Mille/Punks/Cyber/Plateaus:
Science Fiction and
Deleuzo-Guattarian "Becomings"

Charles J. Stivale

For Elizabeth Hand

Mille/Punks

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all
chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in
short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics.
The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material
reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical
transformation. ——— Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"

I RECENTLY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY to perceive myself as just such a
"condensed image of both imagination and material reality" when I at-
ttempted to discharge a book at my new institution's library. Unable to
check a book out to my code, a first worker asked a second, "Why can't I
find this book charged out?" The second asked, "Did you create him?"
After a moment, the first responded, "Yes, but his code is unknown." The
second concluded, "Well, you need to modify him." This exchange in-
spired me to reflect on possible rapprochements between recent fictional and
theoretical speculation on cybernetics, and on its impact on daily life. As
early as 1972, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the radical
psychoanalyst Félix Guattari collaborated to publish a manifesto of sorts,
Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia, in which they posit desire in its
relationship to psychic and socio-economic life as "machinic assemblages"
(agencements machiniques) to which human activity responds and conforms.
Displacing the fields of analysis spawned by Freud and Marx, Deleuze and
Guattari subsequently went well beyond the first volume's initial concep-
tion of "schizoanalysis." In volume two, A Thousand Plateaus (ATP), they
propose diverse and overlapping “sites” of interaction and signification, with corresponding, multiple analytical approaches.

What Donna Haraway and Deleuze and Guattari share is what Haraway describes as an attempt to take seriously “the imagery of cyborgs as other than enemies,” even to develop the “myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination in order to act potently” (Manifesto 222-23). Despite the caveat by Deleuze and Guattari that tales, rather than myths and rites, best describe “becomings” (ATP 237), I propose to examine several narrative manifestations of this “myth system” through the genre of science fiction known as “cyberpunk.” While this subgenre is now inactive as a mode of speculative fiction (some of its authors even refuse to pronounce the “cyber-word”),1 its impact is still quite evident.2 I wish to utilize this genre as a narrative vehicle for introducing some terminological distinctions available, but often hard to activate, in A Thousand Plateaus. Moreover, I would like to situate the Deleuzo-Guattarian analysis in relation to the “informatics of domination” that Haraway describes as being constituted by

. . . fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogous in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial capitalism, . . . a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system. (Manifesto 203)

The cyberpunk novels share a dystopic vision of society in varying degrees of system collapse, and argue against the outmoded idea of a utopian future.3 Yet, this society is also engaged in expansion of human intelligence within a “realm where the computer hacker and the rocker overlap, a cultural Petri dish where writhing gene lines splice” (Sterling, “Preface” xiii). A constant is the proliferation of cybernetic technologies, from microscopic body parts and implants (“wetware”) to the galactic movement of information into space, even beyond the immediate galaxy. At the core of this proliferation is a rhizome-like web of cybernetic exchanges and flows—“cyberspace”—also called “the Grid” (Shirley, Eclipse), “the Net” (Sterling, Islands) or “the Matrix” (Gibson, Neuromancer). These exchanges and flows of information properly constitute a “collective assemblage” moving beyond subject-positions toward a type “that carries or brings out the event insofar as it is unformed and incapable of being effectuated by persons” (ATP 265). Yet, this “consensual hallucination” is created in all of these tales through characters who function both as agents

SubStance #66, 1991
and as peripheral elements of this web, all propelled into various modes of "becoming" by dint of their resistance to those agents who would usurp the web for the sole ends of an "informatics of domination," be it socio-economic or bio- or cyber-technological.

"Becoming"—Between D & G and SF

The "machinic assemblages" that Deleuze and Guattari discuss are elements of a vast process of "becoming" that "produces nothing other than itself," lacking "a subject distinct from itself," having "no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, or which coexists, forms a block, with the first" (ATP 238). As is evident from the complex interactions of humans and cyborgs in cyberpunk tales, "becoming" concerns alliance rather than filiation, a form of evolution between heterogeneous forms that Deleuze and Guattari dub "involution"—not a regression, but that which forms "a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations" (ATP 238-239). Always involving "a pack, a band, a population, a peo-

Yet, the “becomings” of these packs are also nourished by the prin-
ciple that “wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual” (ATP 243), an “anomalous” figure constituted by “a phenomenon of bordering” (ATP 245). This “borderline” position of the anomalous figure accounts for its possibility of belonging to the pack (e.g., of cyborgs or, more often, of the interface with cyberspace) and yet of also maintaining a peripheral position “such that it is impossible to tell if the anomalous is still in the band, already outside the band, or at the shifting boundary of the band” (ATP 245). Not surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari argue that one privileged expression of the different modes of “becoming” is science fiction, in which “involution” proceeds “from animal, vegetable, and mineral becoming to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules, and things imperceptible” (ATP 248).

This admittedly abstract delineation of the concept of “becoming” can be illustrated with examples drawn from several cyberpunk narrative
“clusters”: Rudy Rucker’s *Software* and its sequel, *Wetware*, John Shirley’s trilogy, “A Song Called Youth” (*Eclipse, Eclipse Penumbra* and *Eclipse Corona*), and William Gibson’s “Sprawl” trilogy (*Neuromancer, Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*). Besides constituting a representative group of a genre that has been belittled, this sampling provides clear yet varied examples of modes both of “becoming” and of “informatics of domination.”

All of these tales present sociopolitical turmoil in which cyber-technologies play a crucial role, but each varies in the extent to which the political framework and struggles are immediately distinguishable from the contemporary “mode of information.” As John Shirley notes,

... cyberpunk for me is both a protest and a celebration. Gibson and Sterling were already doing the celebration. ... I went the next step and looked at the dark side more. (“Call It” 91)

In Shirley’s trilogy, the rise of a fascist multi-national/corporate security force, the SA, occurs in a global atmosphere in which armed but non-nuclear conflict between East and West blocs is at its peak, as are xenophobic and nationalistic policies, which are opposed by a rag-tag band of “anomalous” warriors, the New Resistance. These opposing groups employ updated but relatively conventional assault weapons, but the success of their resistance also relies on access to circuits of information available only through sophisticated manipulation of “the Grid,” both on Earth and on the floating space colony known as FirStep.

While William Gibson’s trilogy is equally global and galactic, its politics are considerably more obscure: the corporate “informatics of domination” replace the national in a vast brokerage of software, hardware, wetware (cybernetically enhanced body implants) and the skills necessary for their manipulation. Operating variously in the post-industrial “Sprawl” of the Boston-Atlanta-Metropolitan-Axis (BAMA), in other urban zones in Japan, California, and London, and in the space resort of the Freeside Archipelago, the “resistance” in Gibson’s novels is mercenary rather than political. Its tools are entirely cyber-based, consisting of techniques employed by the “cowboy” (a sophisticated “hacker”) for entering the information matrix (“cyberspace”) to deploy alternate programs in order to penetrate ICE (“intrusion countermeasures electronics”—usually lethal anti-tampering devices) that surround vast corporate and private data banks, in order to run cyberscams whose goals may or may not include financial gain, or even survival.

Finally, Rucker’s duo is truly the most speculative: besides employing the highly transformed and now exotic settings of Florida and Louisville,
he situates the principal locus of conflict on moonbase settlements colonized by liberated rebel cyborgs, the Boppers. He also defines the "political" conflict as a "biopolitics" of domination, i.e. the right of cyborgs not merely to proliferate and reformat into new soft- and hardware configurations, but to develop their implant "wetware" in order to create a new race on Earth whose name, the Meatboppers, suggests the convergence of organic and cybernetic.

This example suggests one obvious way in which "becomings" function as a key plot element in these novels, an extension, in fact, of Rucker's own work in developing "cellular automata," "a type of artificial life rather than artificial intelligence" ("Mutations" 75-76). In Software, the biopolitical infiltration is limited to retrieving and storing a human's cerebral matrix, then down-loading it into new cyborg forms, one of which must create a new religious cult in order to attract followers susceptible to such re-creations. This "anomalous" character, whose human form was instrumental in the invention and liberation of the original Boppers, exists as part of a "collective assemblage" in relation to the "mainframe" mega-cyborg that oversees his operation. While the religious-cult plot is finally aborted through hardware vulnerability, the saga continues in Wetware, where the moon-based Boppers unleash a contagious, procreative "machingic assemblage" named Manchile, whose offspring seek not only to proliferate their Meatbopper race, but to overcome the inhibitive programming that guides the activities of Earth-bound cyborgs according to Asimov's "laws of robotics,"—i.e. to serve and preserve humans first.

In Shirley's trilogy, the "becomings" proceed less along the "molecular" and more on the "molar" level of political consciousness-raising, with the most unlikely characters finding means to oppose and expose the fascist SA. The most striking is undoubtedly the truly "anomalous" Rickenharp, the druggie rock star who must inadvertently join the New Resistance cause. Trapped and wounded in an SA dragnet in Paris, Rickenharp devises an ingenious but suicidal means of diverting the SA's attention, to allow his comrades to escape: he climbs to the top of the Arc de Triomphe with monster amp, rhythm box and guitar, to play his "last gig" to the attacking SA troops (304). Yet, this ego/death-trip has a serious function, and gives the trilogy its name: for his "song called 'Youth'" is captured on video as the mega-dozers, the Jaegernauts, roll in to reduce the Arc to dust; despite censorship, the image of Rickenharp and the sounds of his song spread across "the Grid" to inspire further resistance. The importance of this "cybernetwork" is further emphasized by the battle for control of FirStep, the space-based "web of information" that the New Resistance
first prevents the SA from converting into an impenetrable headquarters, and then uses to oversee global resistance.

However, the most threatening forms of "becoming" occur in Eclipse Corona, with the proliferation of drug-enhanced wetware—implants that stimulate an often uncontrollable war-drive in NATO and fascist SA forces alike. In response to this "informatics of domination," a wetware counter-resistance called "the Plateau" is developed:

It was the Plateau, Jerome thought, that really scared the shit out of the feds. It had possibilities. . . . "They're holding the Plateau back," his brain-chip wholesaler had told him, "because they're afraid of what worldwide electronic telepathy might bring down on them. Like, everyone will collate information, use it to see through the bastards' game, throw the assbites out of office." (27, 31)

The scene of the jailbreak, made by Jessie-Jerome-Eddie-Bones-Swish through the combined cyberlink of their "pack" is a veritable cybernetic deconstruction. Yet, we read, as their "five chips become One," they teeter on the edge of another realm through a break in the psychic clouds: the Plateau, the whispering plane of brain chips linked to forbidden frequencies, an electronic haven for doing deals unseen by cops . . . a place roamed by the wolves of wetware. (33)

In the novel, this breakthrough to cyberspace works on the molecular level in tandem with the molar, political struggle to destroy the SA’s grasp on "informatics of domination," and also to thwart the genocidal plan of the New Resistance’s own corporate benefactor, Witcher, to seize control of global informatics.

**Haecceity: A Mode of Individuation**

While this transcendent merging with the information matrix exists along with other plot elements in both Shirley’s and Rucker’s narrative "clusters," the "becomings" in as well as of cyberspace form the fundamental links between the books of Gibson’s trilogy. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize this merging as a "becoming-imperceptible," occurring on "the plane of consistency," bringing into coexistence any number of multiplicities, with any number of dimensions . . . the intersection of all concrete forms" (ATP 251). The terror that Shirley’s Jerome et al. feel before the infinite expanse of the Plateau is the loss of the subject, or, rather, the intensity of participating in multiple subjectivities. Yet, Deleuze and Guat-
tari propose cartographic coordinates for such "composable individuations:" "A degree, an intensity, is an individual, a Haecceity that enters into composition with other degrees, other intensities, to form another individual" (ATP 253). Plotting "distributions of intensity," of "affects" as "latitude" in relation to longitudinal "relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness" (ATP 260), Deleuze and Guattari follow Spinoza's lead in proposing

... a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing or substance. We reserve the name haecceity for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (ATP 261)

The "involution" of just such individuation lies at the core of Gibson's "Sprawl" tales: in Neuromancer, the complicated plot into which the cybercowboy, Case, and his biotechnologically enhanced partner, Molly, are drawn is generated by a haecceity-type "becoming"—the distribution of affect by "Wintermute," an enormous AI (artificial intelligence) complex, in order to interface and merge with its counterpart, "Neuromancer." To create this unprecedented and illegal mode of individuation, Wintermute must "distribute" human agents and cybernetic technology in ways that allow them to penetrate the ICE surrounding the corporate data bank of the Tessier-Ashpool family, and thus circumvent global regulations that attempt to prevent such mega-mergers of artificial intelligence. The "becoming-sentient" of the cybernetic matrix with which Neuromancer ends forms the backdrop of the transformed behavior of cyberspace in Count Zero—i.e. the infusion of "affect," which certain characters explain as manifestations of voodoo gods. In Mona Lisa Overdrive, the ultimate phase is reached as human subjectivities achieve a "haecceity"—affect and interface within the cybernetic "becoming." In the final pages, the characters embark with the expanded AI on a new phase, toward a merger with "another matrix, another sentence" signaling its presence from outer space.

While Bruce Sterling has dismissed Gibson's narrative moves toward transcendence as "just a feature of the genre, like feedback in rock music" ("Coming In" 100), the very possibilities of diverse and merged subjectivities prevalent in the cyberpunk novels suggest affective relations quite difficult to enunciate, yet potentially quite real as a field of "becoming" in daily life.
Cyborgs and Feminism

In the final sentences of Haraway’s “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” she establishes a bridge to another line of inquiry on “becomings” and “informatics of domination” by insisting that the “dream” of cyborg imagery is

... not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the super savers of the New Right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories. Although both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (223)

In fact, to what extent do the representations of gender, both in cyberpunk novels and in the concept of “becomings,” really speak in tongues that strike fear into the conservative circuitry that Haraway evokes? To what extent do these tales constitute constraining “myths” that reinforce the “informatics of domination” by reproducing stereotypes and leaving dualisms intact? At a recent conference on cyberpunk writing, the novelist Elizabeth Hand levelled precisely these charges at the “SF Boys’ Club” of cyberpunk, and insisted that only a small group of SF writers such as Angela Carter, Ginette Winterson, Joanna Russ and Alice Sheldon, are currently engaging the possibilities of constituting an “infidel heteroglossia.” At the same conference, Larry McCaffery insisted that, rather than consider some “beyond” of cyberpunk (cf. Shirley, “Beyond”), it would be more productive to consider the cybernetic conflicts and biotechnological incursions at the heart of these novels as an expression of a postmodern fiction exploring the very fabric of our daily life “as it already is” (“Introduction”).

It is into this différend that I introduce a particular aspect of “becomings” proposed by Deleuze and Guattari as “becomings-woman” (les devenirs-femme). Early in their development of “becomings,” in plateau 10, they insist that “exclusive importance should not be attached to becomings-animal” (les devenirs-animal), on which they had concentrated their analysis. Proposing “regions” that constitute “a kind of order or apparent progression for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves” (ATP 272), Deleuze and Guattari suggest that

... becomings-animal ... are segments occupying a median region. On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child ... . On the far side, we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible. (ATP 248)
In a parenthetical remark, they add, "... (becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power; it is not so much that women are witches, but that sorcery proceeds by way of this becoming-woman)" (ATP 248, my emphasis). To clarify this, I must emphasize the importance that Deleuze and Guattari bestow on the "sorcerer" as agent of "'anomic' phenomena pervading societies that are not degradations of the mythic order but irreducible dynamisms drawing lines of flight and implying other forms of expression than those of myth" (ATP 237). So, passages into the "contagion of the pack" and into the "anomalous" and its "relation to a multiplicity" (ATP 243-244), discussed heretofore in terms of "becomings-animal," are prepared and rendered possible in the complex preliminary process called "becoming-woman." Further on, Deleuze and Guattari suggest a general definition of "becoming":

Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (ATP 272)

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish "becomings-woman" in terms of two parallel, intersecting planes. On one, "a molar entity is the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject" (ATP 275). As such, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that women must "conduct a molar politics, with a view of winning back their own organisms, their own history, their own subjectivity" (ATP 276). On another, molecular plane, becoming-woman is a function of "emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman" (ATP 275).

Since the manner in which these planes intersect is clearly of importance, Deleuze and Guattari are quick to insist: "We do not mean to say that a creation of this kind is the prerogative of the man, but on the contrary that the woman as a molar entity has to become-woman in order that the man also becomes- or can become-woman" (ATP 275-276). Just as the "myth system" that Haraway suggests as grounding a new way of looking at science and technology would rely not on a drive "to produce total theory," but rather on "an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction" (Manifesto 223), "becomings" rely on the "anomalous," on "a phenomenon of bordering" through which a "multiplicity" is composed "by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in 'intension'," as opposed to "extension" (ATP 245). Since "sorcerers have
always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods," in positions of "affinity with alliance, with the pact" (ATP 246), the "becomings-woman" would constitute a means of access to

\[\ldots\] an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, these politics express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic. (ATP 247)

**Female “Becomings”: Of Women and Clones**

To explore these concepts further, I will employ the cyberpunk novels in order to reconstitute the locus and power of "becomings" introduced by "woman." Gibson’s Molly Millions appears first in the short story "Johnny Mnemonic" (*Burning Chrome* 1-22) as the biotechnologically altered anomalous figure who saves the eponymous character by slaying a Japanese mob assassin, and thereby seals a partnership to deal in the data stored in Johnny’s biochip implants. Molly’s subsequent activities in *Neuromancer*, however mercenary, enable her new partner, Case, to find a form of cybernetic redemption through repeated, near-fatal cerebral mergers with the matrix "haecceities." Here, Molly continues to exemplify the anomalous figure of alliance, even an ambiguous feminist exploitation of the cyborg image. Cast as lethal enforcer, even potential castrator (she has surgically implanted razors under her burgundy nails), and also as usurper of the male gaze (she has surgically inset mirrorshades), Molly returns the reflection of the "other" while skillfully transacting business, often with a mere flick of the hand or head in the street-code called "jive." Moreover, it is literally *through* her gaze that Case (and the reader) follow the action in the two crucial scenes of the cyberscams, thanks to a video-broadcast unit mounted behind her mirrorshades. With Case’s assistance at the cyber console, Molly’s penetration of the Tessier-Ashpool mansion, "Straylight," permits the twin AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer, to achieve their illegal merger and their "becoming-sentient," thereby initiating unfathomable "becomings" of the cyberspace Matrix itself.

In *Count Zero*, Molly’s only "appearance" is in a reference by the software dealer, Finn, to her Straylight run seven years before, that Finn links directly to the "becoming-sentient"—to the "weird shit happening in the matrix" (123-124). Molly returns in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, another seven years later, as Sally Shears, successfully parrying the blackmail threat.
posed by the avenging clone of the Tessier-Ashpool family, Lady 3Jane, and enabling the completion of the merger of cyberspace "haecceities."

However, despite this biotechnological and streetwise stance of power (Gibson refers to her as "a female lead who beats the shit out of everybody") ("High Tech" 61), Molly remains locked into the molar plane, or what the cyberpunks refer to as "meat." While along for the "ride" behind Molly's optical field in Neuromancer, Case finds the passive role disturbing, as when Molly playfully causes him to gasp as she strolls down the street fingering her (and therefore his) nipple through their sensorial interface. Later, on the eve of their multi-phased invasion of the Tessier-Ashpool estate, Molly reveals to Case that she financed the biotech hardware with her earnings as a "meat puppet"—a prostitute whose software programming allowed her subjectivity to be bypassed during "working" hours. However, the potential for depicting a woman's jouissance, and even a man's experience of it, is severely limited since Molly (and thus Case) endures intense pain throughout the novel after a leg injury sustained on the first cyberspace run. Case henceforth remains the "star attraction," as Fred Pfeil describes him:

Jacked in, he rides wildly up against and through the giant walls of corporate-conglomerate "ice" to the secret lairs, simultaneously located in cyberspace and the material world, where the darkest secrets and powers are hid. (89)

In contrast to Molly's (and eventually Case's) limitation to the molar plane, in Count Zero, Angela Mitchell is the medium of the "funny stuff out there, out on the console cowboy circuit... Ghosts, voices" (124)—of the "haecceities" of the voodoo "loa of communication," Legba. However, her role as cyber-sorceress merging with the "becoming-sentient" of the Matrix is unwitting, since her scientist father had installed brain implants into her as a Faustian arrangement with the Matrix itself. In Mona Lisa Overdrive, Angela is reunited with her companion from the previous novel, Count Zero himself—the cyber-cowboy Bobby Newmark, who now is sustained permanently by mechanical life support, having been transformed into a vast database with only the flimsiest corporal link to the molar. Mona Lisa Overdrive is truly the novel of "becomings," in which all the characters undergo various degrees of transformation brought about by the sentient "becoming-imperceptible" of AI, and Angela finally joins Bobby beyond "meat," i.e. in the "virtual reality" maintained by the megabase of the Matrix for "becomings-imperceptible" of humans. Yet, despite access to
these troubling “haecceities,” Angela is the exception confirming the rule of women like Molly, who remain on the material, sensory plane.

We can relate the binaries of meat/women vs. cyber-sentience/men to the concept of “becomings-woman” in that women appear to exist (at least narratively) only as springboards for further “becomings” of men. This reliance of men on the passage through a “becoming-woman” would seem to explain the aforementioned meat/cyber-sentience dualism since, once having achieved this passage, men can leave women in the dust, so to speak, or in a cloud of “particle emissions” of “becomings-woman.”

Another dualism arises in cyberpunk novels, however, that seems to contradict—or a least stands in tension alongside—the meat/cyber-sentience dualism. While the most evident “villain” in cyberpunk novels is usually the corporate “informatics of domination,” the recurrent figure of potential domination in the Sprawl trilogy is a clone, like the vat-sustained Virek in Count Zero, and the clones of the Tessier-Ashpool family in Neuromancer, among whom Lady 3Jane returns with a vengeance in Mona Lisa Overdrive. While Gabrielle Schwab contends that the clone has “become a new mythological figure at the horizon of the postmodern imagination,” a figure “invested with fantasies of immortality, doubling, endless mirroring, and phantasmatic redefinitions of death” (198), clones play a distinctly different role in these and other cyberpunk novels. For clones and post-human cyborgs like Manchile the Meatbopper come to represent the evil and/or fatal horizon of technological progress feeding on humankind, with Manchile as the embodiment of “filiation,” eschewing “alliance.” However, once his own generative program aborts, Manchile acts not only to liberate earth-bound cyborgs from their Asimov-like constraints, but also to permit further “becomings” of cellular automata between software and hardware.9

The evil/fatal status of the clone emerges not only in Gibson’s novels, but also in those of Shirley, Rucker, Sterling (Schismatrix), and Greg Bear (Blood Music, and, to a lesser degree, in Eon and Eternity). This suggests that “becomings” must be kept in check when the body (male) is threatened, since, as Alice Jardine points out, “Man is always the subject of any becoming, even if ‘he’ is a woman” (Gynesis 217).

Jardine’s further queries would seem to address specifically the “becomings” of women in these novels:

To the extent that women must “become woman” first . . . might that not mean that she must also be the first to disappear? . . . there would remain only her simulacrum: a female figure caught in a whirling sea of molecular

77

Mille Punks

SubStance #66, 1991
figurations. A silent, mutable, head-less, desire-less, spatial surface necessary only for His metamorphosis? (Gynesis 217)

From this perspective, the “informatics of domination” indeed seem to provide grounds for concern over “their effects on the flesh” (Jardine, “Of Bodies” 152). However, we can also consider the “becomings” in these novels from the perspective of the predominantly “negative valence” that biological and brain-function concepts have had in science fiction. In this light, the limits that I have attributed to these “becomings” may not solely from cyberpunk’s filiation to the horror genre as it relates to the body’s vulnerability, but also from what Joseph Miller describes as telecentrism:

“telecentrism” (to coin a term), the implicit faith in mind as inexplicable and irreducible center of the universe, last bastion of Cartesian duality, is now crumbling under the reductionistic onslaught of neuroscience in league with the aforementioned cognitive science. These sciences, along with the behavioristic approaches of the psychological and ethological disciplines, ultimately imply that there is nothing special about mind. . . . The very idea of artificial intelligence, as the final extension of neuronal reductionism, is an assault on the last bastion of human uniqueness, consciousness itself. (205)

“Theorists for Cyborgs”

So, these metaphysics—the unlimited metamorphosis in quest of that “cyberspace beyond”—the “line of flight” through which an emission of particles tends towards “becoming-imperceptible,” the development of “cyborg identity” in response to “informatics of domination”—all suggest processes of destabilization at work in these different texts, but processes that may be viewed differently depending on the discursive angle one adopts. The search for the unlimited process of “becoming-imperceptible” may indeed by viewed as a nostalgic return to the cybernetic “soul,” or even “logos”—the phallogocentric folding into a center, of the outside within. Even Haraway’s “Manifesto” can be said to embrace this “becoming-imperceptible” as a starting point, but whether or not “becomings-woman” (both thematic and discursive) allow women—characters and authors—along for the journey is still hotly contested.

Jardine’s critique of Deleuze and Guattari concerning woman’s disappearance seems to equate the molar, fixed plane with the molecular plane of dispersion and destabilization of affects. However, molecular “becomings” are precisely what Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway and cyberpunk
writers attempt to negotiate, with the notion of "becoming-imperceptible" as being applicable to both men and women.

It is no doubt significant that the writers chosen by Haraway as exemplary storytellers "exploring what it mean to be embodied in high-tech worlds" are Joanna Russ, Samuel Delany, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr. (aka Alice Sheldon), Octavia Butler, and Vonda McIntyre (Manifesto 215-216). Haraway sees them as "theorists for cyborgs" who, while safely situated within the SF "overground" (Shirley, "Beyond Cyberpunk" 32), nonetheless reveal their strategic explorations of "bodily boundaries and social order." Further, Haraway contends that this molecular dispersion of "cyborg identity" extends beyond fictional "theorists," to works by anthropologist Mary Douglas, French feminists Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, American feminists Susan Griffin and Adrienne Rich, and women of color Audre Lorde and Cherrie Moraga (Manifesto 216). From the molar perspective, the juxtaposition of Irigaray to Wittig, or of these French feminists to Griffin, Rich, Lorde, and Moraga, gives rise to a number of questions about their respective and distinctive critical projects.

However, this "cyborg identity" emphasizes the molecular fracture and dispersion toward "lines of flight"—a link based not so much on common projects or even epistemological fields as on multiple sites of activity, of enunciation, of affect—in short, on multiplicity of "plateaus." Moreover, if "cyborg writing" is indeed "about the power to survive not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (Manifesto 217), we can understand the cyberpunks, if not as "theorists," then as "practitioners," and better still, as "pragmatists for cyborgs." For they seized tools—cybernetic, neuroscientific and biotechnological—that mark us imperceptibly and daily as other. Even if, as Lucius Shepard suggests, their message "didn’t go far enough" and remained "too elitist to be truly revolutionary" (116), the directions in which they pushed their practice may only seem fantastic, even elitist, for ever-briefer periods of time, if we consider ongoing body/mind technological advances, in fields such as prosthetic devices and so-called "virtual reality." As Peter Fitting suggests, the concept of cyberspace can be understood as

an attempt to grasp the complexity of the whole world system through a concrete representation of its unseen networks and structures, of its invisible data transfers and capital flows . . . [and as] a way of making the abstract and unseen comprehensible, a visualization of the notion of cognitive mapping. (311)
Cyber/Plateaus

Where does the proliferation of technology in everyday life leave the writer of science fiction? According to Bruce Sterling, innovation for SF might have to come from outside SF, from those authors writing "slipstream," which he describes as

a kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the late twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility. ("Slipstream" 78)

John Shirley suggests that the SF underground, "pressing through the rift made by the thin edge of the cyberpunk wedge" and thriving in small SF underground journals, promises "an even more important influx of information and stylistic rebirth" ("Beyond Cyberpunk" 32). Elizabeth Hand demonstrates in Winterlong that writerly processes/excesses/transgressions obliquely pose alternate modes of biology, morality, and sexuality as both thematic and discursive paths for "becomings."13 Andrew Ross suggests, more darkly, that cyberpunk's tendency "to disconnect technological development from any notion of a progressive future" leaves "the field of futurology open to those for whom the connection still is a very profitable idea," to the "speculators in the futures industry" ("Gernsback" 433).14

These reflections and juxtapositions of theoretical and narrative plots suggest numerous openings, rather than closures, and emphasize the stakes for envisaging "becomings" and "haecceity" in simultaneously abstract and concrete terms. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

We must avoid an oversimplified conciliation, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type. For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that. ... You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration)—a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). Or at least you can have it, you can reach it. (ATP 262)

These statements provide the theoretical bases not only of narrative speculation, as we have seen, but also of other concrete individuations, "haecceities" of their own sort, by Haraway and Gabriele Schwab on cyborgs, by N. Katherine Hayles on "postmodern parataxis," by Mark Poster on "the mode of information," by Jean-Pierre Changeux on "neuronal man," and by Shoshana Zuboff on the "age of the smart machine," to name but a few. As Haraway concludes,
taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology . . .
means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily
life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our
parts. (Manifesto 223)

Suggesting “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have ex-
plained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (223), the cyborg may help
us to envisage sites “of the potent fusion of the technical, textual, organic,
mythic and political” (Haraway, “Actors” 25), and perhaps to realize the
potential of new “becomings” as a vital element of our actuality, present
and future.

Wayne State University

WORKS CITED

Counsil, Wendy. “The State of Feminism in SF. Talks with Pat Murphy, Lisa
Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan. “Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism.” Mississippi Review 16.2-
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. Trans. of Capitalisme et
_____ A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Trans. Brian Massumi. Min-
Edwards, Paul N. “The Army and the Microworld: Computers and the Politics of


Mille Punks


NOTES

2. Most recently, cf. Fitting, McCaffery interviews with Greg Benford, Gibson and Sterling, Across, as well as McCaffery, Storming.
7. Cf. Counsil.