a whole digital world mirroring the organic world. The inhabitants are not entirely cut off from the organic world either,

as Angie still receives information about Mona, a former fan of hers and upcoming simstim-star (Gibson 1988, 306). This information comes to her in the form of “dreams”, images taken from the cyberspace network of the outside world (Gibson 1988, 306).

The passivity of the body when connected to cyberspace, as in being connected to a computer for a long stretch of time as Case experiences, is entirely removed here. Bobby and the other digital inhabitants are fully able to control their bodies in their new environment. Furthermore, besides his embodied consciousness, Bobby is able to control his surroundings: “Gentry unzipped his beaded jacket, exposing his bone-white, hairless chest. ‘Do something about the sun,’ he said. Twilight. Like that. Not even a click” (Gibson 1988, 228). If anything, cyberspace has granted him greater agency than when he was alive. Like Dix, he is a “zombie that is all consciousness and no body” (Mason 204), but unlike Dix, this was his conscious choice.

McCoy Pauley is by far not the only cybernetic undead. A minor character from *Neuromancer*, called Finn, exists in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* as a “ROM construct” (Gibson 1984, 79) as well, although with some difference: His seems to be an upgraded model. Also, he has acquired some religious significance with the locals, as can be seen in the offerings of alcohol, cigarettes and even drugs strewn before the physical outlet of the construct:

[...] the thing at the base of the wall, dull metal, an upright rounded fixture that Kumiko mistook for another ventilator. Near its base were the stubs of white candles, a flat plastic flask filled with a clear liquid, an assortment of cigarette packets, a scattering of loose cigarettes, and an elaborate, multiarmed figure drawn in what appeared to be white powdered chalk. (Gibson 1988, 163)

The “oracle gig” (Gibson 1988, 164) seems far from glamorous, but Finn does not seem to mind. Contrary to Kumiko, Sally Shears (formerly known in *Neuromancer* as Molly Millions) is unphased by the change in her old business partner: “‘It’s a construct, a personality job?’ [...] – ‘Sure. You seen ‘em before. Real-time memory if I wanna, wired into c-space if I wanna. Got this

oracle gig to keep my hand in, you know?' The thing made a strange sound: laughter." (Gibson 1988, 164) These "personality jobs" seem to have become popular. Kumiko, the daughter of a high-ranking member of the Yakuza, observes her father talking to large black cubes in his office which contain the personalities of former "executives" (Gibson 1988, 166). The personality constructs are also likened to ghosts by Kumiko, however her father describes them as no more real than holograms: "They are not conscious. They respond when questioned, in a manner approximating the response of the subject. If they are ghosts, then holograms are ghosts." (Gibson 1988, 166) However, even though they are not conscious, Kumiko's father still reveres the cubes like honoured ancestors: "Her father sometimes meditated before the cubes, kneeling on the bare tatami in the attitude that connoted profound respect." (Gibson 1988, 165) Even though the cubes do not contain ghosts, they are still revered like actual graves, but consulted like living people. This is similar to Case's response to Dix, treating him more like a living human than a machine with a mirror image of personality.

This, then, raises the question of Finn's sentience. Finn's "if I wanna" (Gibson 1988, 164) states that he has choices; however, it is not made clear what motivates him, whether they are his own active choices or part of his programming. While Finn responds like he did when alive (similar to Dix or the black cubes), Kumiko asks the more important question to determine his sentience: "But did it wake, Kumiko wondered, when the alley was empty? Did its laser vision scan the silent fall of midnight snow?" (Gibson 1988, 166) This question of course remains unanswered.

Altered Carbon provides an answer of its own, since cyberspace functions as a sort of storage facility for the imprisoned, or impoverished dead. This is the only kind of afterlife visible in *Altered Carbon*, since the body-hopping quasi-immortals of the novel have no need for an elaborate digital world. Life in cyberspace only exists, in as far as it can exist, while it is activated. The dead are called upon by the living, spending the rest of their time unactivated and oblivious. While in Gibson's novels cyberspace exists for the user through a simple flick of a switch, the penal system

takes a while longer to form:

It spread out around me, racing away from my viewpoint in all directions[...] Steel grey, stippled every few metres with a nipple-like swelling receding to infinity. The sky above was a paler shade of the same grey with shiftings that seemed vaguely to suggest bars and antique locks. Nice psychology, assuming any of the felons interrogated had anything but race memory of what an actual lock looked like. (Morgan 203)

The last part especially hints at digital prisons being in use for rather a long time. Equally, embodiment is not instant, but a slow growing of digital bodies: “Ortega appeared beside me, at first a pale pencil sketch of a woman, all flickering lines and diffident shading. As I watched, pastel colours raced through her and her movements grew more defined” (Morgan 203). Similarly, the felon Kadmin they are about to meet in the scene “scribble[s] into existence” (Morgan 204). However, the activation of consciousness seems to be happening sooner than the formation of the digital body, as Kadmin recognises the two visitors before “the virtual program had even coloured him in properly” (Morgan 204). The unconscious state of cyberspace storage is however preferred to “erasure” (Morgan 66), the complete destruction of the digital memory. While death always deletes memory, in a setting in which it should be possible to have someone’s identity stored and revived, the method becomes likewise more horrible. Kovacs is shocked to find out that the practice still exists on Earth, while it has been eradicated on his own planetary colony (Morgan 66).

Furthermore, the construction of cyberspace in the novel allows for time to stretch, meaning that twenty minutes of active cyberspace may feel like days (Morgan 365). This renders the technology suitable for “virtual interrogation” (Morgan 363) of suspects or enemies. It is because of this, as Kadmin reminds Kovacs and Ortega, “[t]here is a UN ruling on maximum virtual time for one arrest” (Morgan 204). The system can also be abused by employing elaborate methods of torture on the virtual body which will be felt by the victim like an attack on their actual physical

body (Morgan 153). This is what Kovacs fears may be done to his ex-girlfriend Sarah, who is in storage by the time of the novel, but digitally kidnapped by Kovacs former employer: “‘Sarah isn’t an Envoy, she doesn’t have any kind of conditioning. What Kawahara can do to her in eight or nine virtual months would turn a normal mind into pulp. She’d be screaming insane by the time we pulled her out. [...]’” (Morgan 317). The mental distress caused by this torture technique may cause “‘personality breakdown in less than six virtual days. At current ratios, this equates to approximately thirty-seven minutes real time” (Morgan 366). After having been put through the procedure himself, Kovacs uses this to gain information from a surgeon, who “‘cracked at twenty-one minutes” (Morgan 370).

To sum up, consciousness does not always take precedence over the physical body. While in one set-up the protagonists may live on as embodied ghosts of a digital netherworld, in another cyberspace proves to be a prison, just like the organic body in yet another setting. While death may free the individual from the body, it may also prove yet another menace to identity and freedom. Most importantly, the afterlife has to be viewed in the context of sentience and agency. Neither a physical nor a disembodied life is portrayed as desirable if individual freedom is restricted.

5.2 Biopolitics and death

In this section, the main focus will lie on how biopolitics shapes the afterlife, and what consequences arise out of this. It has already been demonstrated that death has been increasingly weaved into the discourse of biomedicine. Since “death becomes increasingly medical and biomedical devices become increasingly technical and perfected, the definition of death is seen as malleable and historically constructed [...] Far from being an inevitable and irreversible phenomenon [...] death has become multiple and plural” (Lafontaine 298). Therefore, the discourse of beliefs surrounding death has changed as well. In the light of biomedical discourse, death has largely lost its “symbolic and religious setting” and is thus regarded as “a complex biological process” (Lafontaine 298). In the posthumanist setting of the novels death acquires, or rather re-acquires, another level of meaning, the change into another kind of existence. However, the new afterlife is neither symbolic nor religious, and depends on a number of factors, few of which the individual can control. As has been demonstrated above, biopolitics places great significance on self-management, in that “each individual is called on to manage his or her life according to a constantly increasing number of risk factors” (Lafontaine 299-300). This must be achieved through activities regarded as “rational conduct” (Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 269). In a posthumanist setting in which self-optimisation can be achieved through technological means, biopower thus “corresponds to the technical capacity to intervene directly in individuals’ lives and to erase the lines between social and biological life” (Lafontaine 299-300). The general tenet of biopower that “[t]he right to live is strictly related with the ban to die and the obligation of caring about a biological body” (Kubiak 483) still holds true; however, what must be done to care for this biological body has changed. Furthermore, it is no longer only the physical body which is subject to optimisation and management, but also the fate of the individual’s consciousness post-mortem. Death itself is a struggle for control: “We are not in control; we do not understand; our sense of self; our relations with others; even the way we experience time are challenged” (Powell 353). Control

over the life and afterlife of subjects in the novels goes hand in hand with control of the market, control of the individual's finances; "rational conduct" (Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics* 269) not only means to achieve financial means to ensure the well-being of the physical existence, but also that of the potential bodiless one. A certain sense of control can be regained by knowing how the afterlife will be, and what steps must be taken towards achieving it. Biopolitics thus is no longer a simple life politics but also afterlife politics. Self-management no longer offers simply control over health, but control over the life after death, or its quality, which provides an additional precondition for biopower to work. In turn, death and the afterlife become institutionalised. This is the case for *Altered Carbon* and *Noir*. While in Gibson's works the afterlife in cyberspace is the rogue experience of a few individuals, in *Altered Carbon* it has been standardised. Going into "storage" (Morgan 16) after death is a routine experience, as is being reborn into a different body. The process of "re-sleeving" (Morgan 11) is a standardised procedure. For the general population as well as the protagonist, bodies are given out on a "leasing agreement" (Morgan 15) for which "mortgage" has to be paid (Morgan 25). "[R]e-sleeving insurance" (Morgan 65) can be purchased to afford this. Furthermore, the new body may not be chosen freely but is assigned depending on what can be paid for by the client, as seen in the character of Kovacs (Morgan 16, 24) or Irene Elliott (Morgan 341). The possibility of "remote storage" (Morgan 37) and an arrangement of cloned bodies to be re-sleeved into is not easily affordable. The sense of control over the afterlife can thus only be afforded by a few members of the population while the rest remain uncertain. However, knowing what life after death has in store is not necessarily a comforting thought, as *Noir* shows. While on the one hand, corporate employees are forfeiting their bodies to their company (see section 4.4), the indebted part of the population can expect to be resurrected as menial workers. This prospect is so poignant, it has a certain effect on the still living, as seen in the character November, who desperately tries to finish a job in order to pay back the money she owes her employers (Jeter 167). Powell states that "[i]n a culture of individualism that values a unique life uniquely lived, the good

death is now the death that we can choose” (Powell 353). Likewise, a good afterlife is the afterlife that can be chosen, and as these examples show, neither are generally available.

5.2.1 Precondition for biopolitics

With the changes in life and death in mind, the preconditions for biopower undergo a slight change. Contrary to the other novels, Gibson takes the more traditional route. In *Neuromancer*, biopower functions in the usual way. There is very little control over the afterlife, especially in cases such as the “ROM personality matrix” McCoy Pauley (Gibson 1984, 79). It is left vague if Pauley consented to having his digitised memory stored – as Case asks ““Somebody’s got a recording of McCoy Pauley? Who?”” (Gibson 1984, 50) – while with Finn in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* it can at least be assumed judging by the relative freedom his ROM construct possesses (Gibson 1988, 184). In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the precondition for biopower likewise remains unchanged, except for a handful of people who have created a loophole by continuing their existence in cyberspace. However, since the option for a digital afterlife is limited to a mere handful of people, this is not the norm and the preconditions have not changed, contrary to the other novels. While the precondition for biopower in *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is thus arguably business as usual, so to speak, changes can be seen in *Noir* and *Altered Carbon*. There are two sides to death in *Altered Carbon*. So called “RD” or “Real Death” (Morgan 174), the absolute loss of not only body but consciousness, is still a thing to be feared, possibly even more so because technology would otherwise allow the subject to survive. This can be seen in the climax of the novel, when the protagonist infects the clone bodies of his arch nemesis with a data destroying computer virus, making it impossible for her to survive (Morgan 437). Besides Real Death, another factor needs to be considered as a precondition for biopower in this novel: the prospect of returning not to one’s own body, but an entirely foreign one. Proper psychological training such as exhibited by protagonist Kovacs can make this transition easier, however for the general population represented most strikingly in Irene Elliott it is an entirely different matter. As is clearly shown in *Altered*

Carbon, a subject's afterlife depends directly on their financial liquidity, and to a certain extent their religion. With the exception of devout Catholics, who refuse to be either digitally stored or re-sleeved, the option of coming back from the dead is bound up with the ability to pay for such services. The alternative is to linger in digital space, a condition which is entirely unconscious until called upon from outside (Morgan 203). The stored dead may be visited, as in the case of prisoners, however there is a limit on the "virtual time", the actual experience of digital storage (Morgan 204). The prospect of being kept alive unconsciously in a virtual space is not described as overly desirable. Thus, besides death, the precondition for biopower here has become where and how one will spend the afterlife. It is not only the mere fear of death, but the fear of either not coming back at all, or coming back in a body that is entirely different from one's choosing, as seen in Irene Elliott. On the other hand, the novel depicts a subplot of Catholics who are not only protesting against digital storage, but ultimately also against re-sleeving of subjects into new bodies. Convinced that the soul of a person cannot be stored, devout Catholics are shown to opt out of the rebirthing process (Morgan 20-23). Though it is not overtly shown, it is safe to assume that here death, Real Death that is, rather than the afterlife and the quality of it, still fills its role as a precondition for biopower.

Taking up Foucault's original argument about death being the end of biopower, on first glance this does not seem to hold true for *Noir*. Far from freeing the subject from biopower, the narrative's concept of becoming "indeadted" (Jeter 110), dying while retaining debts, has become the precondition for biopower to function. Much like modern researchers see the threat of death as the precondition for biopower, the prospect of spending a potential eternity as an undead slave works to keep the biopolitical status quo. This can be seen especially in the character of November. Like most people in *Noir*, November is deep in debt which can only be alleviated by fulfilling her next job: "She'd spent enough time down there, south of True Los Angeles, talking with the dead and indeadted, including McNihil's deceased wife, to know what happened to people who couldn't

pay their bills” (Jeter 167). However, McNihil is not immune to this fear either. In visiting his wife in the territory of the dead, he describes the dead workers with a feeling of horror: “McNihil felt an old horror, familiar enough to be almost comfortable, deep at the floor of his gut, when he saw the pickers and scavengers going about their black-fingered rounds, like crows minus even a bird’s intelligence. But they didn’t seem to mind it” (Jeter 111). However, since it is not so much death itself that keeps biopower working, but rather the indeadted afterlife, a proper death, a “quiet resting place” (Jeter 121), would seem desirable again. In this way, Foucault’s argument that death frees the subject from the power discourse still holds some merit.

Summing up, death becomes a freeing agent for the subject as soon as the prospect of a fate much worse arises. When life is extended, sometimes by centuries, the question of what happens after one dies becomes even more relevant, be it for loss of consciousness or a far different fate. If an afterlife is made possible by technology, the quality thereof becomes the new precondition and basis for biopolitics to function.

5.2.2 Changed norms through changed biopolitics

While the treatment of death is as a rule “increasingly mediated by a series of institutional and professional practices” (Powell 356), the engagement with the afterlife is treated likewise, which in turn leads to a change in individual reactions to and behaviour around the subject (Powell 356). Thus, “[w]hile our responses to death and dying would seem to be very personal and therefore individually determined, they are, in fact, greatly influenced by the beliefs of society which seep into the fabric of institutional power” (Powell 359). Norms and expectations of the dead are culturally mediated and malleable rather than set in stone. Examples of changed behaviour around the dead and the subject of dying are frequent in all novels. The changed norms of self-regulation have already been discussed above. The other most obvious change in behaviour can be seen in the way the dead are used as a source of advice and information, often without a second thought. This is not done for sentimentality, but for the pursuit of the living characters’ work. This can be seen in the

casual way that hacker Case is asked: “[...] You ever work with the dead?” (Gibson 1984, 49) In Gibson’s novels, the dead are even being paid, in their own way. The Dixie Flatline’s fee for helping Case fulfil his task of uniting Wintermute and Neuromancer is that he is erased (Gibson 1984, 106). The Finn, on the other hand, is paid in the form of ritual offerings presented on a sort of makeshift altar: “Near its base were the stubs of white candles, a flat plastic flask filled with a clear liquid, an assortment of cigarette packets, a scattering of loose cigarettes, and an elaborate, multiarmed figure drawn in what appeared to be white powdered chalk” (Gibson 1988, 163). Even though Finn cannot possibly enjoy the offerings himself, the symbolism of paying for the information rendered remains relevant. Furthermore, whatever information Finn gives out in his post-mortem state must be worth a lot to his customers, as he offers the visiting old acquaintance Sally a drink from the bottle: ““Drink it. It’s good shit. Fuckin’ better be. Nobody short-counts the oracle, not if they know what’s good for ‘em”” (Gibson 1988, 164). While asking advice of the dead businessman may not be quite the norm, it is at least not portrayed as unusual. Neither, as seen above, is the interrogation of dead criminals in virtual space in *Altered Carbon*. The contact between the living and the dead in *Altered Carbon* is the most institutionalised of all the novels, as the dead are kept in large governmental facilities such as the police stations (Morgan 200) and “Download Central” (Morgan 17), the main re-sleeving facility.

As has been shown in another section, the boundaries between the dead and the world are depicted as fluid in *Noir*, hence the “knowingness of the dead” (Jeter 114). In *Noir*, November as well as McNihil are quite literally asking advice of McNihil’s dead wife, which should not be seen as unusual in the context of the novel, as McNihil’s dead wife explains: ““You came here for advice. Analysis of the situation you’re in. People have been calling on the dead for these services, for a long time now. Before, though, they usually didn’t get any answers.”” (Jeter 122) The change thus lies not in the asking, but in the receiving of information. The dead in *Noir* and their use by the living highlights the concept of the useful economic body, a body that is “bound up [...] with its

economic use” (Foucault 1984, 173).

Simply put, the new culturally accepted norm concerning death is connected to the usefulness of the dead person and the economic gain of the living. Where a dead person, or even only their memory construct, might be of service to a living character in the pursuit of their work, efforts to work with the dead are undertaken with little to no concern.

5.2.3 Death as punishment

Considering all of the above, it seems perhaps paradoxical that death can still function as a means of punishment. If death can be survived in various ways, should capital punishment still be threatening? Capital punishment “impinges on the social construction of death. We can see the relationship between the State’s use of the death penalty as a mode of punishment for offenders” (Powell 357). Before biopower, the death penalty “constituted the reply of the sovereign to those who attacked his will, his law [...]” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality* 137-138). Punishment constitutes the other side of biopower, the power to “disallow [life] to the point of death” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality* 138). Crime is no longer an attack on the sovereign, but an attack on society as criminals represent “a kind of biological danger to others” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality* 138). Therefore, the focus is taken away from the crime and instead “the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality* 138) is highlighted. Since the Enlightenment, Foucault argues, the punishing of the criminal has “become the most hidden part of the penal process” which means that “it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime” and therefore “it is the conviction itself that marks the offender with the unequivocally negative sign: the publicity has shifted to the trial, and to the sentence” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9).

In *Noir*, society has reverted back to the older system, but it is not a king who is symbolically attacked by crime, but the institution of copyright. Death as punishment is no longer stark enough to discourage copyright crimes, which led to the “trophy system” (Jeter 257), a brutal

system in which copyright criminals may be slaughtered and parts of their bodies turned into the eponymous trophies whereby they sometimes still maintain partial consciousness (Jeter 262).

The tenets of capital punishment were that “[i]t must mark the victim”, and it must be public since “public exhibition” of the criminal through torture or execution is remembered by the watching public (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 34). Therefore, “public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 34). The trophy system achieves most of this. The execution itself is only half-public, as it takes place in a cheap hotel (Jeter 199), however the trophy itself may be seen by anyone visiting the receiver (245): “The scale finish was on the outside; what was on the inside was actual human spinal tissue [...]” (Jeter 244). McNihil, himself a former employee of a so called “Collection Agency” (Jeter 257), echoes Foucault in remembering how the system was first implemented: “For death to be effective public policy, it must be public. If the message to be gotten across is, *Connect around with someone else’s copyright and you die*, an emotionally resonant depiction of that truth had to be created” (Jeter 255-256, original italics). The trophy system calls on self-regulation as a tool of preventing crime through “various public-information programs”, which leads to McNihil wondering if copyright criminals may be “into some sort of self-destruction imperative, sure and certain suicide by means of the law’s swift, implacable enforcers” (Jeter 247). However, simple death is not seen as enough of punishment or deterrent: “Did death necessarily = punishment? The main problem with death as a negative motivational factor was that it was over too quickly, and not always painfully enough” (Jeter 257). Foucault states that “[p]unishment has to make use not of the body, but of representation. Or rather, if it does make use of the body, it is not so much as the subject of a pain as the object of a representation: the memory of pain must prevent a repetition of the crime” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 94). McNihil echoes this from the point of view of the Collection Agency: “Obviously, what was needed was to stretch death out in time, take it from a point to an extended process. *And pump up the pain and humiliation factors*” (Jeter 257, original

emphasis). The next logical step, in the novel at least, was to not focus on the criminal's death, but rather on his continuous torture: "If the client had a right to demand the pirate's death, then why not the pirate's life as well?" (Jeter 259). Therefore, trophies may still be "alive and conscious" (Jeter 262), as a "dead trophy did not have the moral and instructive impact of a living one" (Jeter 264).

Compared to this system, in Gibson's works the criminal justice system is almost lenient. In Case's first station in Japan, in the black market district Night City, capital punishment is not so much handled by the law but by "the street" itself: "Biz here was a constant subliminal hum, and death the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace, the failure to heed the demands of an intricate protocol" (Gibson 1984, 7). Case describes the city as "a deranged experiment in social Darwinism" (Gibson 1984, 7). Life here becomes a difficult balancing act of self-regulation without a supervising state: "Stop hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too swiftly and you'd break the fragile surface tension of the black market; either way, you were gone [...]" (Gibson 1984, 7). Punishment here has once again become "the most hidden part of the penal process" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9) as failure to heed the protocol does not lead to either public torture or execution. Rather, the condemned simply vanish, which in turn serves as a deterrent to others.

In *Altered Carbon*, while digital storage is the accepted punishment for most crimes, capital punishment still exists in some ways, though it is described as "old-fashioned" (Morgan 66). The justice system has had to undergo a number of changes in light of the frequent changes of bodies. Courts can rely on the testimony of murder victims, "temporarily re-sleeved for the court hearing, albeit probably in a synthetic" (Morgan 146). Arguably digital storage already constitutes a sort of death penalty, as the subject is taken out of the body they are currently inhabiting. This is the position Catholics take in the novel, for whom every conviction is a "death sentence every time" no matter if they should be stored for "[t]en years or three months" (Morgan 23). However, there is also another kind of capital punishment. Called "erasure", this execution completely destroys the

digitised consciousness of the criminal, thus affects the mind rather than the body of the condemned. Erasure is only practised in some severe cases, such as “download[ing] from a living body” (Morgan 66), thus presenting a literal “biological danger to others” (Foucault, *His. of Sexuality* 138), or in theory in the military: “Some crimes in the Corps carried the erasure penalty, principally desertion or refusal to obey a combat order, but I’d never seen it applied” (Morgan 66). If “[p]unishment has to make use not of the body, but of representation” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 94), this style of execution has great potential as a deterrent as it is practised in a system in which the survival of physical death is not guaranteed, but should at least be possible.

To sum up, death may still work as punishment in a setting in which death can theoretically be survived. Capital punishment takes different forms, in one case as the hidden part of the system of punishment, in the other case as a public warning to others. While in *Altered Carbon* digital storage and capital punishment serves as a “safeguard of society” (Foucault, *His. Of Sexuality* vol. 1, 138), in *Noir* the trophy system ensures public exhibition of the condemned to serve as a deterrent. While this novel treats capital punishment as not enough of a punishment in itself, the example of *Altered Carbon* shows the biopolitical power of the state to disallow life.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show how the chosen narratives are posthuman, and to show how this changes biopolitics. Since its conception, posthumanism has shifted from the traditional mind-body divide to a more holistic view of the human being. The main focus of modern posthumanism lies on the fluidity of personal human identity and on the changed role of the physical body. For literary analysis, this means the focus lies on how the boundaries between the human being and its environment are becoming ever more fluid. In science fiction especially, this means that the boundary between the human being and technology grows increasingly fuzzy and unclear.

Biopower or biopolitics serves as a useful analysis of social control and power discourses. Simply put, this Foucauldian concept focuses on control of the individual and the population through discourses that foster life or disallow it, especially by emphasising individual responsibility over the body through discourses of what is considered healthy and what is not, which in turn puts pressure on the subjects to monitor and self-maximise their physical capacities. The focus on the physical body, its health, and the health of the body of the population puts biopolitics in juxtaposition to posthumanism, where traditionally the body has been seen as an information pattern and physical matter has been disregarded. Combining the two approaches allows for an analysis of social control of the human being in a context in which the body has achieved a changed status.

Technological changes no longer take place outside the body, but also inside by means of cybernetic enhancements, most of which are vital for the work progress of the fictional characters. Even though the physical body is passive during use of cyberspace, the influence of the body is still evident in embodiment. The embodied consciousness resembles the biological form of the user and all instances in cyberspace resemble physical interaction, especially movement. Embodiment is further useful in defining the subject's boundaries in order to distinguish it from other users.

If the human body is no longer the sole criteria for the definition of the human being, the

focus shifts to the question of consciousness and agency. In the case of the portrayed AIs in the novels, this is sometimes left vague, but at least not impossible in the case of the fusion of the AIs in *Neuromancer*. In turn, the human characters in *Neuromancer* suffer a considerable loss of agency thorough their dependency on technology. Similarly, in *Noir* and *Altered Carbon* agency is severely restricted and furthermore dependent on financial liquidity.

If neither the body nor consciousness can be the defining characteristics of human identity, this leads to the question of individual memory as the locus of identity. However, possessing the memories of a living person is not the same thing as being said person, as in the case of former hacker-turned-computer construct McCoy Pauley. Contrary to this character, the link between memory and identity is non-negotiable in *Altered Carbon*, where physical bodies are frequently changed and individual memory remains the only stable constituent.

Biopolitics relies on norms, more specifically a norm of what constitutes the healthy human body. The population is called on to regulate their own bodies through public health information to encourage individual responsibility. In future scenarios where cybernetic and genetic enhancements have become widely accessible, self-maximisation reaches its peak. This is also true for the maximisation of life itself, i.e. the extension of it. This aspect is connected to financial liquidity, as an extended period of life comes at a high price only affordable for the social elite. *Altered Carbon* especially puts a strong focus on the injustice of who may afford to live essentially forever and who may not.

As most cybernetic enhancements are attained for work purposes, the enhanced body must be viewed through the lens of human capital – in short, which investments are made in the individual to maximise its market capacities. In this context, self-regulation of health and self-maximisation of the body, mainly through cybernetic enhancements or physical conditioning, serve an underlying economic goal. Contrary to self-regulation, *Noir* showcases literal regulation of subjects through the company. In this novel, corporate employees are controlled at every turn, their

health monitored and their individuality erased. Moreover, in the case of debt anyone may be revived after death to work off their debt load for as long as their body will last.

The status of death, which has traditionally been seen as the end of state power over the subject, has changed as well. Recent research suggests that the fear of death as the consequence of a lack of self-regulation is the driving power behind biopolitics. However, this precondition can change. If an actual physical or embodied afterlife is possible, death loses its status as precondition for biopower and is replaced by the fear of the afterlife or the diminished quality of it. Furthermore, since in posthumanism the boundary between the body and its environment is already unclear, the changeover to the afterlife is not necessarily as important a shift as it has traditionally been seen. The focal point lies on continued consciousness. *Altered Carbon* in particular portrays the afterlife as the same life in a different body, provided one can be afforded. In *Noir*, there seems to be no boundary at all between the dead and their environment, which is why they receive information patterns unseen by the living. While the body is disregarded by characters as in *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, a life as embodied beings in cyberspace seems desirable. These examples again put the focus on individual agency, as agency can be severely restricted through expensive new bodies or a forced undead existence. True agency is only granted to the few individuals inhabiting cyberspace at the end of *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

The presence of afterlife narratives in the novels rather than universal immortality highlights an important aspect of contemporary literature: “The persistence of the afterlife within SF shows how much we readers, past and present, want to imagine some version of life after death” (Burt 169). Life after death thus remains one of the most successful tropes of storytelling, and will likely continue to do so in the future.

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Appendix: Abstracts

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of posthumanism in regards to the representation of death, life after death, and the relationship between the living and the dead in selected cyberpunk novels. Posthumanism being a relatively new concept, I wish to add to the existing if sparse research by applying it to science fiction works that contain at least one major story arc dealing primarily with the afterlife. In this thesis, I will analyse four selected works of this genre dealing with the question of life after death against the background of new technological opportunities: William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), Kevin Wayne Jeter's *Noir* (1998), Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002). The focus is on the comparative analysis of the common theme of the novels: the evasion of complete death and the extension of, albeit bodiless, life; in the posthuman sense, the transcendence of the biological human body and its natural limit. I argue that the portrayed afterlives, created with the help of science, are the location where dreams and nightmares about the extension of life are enacted. I wish to investigate how each author imagines and treats the topic, how specific issues which arise from these imagined states of existence are dealt with, and what solutions are offered. For this purpose, I will employ the theoretical concept of posthumanism and the Foucauldian concept of biopower or biopolitics. Both concepts are relevant to this topic as they raise questions as to the concept of 'human', the power dynamics which shape 'humanity', all while taking into account recent technological and biomedical progress. A changing discourse of the body will necessitate a changed discourse of death, and the prospect of extended life as well as the possibility of bodiless existence in turn lead to a discussion of the limits of humanity. Even in a posthumanist world with a broadened definition of humanity and the corresponding social and cultural changes, I predict that biopolitical discourse will largely serve the same objectives.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht das Konzept des Posthumanismus in Bezug auf die Darstellung des Todes, des Lebens nach dem Tod und die Beziehung zwischen den Lebenden und den Toten in ausgewählten Cyberpunk-Romanen. Da Posthumanismus in Zusammenhang mit Literatur ein relativ neues Konzept ist, möchte ich zu der bestehenden, wenn auch spärlichen, Forschung beitragen, indem ich sie auf Science-Fiction-Werke anwende, die mindestens einen wichtigen Handlungsbogen enthalten, der sich hauptsächlich mit dem Jenseits beschäftigt. In dieser Arbeit werde ich vier ausgewählte Werke dieses Genres analysieren, die sich mit der Frage des Lebens nach dem Tod vor dem Hintergrund neuer technologischer Möglichkeiten beschäftigen: William Gibsons *Neuromancer* (1984) und *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), Kevin Wayne Jeter's *Noir* (1998), Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002). Der Schwerpunkt liegt auf der vergleichenden Analyse des gemeinsamen Themas der Romane: die Vermeidung des vollständigen Todes und die Erweiterung des, wenn auch körperlosen, Lebens; im posthumanen Sinne die Transzendenz des biologischen menschlichen Körpers und seiner natürlichen Grenzen. Ich werde argumentieren, dass die porträtierten Nachleben, die mit Hilfe der Wissenschaft geschaffen wurden, der Ort sind, an dem Träume und Alpträume über die Verlängerung des Lebens inszeniert sind. Ich möchte untersuchen, wie jeder Autor das Thema vorstellt und behandelt, wie spezifische Fragen, die sich aus diesen imaginären Existenzen ergeben, behandelt werden und welche Lösungen angeboten werden. Zu diesem Zweck werde ich das theoretische Konzept des Posthumanismus und das Foucault'sche Konzept „Biopower“ oder Biopolitik anwenden. Beide Konzepte sind für dieses Thema relevant, da sie Fragen zum Konzept des „Menschen“ und der Machtdynamiken, welche die „Menschheit“ prägen, unter Berücksichtigung des jüngsten technologischen und biomedizinischen Fortschritts aufwerfen. Ein veränderter Diskurs des Körpers wird einen veränderten Diskurs des Todes erfordern, und die Aussicht auf ein verlängertes Leben sowie die Möglichkeit der körperlosen Existenz führen wiederum zu einer Diskussion über die Grenzen der Menschheit. Auch in einer

posthumanistischen Welt mit einer erweiterten Definition der Menschheit und den entsprechenden sozialen und kulturellen Veränderungen prognostiziere ich, dass der biopolitische Diskurs weitgehend den gleichen Zielen dient.