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# You Can't Get There from Here: Movement SF and the Picaresque

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You Can't Get There from Here:  
Movement SF and the Picaresque

You Can't Get There from Here:  
Movement SF and the Picaresque

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the crisis of authenticity in postmodern culture and argues that contemporary science fiction, specifically the subgenre of Movement SF, has evolved a unique answer to this crisis by adopting, perhaps spontaneously, the picaresque narrative structure. Postmodern fiction has a tenuous relationship with the issue of authenticity, such that the average postmodern subject is utterly without true authenticity at all, alternately victim to the socioeconomic conditions of his or her culture and to the elision of the self as a result of the homogenizing effects of advertising, television, etc. Postmodern SF also carries this bleak perception of the possibility of agency; William Gibson's *Sprawl* and *Bridge* trilogies are rife with negations of human agency at the metaphorical hands of various aspects and incarnations of what Fredric Jameson terms the "technological sublime." This dissertation puts forth the argument that a group of post-Eighties SF texts all participate in a spontaneous revival of the picaresque mode, using the picaresque journey and related motifs to re-authenticate subjects whose identity and agency are being erased by powerful social and economic forces exterior to and normally imperceptible by the individual. This dissertation is organized around three loosely connected parts. Part 1 attempts to define Movement SF by separating the various, often confusing marketing labels (such as cyberpunk, postcyberpunk, etc.) and extracting a cluster of core characteristics that have shaped the genre since its inception in the early 80s. Part 1 further examines how these core characteristics (or premises) of Movement SF provide fertile ground for picaresque narrative strategies. Part 2 describes in detail the picaresque as it appears in Movement SF, examining worldbuilding strategies, the persistence and evolution of tropes and motifs common to the traditional picaresque, and the generation of new tropes and motifs unique to Movement picaresques. Part 3 examines the spatial tactics used in Movement picaresque

narratives to enable picaresque marginality in totalized, globalized environments. Furthermore, Part 3 examines the use of psychological plurality as an internal tactic to escape closed environments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Now she walks through her sunken dream  
to the seat with the clearest view  
and she's hooked to the silver screen  
But the film is a saddening bore  
for she's lived it ten times or more  
She could spit in the eyes of fools  
as they ask her to focus on . . .

-David Bowie, "Life on Mars" (1971)

I got to feeling like a machine, and that's no way to feel.

-John Shaft, *Shaft* (1971)

I walked to the TV set and turned it on to a dead channel – white noise at maximum decibels, a fine sound for sleeping, a powerful continuous hiss to drown out everything strange.

-Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)

As many critics have suggested, one of the most problematic aspects of the pervasive technological and media-driven cultures in which we live is that we often feel powerless, as if our intentionality, our agency, is being undermined. This may be the result of advertising industries reducing us to the passive role of consumer; it may be the result of entertainment industry stereotypes dictating how we conceive of our selves; it may simply be the feeling of

insignificance that comes from living in an economy vast beyond our capacity to understand. Whatever the sources, we are losing the sense that we have the capacity to act, and our television, our films, and our literature reflect quite faithfully our collective sense that our very intentionality is being eroded by complex, enigmatic forces.

Within the first forty pages of one of Pynchon's postmodern masterpieces, the picaresque-in-spirit *Vineland*, the reader is presented with an image of stunning suicidal stupidity:

After work, unable to sleep, the Corvairs liked to go out and play motorhead valley roulette in the tule fogs. These white presences, full of blindness and sudden highway death, moved, as if conscious, unpredictably over the landscape. There were few satellite photos back then, so people had only the ground-level view. . . . The idea was to enter the pale wall at a speed meaningfully over the limit, to bet that the white passage held no other vehicles, no curves, no construction, only smooth, level, empty roadway to an indefinite distance — a motorhead variation on a surfer's dream. (35)

This image, like the final image of Cameron's *Terminator 2*, is a metaphor of the future, or rather of the average person's experience of the future, now an unknown rush of rapid social and technological change. This passage offers a penetrating assessment of the postmodern experience, encoded into a literalized road metaphor – America's arteries and veins, as it were. Pynchon's *Vineland*, the title borrowed from the name Leif Ericsson gave North America a thousand years earlier, is a stand-in for America proper during the Long Sixties, capturing a culture experiencing the rolling back of the wave described by Hunter Thompson in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the same moment David Harvey identifies as the crucial moment of change from Modernity to what is widely called Postmodernity, and the aftermath of that change, for the novel is technically set in Reagan's (and Orwell's) 1984. Pynchon suggests via this deliriously insane image that an individual so inclined to travel the shifting social terrain must become Pynchon's suicidal road warrior: locked into a frenetic acceleration with no *OnStar* to

tell, in a friendly voice, what dangers lurk around the next hairpin curve. This subject is one without maps, without foreknowledge, without any real control, susceptible any moment to being swept away with the high and beautiful wave as it breaks and rolls back towards the sea.

There is, however, a far more apt image of the general condition of the subject in contemporary society: Chevette Washington, former San Francisco bike messenger, locked into a pre-programmed course while riding her video bike trainer, an image taken from William Gibson's *All Tomorrow's Parties*. Chevette's trainer, something she finds in the laundry room of the house she was sharing, is an immersive version of the standard exercise bike, able to be configured "for a dozen different bikes, and as many terrains" (40). An attached screen allows for multiple routes: "Chevette liked this one, an old-fashioned steel-frame ten-speed you could take up this mountain road, wildflowers blurring in your peripheral vision" (40). This innocuous trainer offers a much more accurate statement about the status of the human in contemporary Western society than the high-octane motorhead valley roulette found in *Vineland*. Though Gibson never really covers this in detail, the text implies that while Chevette can take the ten-speed up the mountain road, she cannot take it anywhere else. The wildflowers passing by in a blur in her peripheral vision do so not because of the speed and certainly not because of the anatomy of the human eye, but rather because they have been programmed to display as a blur analogous to that seen in one's peripheral vision while travelling at speed. Her input into this system is limited to pumping the pedals, and the output into *her* system (not that in this configuration there is much of a difference) is limited to preprogrammed images of a mountain road. Chevette can turn neither left nor right, let alone around; she certainly can't let her imp of the perverse take over and ride right into the wildflowers, mashing them to pollen-flecked pulp.

This is diametrically opposed to her experience described in Gibson's previous novel *Virtual Light*; as a bike messenger in San Francisco, her success depended on *not* following the pre-selected paths. There, she was a navigator, defining the most apt path through her own experience of everyday life:

Sometimes, when she rode hard, when she could really proj, Chevette got free of everything: the city, her body, even time. That was the messenger's high, she knew, and though it felt like freedom, it was really the melding-with, the clicking-in, that did it. The bike between her legs was like some hyperevolved alien tail she'd somehow extruded, as though over patient centuries; a sweet and intricate bone-machine, grown Lexan-armored tires, near-frictionless bearings, and gas-filled shocks. She was entirely part of the city then, one wild-ass little dot of energy and matter, and she made her thousand choices, instant to instant, according to how the traffic flowed, how rain glinted on the streetcar tracks, how a secretary's mahogany hair fell like grace itself, exhausted, to the shoulders of her loden coat. (131)

Chevette's bike constitutes her personal technology of the self, to borrow a term from Foucault, allowing her the freedom to navigate the city as she sees fit. While she might feel at one with the city, the *actual* experience of the city, the typical experience of the masses and the one she manages to rise above, is encapsulated in the gridlock she blows past, cars locked into their pre-approved paths. Moreover, Chevette and her bike are depicted as fused, part of each other, it as much an agent of her will as she the fulfillment of its potential – a perfect symbiosis of humanity and technology, as positive as the ideal vision of posthumanity put forth by N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman*. Most importantly, though, Chevette's technology allows her to control her trajectory through life. She is here the antithesis of Pynchon's wild highway riders, blind to whatever comes around the next curve. She is momentum, control, and agency, organizer and directory of her own behavior in a world that lacks, as Gwyneth Jones puts it, “the clunky whirr and click of the old teleological evolution drive” (160), a world of beautiful purposeless chaos where free action is real because “stuff happens, that's all” (160). Yet, by the

events of *All Tomorrow's Parties*, Chevette has lost all of this, the only analogue of that freedom depicted in *Virtual Light* embodied in the bike trainer crammed in a laundry-room reeking of mildew – a vision of posthumanity much closer to Scott Bukatman's terminal subject than Hayles's more empowered variant.

So what are we to make of this stark shift from agent to structure slave? This seems a strange shift, especially considering that a great many critics have accused Gibson's work of being little more than male empowerment fantasies. Empowerment fantasies surely imply power? Contrary to many critics, lack of power is nothing new in Gibson. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. in "Futuristic Flu, or, The Revenge of the Future" rightly points out that the plot of *Neuromancer* is Wintermute's plot alone:

And this plot acts on the characters precisely as the flu acts on the readers, taking their emotions and transforming them into functions and commands: Case's and Molly's hate, Case's longing and grief. Armitage's guilt, Maelcum's courage, and 3Jane's perversity have no significance other than their function enabling the completion of Wintermute's master plan. (39)

Case is not an empowered character; he is at best an attendant lord who finds some degree of escapist pleasure from this bleak powerlessness in cyberspace, itself part of the disempowering structure. Case has, at best, been sold a fantasy of empowerment, both by his profession and the AI pulling his strings, but it is ultimately just that – fantasy. The plain reality seems to be that both Gibson's cyberpunk and postcyberpunk works offer the same bleak vision of the subject: Chevette, like Case before her, is little more than a marionette, strings pulled by larger powers both nameless and faceless – powers that are not necessarily human or even themselves possessed of agency. *All Tomorrow's Parties* is, in this regard, a complex exploration of the subject's loss of authenticity and agency in the postmodern world at the hands of multiple

sources, technology (or rather, technology put to certain uses) only one of many but certainly emblematic of all.

This is without a doubt Gibson's read of the present. In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Gibson explains that he doesn't exactly operate within the celebrated science fiction tradition of extrapolation: "When I write about technology, I write about how it has *already* affected our lives; I don't extrapolate in the way I was taught an SF writer should . . . My aim isn't to provide specific predictions or judgments so much as to find a suitable fictional context in which to examine the very mixed blessings of technology" (*Wounded Galaxies* 140). Chevette's virtual "ride" is certainly one of the curses mixed in with the blessings; Gibson seems clear on the point that technology, be it in the form of a simple bike trainer or a transcendent artificial intelligence representative of the entire information system of human civilization, contains the potential to strip us of the possibility of self-directed action and unique, unmediated experience, leaving us but a component of a system, what Scott Bukatman labels the terminal subject: "an unmistakably double articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or computer screen" (9).

Drawing upon Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Bukatman argues that "a new subject emerges, one that begins its process of being through the act of viewership" (35). Reality, he argues, becomes an extension of the media pap-feed, and individuals become addicts whose very sense of self is fused to the mediascape as surely as Burroughs's addicts are fused to the needle. The image addict becomes "a helpless prisoner of the spectacular society. The spectacle is a force of pacification, exploitation, control, and containment which functions as either a supplement or simulacrum of the state. The citizen becomes a blip circulating within the feedback loop of the imploded society: terminal identity begins" (69). Image addiction certainly

seems to account for the perceived loss of agency, but the problem isn't simply an issue of top-down media control. There is perhaps a less instrumental force operating simultaneously to threaten our capacity for self-direction; Rowland Sherrill, in *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque*, explores this postmodern existential dilemma through a different lens. Sherrill, in describing the ills besetting selfhood in the contemporary era, draws upon Kenneth Gergen's *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. According to Sherrill, "Gergen contends that [the various media ranging from radio to television to the postal service] have so amplified the range and numbers of a person's social relationships that, by now, an individual self finds itself 'overpopulated' and, in fact, overwhelmed by its often obligatory and frequently unavoidable connectedness to far too many other selves" (86). Moreover, this "overpopulated self cannot distinguish its own separate identity, agency, or authorizing form of outlook and response, any more than it can either choose among or find a way to coordinate the competitive and often contradictory perspectives and perceptions of the multitudes within it" (86).

Pursuing this possible cause, Sherrill also draws from Walker Percy's *The Message in the Bottle*, particularly the chapter entitled "The Loss of the Creature," from which Sherrill takes the idea that

contemporary life has created a condition in which any 'direct' experience – of the Grand Canyon, of a dogfish, of a Shakespearean sonnet, of virtually anything – has become so utterly mediated, or packaged for certain consumption, or overridden by theory, or surrendered to the cult of the expert, that a person who fails to 'work at it' stands little chance of eluding the intermediate barriers between him or her and the thing encountered. (86)

An individual's identity and agency are then hopelessly intertwined with the countless, contradictory media that have colonized his or her mind. Both Percy and Gergen's views provide a bleak assessment of the subject under the conditions of postmodernity, positing an individual

whose identity, agency, and even perceptual potential have been thoroughly colonized by the disparate threads of our massively-parallel, pluralist techno-culture. All of this is, of course, related to Fredric Jameson's "'death of the subject,' the end of individuality, the eclipse of subjectivity in a new anonymity" (174). What possibility for agency can there be when the self is too saturated with other inputs to do any directing?

This more specific vision of characters whose agency is compromised by the choir of competing voices that comprise our culture is also apparent from even a cursory glance at the protagonists (if such a term still applies) of postmodern novels. Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* provides us with Hector, a government agent whose television addiction is so severe that he must be sent to a Tubaldetox facility where "a retinal diet of scientifically calculated short video clips of what in full dosage would, according to theory, have destroyed his sanity, [would rally] his mind's own natural defenses" (329-30). This treatment, of course, fails in the manner methadone often fails, and Hector the Tube addict is left as one who can only think via Tubal patterns, thus having little option but to later interpret Prairie's boyfriend via a god-awful Sandra Dee movie he saw a quarter of a century earlier, thinking (complete with proper citation) "he might even turn out to be a fine young man despite all the evidence, look at Moon-doggie, for example, in *Gidget* [1959], after all...." (16). DeLillo provides an almost identical character in *White Noise* in the form of Mink or Mr. Gray who, when finally encountered by Jack Gladney, can only communicate in advertising sound bites such as the following: "Did you ever wonder why, out of thirty-two teeth, these four cause so much trouble? I'll be back with the answer in a minute" (312). John Duvall, in "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*," neatly summarizes Mink's relationship with television in a manner perfectly harmonious with Bukatman's terminal image: "Mink's viewing is more than passive.



There is no distance for him; he is almost another piece of electronic hardware through which television's message flow" (142). Neither Mink nor Hector can truly experience the world, let alone chart their own courses through it, so co-opted are they by media forces.

There have been numerous calls for a form of literature that offers both an accurate representation and possible corrective for this invidious situation. Fredric Jameson has called for a hero capable of navigating this new postmodern world, suspecting such a hero could be found in cyberpunk. Jameson felt that what was required was "[a]n aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – [that] will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice" (54). No such aesthetic was extant in any real, fully matured sense, but Jameson did look forward to "some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing . . . in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale" (54). Jameson seemed, at least within the pages of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, to think highly of the cyberpunk genre's ability to provide a cognitive mapping function for denizens of Megamerica, to borrow a useful neologism from Don DeLillo. Jameson describes cyberpunk as "as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself" (38) and called William Gibson's work "an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production" (38), clearly signaling a belief that cyberpunk was, at the very least, allowing for a much more accessible comprehension of the

nascent lines of corporate power peculiar to the postmodern reality. Jameson later explains that “‘cognitive mapping’ was in reality nothing but a code word for ‘class consciousness’ – only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind” (418).

Regardless of the political models implicit in Jameson’s statements, his call for a new literature that maps out the complex hierarchies of power and reveals the powerlessness of the individual speaks volumes about the individual’s loss of personal agency, of self-directed action – and he was certainly not alone in his call.

Larry McCaffery, writing in *Storming the Reality Studio*, echoes Jameson’s sentiments, suggesting that “postmodern SF has recently produced the only art systematically exploring the “desert of the real(s)” (8), an art which “seeks to empower us by providing a cognitive mapping that can help situate us in a brave new postmodern world that systematically distorts our sense of who or where we are, of what is ‘real’ at all, of what is most valuable in human life” (16). McCaffery, too, recognizes that human agency is vanishing, hoping that new models might empower. Jameson and McCaffery are not alone in this hope, of course; calls for a mysterious, indescribable new type of literature came (and still come) from critics from all points of the spectrum (though most did see hope, for some odd reason, in cyberpunk, by then hopelessly neutered by its own success). Timothy Leary, Sixties drug guru asserts in “The Cyberpunk: The Individual as Reality Pilot,” anthologized in *Storming the Reality Studio*, that “A *cyber-person* is one who pilots his/her own life. By definition, the cyber-person is fascinated by navigational information – especially maps, charts, labels, guides, manuals, which help pilot one through life. The cyber-person continually searches for theories, models, paradigms, metaphors, images, icons which help chart and define the realities which we inhabit” (258). Leary boldly and hopefully proclaimed that the “model for the Cyberpunk is Prometheus, a technological genius who ‘stole’

fire from the Gods and gave it to humanity” (245). Leary, often lambasted as a space cadet, is expressing virtually the same desire as Jameson, McCaffery, and a host of others: the (post)modern world, with its unimaginable complexity, paralyzing overabundance of knowledge and choices, and power hierarchies so subtle and vast as to be nearly supernatural, somehow undermines the integrity of the self and the self’s ability to act with genuine agency. Leary can certainly be forgiven his bombastic language, for this is a universally observed problem. Leary is, however, something of an optimist; it is a bit naïve to believe that cyberpunk had managed to attain this state. What Leary saw as the cyberpunk hero – the reality pilot – simply hadn’t developed. As we have already seen, the very plot of *Neuromancer* revolves around the elision of agency.

Jameson, however, is really no less bombastic in his exhortations; discussing the hyperspaces of postmodern architecture in his 1984 essay “Postmodernism,” he declares that “we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace . . . The new architecture, therefore . . . stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions” (80). Damien Broderick suggests provocatively that Jameson’s hyperbolic statement “resembles nothing so much as the utopian – even the somewhat crackpot – voice of a Bernard Shaw if not a Timothy Leary. Yet it is in exactly this perilous register that Jameson’s theories come closest to illuminating science fiction at its most audacious, silly, ambitious, and indispensable” (103). Indeed, I would argue that Broderick’s somewhat biting connection between Jameson and Leary isn’t a facetious comparison at all, for both are envisioning a similar function for literature (and resultant subject or subjectivity) in response to social conditions both recognize – and both illuminate “science fiction at its most audacious, silly, ambitious, and

indispensable” (103) in their respective calls for literatures that assist the reader in comprehending the place of the subject under the conditions of postmodernity and possibly suggest strategies for reclaiming that vanishing potential for free action.

In addition to the calls of Jameson and Leary outlined above, many other writers and theorists have contributed to the dialogue. Alvin Toffler, for instance, makes such a call for a new type of fiction in 1970’s *Future Shock*: “Today we need powerful new utopian and anti-utopian concepts that look forward to super-industrialism, rather than backward to simpler societies” (466). Lewis Shiner, author of such cyberpunk Ur-texts as *Frontera* and *Deserted Cities of the Heart*, makes his own call in 1992’s *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, arguing that “New Age mysticism, religious fundamentalism, panicked consumerism, drug and alcohol addiction – all are picking up speed. I see all of these as responses to technology, as indications that technology alone is not enough. Our problems are also sociological, spiritual, even moral. There are issues that fiction in the year 2000 could, and should, address” (23-4). There are dozens of similar calls, each, in its own way, anticipating a type of literature that effectively addresses the plight of the subject in contemporary technosociety and offers some hope of solution to problems ranging from information overload to fragmentation to rampant consumerism.

But must this much-heralded new form of literature necessarily be *new*? Bukatman begins *Terminal Identity* with the assertion that “[w]ithin the metaphors and fictions of postmodern discourse, much is at stake, as electronic technology seems to rise, unbidden, to pose a set of crucial ontological questions regarding the status *and power* of the human. It has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly narrate a new subject that can somehow directly interface with - and master – the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age” (2). While his conclusion is

hardly positive, his assertion that it is the work of SF to recenter the subject is undoubtedly correct. It is my contention that a contemporary resurgence in science fiction of the picaresque, which can be viewed as either a genre originating in Spain in the sixteenth century or an independent mode of literature, offers a unique and valuable approach to answering this call. The parameters of the historical picaresque were drawn by such defining features as a first-person perspective, an episodic narrative rhythm, and a vast panorama of social types, and also by such motifs as the unusual birth, the grotesque incident, and the ejection or exile. The historical picaresque is today by and large considered a closed genre, confined to its long-passed epoch. Nonetheless, the picaresque is still very much in operation as a literary mode, in Robert Scholes's sense; Ulrich Wicks and Rowland Sherrill both argue that the picaresque should best be thought of in this way, since a mode is much more flexible and capable of evolution than is a rigidly defined genre. The picaresque as it appears today in SF is much changed from the historical model while still retaining most of the original structural features and motifs, modified for relevance and to engage more effectively contemporary cultural problems.

Sherrill, examining the resurgence of the picaresque in mainstream fiction from the Sixties to the present, has provided a useful model for approaching the picaresque in SF. Sherrill's *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque*, offers an interesting assessment of the new American picaro:

While maintaining the characterizing mobility of the old picaro, then, this new American picaro travels not to meet the literal needs of survival in hand-to-mouth existence but, rather, to carry out a kind of 'errand into the wilderness,' to engage the newly alien character of American experience, to restore or locate the terms of relation when senses of community have been fractured, to render the whole sensical somehow by deciphering the chaos on his or her particular pathway. (44)

Sherrill is here proposing a bold argument concerning the work of the picaro in the contemporary world. Rather than a semi-satirical commentary on hypocrisy, corruption, or popularly held

illusions, Sherrill suggests that the new picaresque serves a double function: first, it aids in charting the terrain of an America rapidly becoming unrecognizable in its complexity; and second, it seeks to identify the social maladies that afflict the subject in contemporary society and find treatment for said maladies via the picaresque journey itself.

Sherrill argues that “certain obstacles confronting selfhood in recent America . . . conspire severely against the ability of any ‘self’ in the arenas of experience and interpretation, and, as it frequently happens, the new American picaro or picara begins his or her road career as a ‘carrier’ of the ills that beset contemporary selfhood” (84). Accepting Gergen and Percy’s analyses of the ills of contemporary life – analyses which are repeated by social theorists such as Alvin Toffler and Scott Bukatman and by numerous authors such as Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon – Sherrill continues to argue that the picaresque journey offers a cure for these ills . . . provided that the picaro or picara first becomes aware of his or her status as a carrier of the disease: “Before a self can work at recovery or can learn to respect the authority and integrity of its own distinctive experience, however, that self must first recognize itself as ‘under siege,’ suffering affliction” (90). Once this realization occurs, however, the picaro’s “‘exile’ onto the solitary course can become a means of leaving the resident ‘others’ behind, putting one’s self out of reach” (100), although not all manage to escape the shackles imposed upon their identities. The picaresque is thus both diagnostic tool for the diseases of contemporary life and therapy, at least in vicarious literary form, for those same illnesses.

According to Claudio Guillén, the exiled or ejected picaro or picara is a half-outsider, one who can “neither join nor actually reject his fellow men” (80), having learned that, while the world is harsh and unfair and society is cold, there is no existence beyond it. The half-outsider hero is one who must live in a gray area between a full participation in society and an outright

rejection of society, learning the existence of a hermit, how to adopt masks, perform deceptions, and in general hide the inner self from the outer. This proves to be a powerful marginal position, a position from which the half-outsider can be free from the cacophony of voices that would seek to colonize his or her mind while he or she can, from a distance, be able to gain perspective on the oppressive forces from which he or she has fled or been fortunately exiled. It is this model of the picaresque hero-as-outsider undergoing journeys of healing that can be found in much contemporary science fiction.

Contemporary SF is rife with characters that follow this three-part model: victim or carrier of the ills of contemporary society, half-outsider exile now possessed of enough distance to recognize the forces aligned against them, and spatiotemporal traveler who gains via mobility a more accurate understanding of the society he or she inhabits while acquiring on the journey a toolkit to overcome the various instrumental or more often incidental forces that inhibit authenticity and agency. Many characters come to mind: Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs from *Altered Carbon*, Stephenson's Princess Nell from *The Diamond Age*, Ellis's Spider Jerusalem from *Transmetropolitan*, etc. Examples abound in contemporary SF, but nearly all contemporary examples – whether labeled as Hard SF, Space Opera, etc. – share elements that are generally labeled “postcyberpunk,” suggesting ancestry in 80s SF authors such as Bruce Sterling, more so than William Gibson. Moreover, this incarnation of the picaresque, plentiful from the 80s to the present, does not really exist in such quantity (if at all) prior to the cyberpunk/Movement SF of the early 80s. In my estimation the grand cultural shifts that began in the Long Sixties but first became obvious and pervasive in the late Seventies and early Eighties sparked the rebirth of the picaresque in the work of up-and-coming SF authors interested in capturing the zeitgeist, as it were, of the moment of Transition. The work of these SF authors, who together form the body of

what will be referred to as Movement SF, provided a particularly fertile ground for the picaresque genre, as the defining characteristics of Movement SF dovetail with the defining characteristics of the picaresque.

The aims of this project are therefore threefold. First, this project will attempt to define the salient features of Movement SF, sometimes referred to as postcyberpunk, in order to identify exactly which genre features prove conducive to the picaresque. Second, this project will explore the picaresque as it manifests in Movement SF, examining the various tropes and motifs that have been repurposed for use in contemporary SF and defining a body of new ones that have arisen from this genre fusion. Third, this project will examine the spatial tactics, both physical and mental, used by these picaros and picaras to create marginal positions in an otherwise globalizing culture from which they can find escape from the cacophony of voices and other influences (not the technologies proper, but rather the uses to which they are put) in order to begin a profitable picaresque journey. Contemporary picaros and picaras, being products of a globalizing world, often are victimized by the very cultures they seek to study, so it will also be necessary to explore the journeys of healing proper, highlighting both the diseases of authenticity and agency and the various “road cures” each text prescribes.

#### Part 1: (Re)Defining Spaces: Mapping Movement SF

Part 1, “(Re)Defining Spaces: Mapping Movement SF,” turns its attention to the cyberpunk and postcyberpunk genres themselves, the genre(s) so many critics found hopeful (or at least instructive, representationally speaking), with the ultimate goal of paring away genre misunderstandings and commercial labels and, by so doing, revealing the core traits of



Movement SF so fertile for the growth of picaresque narratives. For instance, Lewis Shiner, in “Inside the Movement: Past, Present, and Future,” gives an insider’s view of the early days of the cyberpunk genre and offers up an interesting understanding of what really constitutes the genre. Shiner argues that cyberpunk, a genre as fully commodified as is conceivable, is by and large composed of what he terms sci-fiberpunk and should be considered separately from what he “prefer[s] to call the Movement, using John Shirley’s term” (18). Sci-fiberpunk is, for Shiner, more of an adolescent fantasy than a literature actively engaging present and future realities. It is “a very restricted formula; to wit, novels about monolithic corporations opposed by violent, leather-clad drug users with wetware implants” (17) – in short, all of the typical stereotypes associated with cyberpunk fiction. Sci-fiberpunk, elsewhere called “technosleaze” by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. and “cyberdrol” by Scott Bukatman, has amongst its practitioners (according to Shiner) such luminaries as Mike Resnick, David Brin, and Spider Robinson. From the perspective afforded by 2013, to this list one might add hundreds upon hundreds of pretenders to the throne, ranging from the thirty-five odd *Shadowrun* novels based upon a pen-and-paper game not-so-loosely based upon *Neuromancer* to films such as *Equilibrium* – none of which fulfill, in any real sense, the hopeful expectations placed upon them by Jameson, Leary, or any of the others, let alone share the traits that prove fertile to the picaresque.

These sci-fiberpunk works, Shiner argues, have virtually nothing in common with the Movement science fiction of the Eighties in either philosophic or aesthetic ambitions: “only the Rucker and Gibson books have anything at all in common with the sort of sci-fiberpunk commodity written by Swanwick, W.T. Quick, and the like. I feel this split between sci-fiberpunk and the Movement was inevitable” (22). Of course, Rucker’s and Gibson’s books are neither lacking in quality nor are the adolescent fantasy vehicles certain critics have made them

out to be; they merely introduced the tropes that others imitated ad nauseum. I shall argue that cyberpunk is best thought of as a limited closed genre, confined exclusively to the early work of William Gibson and one or two of his compatriots. The rest of the marketing category of “cyberpunk” falls flatly into the irrelevant category of sci-fiberpunk; hopefully this distinction will permit a cleaner interrogation of the genre and its descendants. Once this distinction is made, the argument can be put forth that what has in the years since Shiner’s essay come to be called postcyberpunk fiction is a continuation not of cyberpunk but rather of the general Movement fiction Shiner identifies and Bruce Sterling championed in his free publication *Cheap Truth*. Thus, the category under discussion – Movement SF – can be shown to have a common ancestor and thus common features while containing within itself several somewhat bogus marketing categories such as the New Space Opera, a group of fictions which have more in common with Sterling than they do with E. E. Doc Smith.

Having established the pedigree and parameters of Movement SF, Part One can assess the defining traits of the genre that mesh so well with the picaresque. Movement SF will be shown to be defined not by such overexposed tropes as cyberspace, but rather by four distinguishing features, or premises, which set the genre apart from other incarnations of SF. Movement SF, unlike many other SF genres, makes its mission an honest attempt to engage with the present, be it the present of the 80s or today. Rather than running thought experiments about distant technologies or alien cultures, Movement SF participates in that truest of SF traditions: commenting on the present through the powerful tool of defamiliarization. As such, Movement SF is above all a genre designed to critique and demythologize society, the very purpose of the picaresque. In addition, Movement SF is marked by an interest in the dissolution of traditional boundaries due to technological change, specifically social boundaries and categorical

boundaries, such as that which exists between human and nonhuman. Movement SF, in other words, is geared to map the terrain of a changing society. Movement SF also possesses a natural fascination with marginal, interstitial areas, the hinterlands of culture that are paradoxically the fuel for capitalist expansion, providing the trendy edginess to sell new products, and also the most vulnerable areas, destroyed upon being co-opted by the forces of capital. These marginal areas are also indispensable for picaresque engagement, since picaros and picaras, as we will see, must be ejected from society; one can't successfully become a "half-outsider hero" if there are no outsider margins to inhabit. Finally, Movement SF is marked by an energetic, high-information prose style which not only reflects the high-information condition of modern life but also reflects the languages of globalization. Our vast and yet deceptively uniform media machine ultimately serves to construct social environments that eliminate crucial marginal and interstitial areas and impede picaresque engagement by encouraging cultural homogeneity, and Movement SF's unique approach to prose (and the content it hides) provides a tool for charting this trend.

## Part 2: Evolving Spaces: Mapping the Evolution of Movement Picaresque

Once Movement SF's parameters and ambitions are defined, the new incarnation of the picaresque can be defined, demonstrating in the process that, considering the aims and ambitions of Movement authors, the picaresque is almost certainly a natural result of the genre's evolution. This new picaresque, however, must not be thought of in the typical rigid terms often deployed when discussing genre. As opposed to a closed historical definition of the picaresque that restricts the genre to the 1500s-1600s in Spain and an open ahistorical definition that tends to allow the term *picaresque* to be applied to anything that bears a few general picaresque

characteristics – an approach that has led critics such as Howard Mancing to complain that the picaresque has become a protean form that has blended away into the crowd – Ulrich Wicks argues for a modal approach to the picaresque built upon Robert Scholes’s definition of the literary mode. Wicks suggests that “[m]odal awareness allows us to see the *general* fictional makeup of individual narrative work. Modes do not specifically impose a form and are thus prenovelistic: they are applicable to fiction anytime, anywhere. Since the picaresque is here posited as one of the modes, we would expect to find it in widely varying degrees in much fiction” (241). By conceiving of the picaresque as a mode that is fully capable of evolution rather than a specifically codified set of parameters, this model of the picaresque genre can more easily be applied as a critical tool to the current descendants of the picaresque.

A modal view also frees us from rigid expectations about the applicability of the picaresque as a genre; as a prenovelistic *shape*, the picaresque is then freed from hard historical ties, allowing it to become a narrative strategy any author can employ – with or without knowledge of literary precedent – for the purpose of engaging with social situations that demand its special charms. Claudio Guillén notes of the historical picaresque in his landmark essay “Toward a Definition of the Picaresque” that “the picaresque would return during days of irony and discouragement—times less favorable than the nineteenth century to the plans of the bold individual. In the twentieth century, as in the Spain of Philip II and the Germany of the Thirty Years’ War, the career of the rogue would once more disclose an awareness of civilization as oppression” (105). I can think of no better description of the present than “civilization as oppression” or “days of irony and discouragement.” If such days are the natural material of the picaresque mode, then the only real conclusion is that the picaresque couldn’t help but resurface.

The only question might be why it resurfaced in such overwhelming force in the SF of the past three decades.

A brief answer might be found in the fact that Eighties SF authors actively sought to create characters representative of the people populating the postindustrial present, described by authors like David Harvey and Alvin Toffler in terms of flexibility, high mobility, rapid professional turnover, multiple skill sets, etc. It strikes me as inevitable that an author attempting to create a plausible postindustrial person would create something akin to the *pizaro*, who is also a highly mobile person of many roles possessed of great capacity for change. The *pizaro* is the protean trickster; Toffler's tomorrow people and modular men, embodied in such memorable SF characters as Charles Stross's Manfred Macx or Neal Stephenson's Hiro Protagonist, aren't much different. Add to this the necessity of marginal positioning if any real social commentary in a fully globalized world is to be accomplished and the need for great spatial and social mobility to experience the growing micronarratives characteristic of the postmodern, and the result is the picaresque mode.

Thus, Part Two will turn its full attention to mapping this new incarnation of the picaresque mode. The general shape of the new SF picaresque can be arrived at by paring away elements from previous structural models of the picaresque, most notably those put forward by Stuart Miller, Claudio Guillén, and Ulrich Wicks, and by adding several new or altered elements not covered in other commentaries. The navigator motif, for instance, is an altered element all but universal in contemporary SF picaresque. Guillén points out that "[i]t is a well-known fact that Smollett and the English eighteenth-century novelists were the first to make the *pizaro* a good sailor" (84), but while most traditional *pizaros* and *pizaras* were not overtly associated with professions related to navigation (unless vagabond or wanderer should be considered a

navigational profession), nearly all contemporary SF picaros and picaras are navigators of some form or fashion, consistent with the new picaresque's goal of social cartography. Another significant change concerns the general chaos of the picaro or picara's world. Miller observes that "[i]n the picaresque, we start with life's chaos assaulting the picaresque hero in one event after another and we watch it continue to do so . . . No mysterious order emerges to bind events together and to bring them to some end" (12) and that consequently "[t]he moral order we expect (or hope to find) in life has also dissolved" (27). The traditional picaresque was set in an amoral, chaotic world starkly at odds with the moral order presumed to exist, and while the plots of some picaresque novels halfheartedly attempt, via the hermetic retreat of the picaro or picara, to restore moral order to reality, the primary lesson is that the world we inhabit and the societies we create are inherently chaotic. In Movement picaresques, however, the underlying chaos mutates slightly into what is better understood as an evolutionary chaos. Evolutionary frameworks maintain the theme of chaos, something necessary for evolutionary systems to work, but allow for a focus on growth and change, on adaptation, without introducing teleological notions of directed growth or a reliance on order/chaos moral binaries. These and numerous other significant changes will be explored, providing a working model of the SF picaresque.

Part Two, as well as Part Three, will draw support from the plots and protagonists of four representative novels drawn from the works of authors spanning three decades (roughly 1985 through 2008) and several Movement-influenced subgenres of science fiction, all of which participate to a greater or lesser extent in what Ulrich Wicks describes as the picaresque mode. The works and protagonists are as follows: Abelard Lindsay of Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix* (1985); Ubu Roy and Beautiful Maria of Walter Jon Williams's *Angel Station* (1989); Spider Jerusalem of Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson's *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002); and Freya

Nakamichi-47 of Charles Stross's *Saturn's Children* (2008). There are, of course, many other science fiction works participating in the picaresque, but, while sporadic use will be made of other Movement SF works that also participate in the picaresque, the core of the study will focus on the representative four listed above.

### Part Three: "Violating Spaces: Homogenized Worlds and Tactics of Marginalization"

Andrew Ross, speaking mainly of cyberpunk's (over)celebrated spatial trope of cyberspace, suggests in *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* that "cyberpunk sketched out the contours of the new maps of power and wealth with which the information economy was colonizing the global landscape" (147), cleanly summarizing the importance of space in cyberpunk's examination of postmodern society. Scott Bukatman says much the same: "Science fiction provides the referential dimension absent from these new, disembodied, electronic spaces; the function of the genre is to compensate for the loss of the human by transforming these spaces into arenas susceptible to human perception" (238). Bukatman sees in the cyberspace realms of 80s SF a potential for the decentering of the traditional humanist subject, but ultimately he cannot overcome the conclusion that this effort is "undermined by the transformation of these spaces into arenas of dramatic, human action" (238). The focus has fallen on what he perceives as a traditional masculine, domination-oriented paradigm (console cowboys, etc.) – a once-common criticism of both SF and cyberpunk that has been presented by many critics as universal but seems in retrospect only to apply to the early work of William Gibson, a criticism that now tends to be rejected by even such critics as Sherrill Vint, who states plainly that "his critics and imitators have overstated Gibson's rejection of the

body” (107) and notes that Case is presented “in typically feminized terms – pale, weak, passive” (105). Cyberspace, for some critics, was celebrated as an attempt to represent the complex interconnectedness of postmodern finance and/or culture, while for others it was read as simply a masculine escapist fantasy. Timothy Leary sees in it an empowering, liberatory function; Nicola Nixon sees it as a continuation of traditions of domination and power.

This debate still continues, but, at any rate, virtual reality itself – in whatever form it is presented – is not particularly crucial to cyberpunk and certainly not to Movement SF in general, regardless of the glut of critical attention directed at the novum from critics such as Ross, Hollinger, Bukatman, Sabine Huesser, etc. Virtual realities, within the logic of these plots, are simply one more space amongst many. If there is an importance to cyberspace as a trope, it is as an attempt to represent what Fredric Jameson terms “the technological sublime.” Jameson observes that “one is tempted to characterize it as ‘high-tech paranoia’ – in which the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hookup are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the human mind” (38), although for Jameson this is a “degraded attempt” (38) to model the technological sublime. Jameson rather “suggest[s] that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism” (37), with all of the lines of technological and political power that might imply. It is sublime in that it is beyond conventional representation. The technological sublime, then, could be conceived of as the totalizing space of globalized culture, the entirety of the world telecommunications system, and all of the structural elements that serve it. The technological sublime serves as a useful catch-all term for discussing the cultural phenomena



that place the self under siege. Cyberspace, as an attempt to represent the technological sublime, is a space that is everywhere and nowhere, decentralized and yet representative of a kind of centralized power. Cyberspace is not, however, the only possible avenue for attempting representation of the technological sublime: SF authors have used everything from surrealist Aztec dreamscapes to four-dimensional megalopolises to represent their respective analogues of Jameson's concept of the technological sublime. The crucial element is not cyberspace – a particular strategy of representation – but is rather the underlying reliance of spatial strategies upon which such representations depend. It is from this *type* of space that, in some sense, the picaro or picara must find some kind of marginality, for it is only within the boundaries between these spaces of the technological sublime(s) that the subject's latitude for action and agency, ability to construct mental maps covering possible courses of action, and ultimate evolution regarding individual capacity to understand the often vast, alien spaces that make up contemporary reality can be found.

The goal of Part Three will be to provide a broad map of the spatial tactics deployed in SF picaresques for the express purpose of allowing the beneficial picaresque journey to occur. While this might seem a simple exercise in definition, the purpose is far more crucial; if one does not have a rough sketch of the various spaces representative of the forces that have the self under siege, how can one identify, let alone discuss, the hinterlands, the borders, and the unexplored territories the picaros and picaras must cross into in order for their journeys to commence? Further, these spaces are intended, through the powerful tactic of defamiliarization, to reveal to both reader and picaro/picara alike something of the nature of the problems of the self, therefore a discussion of the nature of these spaces is indispensable. In order to accomplish this goal the expected works of picaresque genre theory will be used, but as the inherent significance of these

contemporary spaces are certainly not covered in spatial models of the picaresque developed for application to sixteenth century worlds, more contemporary theorists will be needed. While there have been many strides recently in exploring the spatial significances of contemporary SF – Rob Kitchin and James Kneale’s *Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction* comes to mind – I will instead be relying on the work of David Harvey, Alan Bryman, and George Ritzer to define the problem before turning to the work of Tim Cresswell and Michel de Certeau to assist in describing the tactics that lead to potential solutions. In brief, then, Part Three will explore how spatial strategies are deployed in Movement picaresques to achieve/chart out avenues of healthy marginality in which picaresque journeys can be undertaken. As Michael Marshall Smith points out in *Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction*: “these future worlds and environments are an expression of our internal present. The better our maps of these lands, whether real or virtual, the keener will be our understanding of who we are, where we are, and why” (xii).

Part Three will be subdivided into three sections. Section One will explore the globalized spaces foregrounded in Movement picaresques, spaces that are complex, literalized metaphors describing the various aspects of contemporary (post)industrial existence that, through both intention and unavoidable consequence, rob the subject of agency, prevent the subject from leading an authentic life, and colonize the mind of the subject such that alternative configurations of life and self cannot easily be conceived. The circuit-board description of San Narciso as seen by Oedipa Maas found in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* serves as an icon of this aspect of the Movement picaresque: “The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit

to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out)” (Pynchon 14). On the surface the “ordered swirl of houses and streets” is an oppressive Modernist depiction of city planning similar to the Pruitt-Igoe housing projects of St. Louis, but the narrative reveals the unstable, chaotic reality that the city’s rationalist planning seeks to control or at least mask, the “concealed meaning” waiting to be communicated. This hidden nature and the spaces that define it is key, therefore part one will also explore the margins of these worlds, the interstitial zones, the heterotopian zones into which the picaresque heroes find themselves ejected and from which they can embark upon their own unique trajectories through the otherwise far too thoroughly mapped-out existences that make the worlds under discussion. Section Two, by contrast, will examine the tactics of marginalization by which picaros and picaras can escape the oppressive homogeneity that defines our “post” modern societies.

The worlds in which these picaros and picaras tramp about and the consciousnesses they develop having been fully explored, the discussion can return to the picaresque effort to regain authenticity and agency. Section Three focuses on what is sometimes termed the fragmentation of identity and death of the subject/agency typical of postmodern and science fiction and the various strategies that the Movement picaresques uses to reauthenticate the subject and restore agency. The basic model provided earlier by Sherrill – picaro as carrier and journey as cure – structures this chapter’s investigation. Part One of Section Three explores the various “social” diseases of the self that hamper agency, focusing primarily on the compromising of authenticity brought about by the saturation of one’s identity by the multiphrenic (or, as I argue, *monophrenic*) and insistent voice(s) of the media. Part Two will shift the focus from the disease to the “road cure,” exploring the various strategies – the technologies of the self, to use again Foucault’s term – that Movement picaros and picaras employ to expel the forces colonizing their

identities, thus restoring authenticity to the self. Sherrill argues that “[o]ne way to skirt the predisposed response, the intercessions between self and experience, is to get off the beaten path and into those areas not overlaid with prior images and ideas that precondition the terms of the engagement” (102) – making of the journey a literal “road to recovery,” as Sherrill puns, avoiding in the process “the contemporary self’s . . . retreat into interiority” (105). The exposure to and mapping of a social panorama of individuals and ideas – the picaresque exposure to alterity – in an effort to counteract colonizing or homogenizing forces will be the primary treatment offered by the road cure under discussion, although it is certainly not the only possibility. Ultimately, multiple strategies by which Movement picaros and picaras expel the influences compromising their authenticity and thus regain a degree of autonomous action will be outlined.

## PART 1 (RE)DEFINING SPACES: MAPPING MOVEMENT SF

### "Watch Out, The World's Behind You": Looking Back at Cyberpunk

The history of cyberpunk has been written. In fact, cyberpunk's history has been written many times by an army of authors - something of a surprise considering that the genre had a lifespan of slightly less than two years. Cyberpunk *as a genre* "began" when Gardner Dozois popularized the term in his December 1984 *Washington Post* article "Science Fiction in the Eighties." This popularization was primarily the result of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* winning the 1984 Nebula Award (then, later, both the Hugo and the Philip K. Dick award). The genre "died" when its architect and ambassador, Bruce Sterling, declared the genre dead in *The Last Cheap Truth* in November, 1986 (though many still writing cyberpunk disagreed). If we wish to be generous, the genre's lifespan can be lengthened to a full six years by locating its inception (nomenclaturally speaking, of course) in Bruce Bethke's short story "Cyberpunk" written in 1980 (and published in *Amazing* three years later). Bethke coined the term, Dozois christened the genre, and Sterling, the father, provided last rites. As with anything smacking of history, there have been numerous impulses to push the dates back, thus giving cyberpunk a clear evolutionary history. William Gibson considers John Shirley's 1980 *City Come A-Walkin'* to be the genre's "patient zero" (Shirley, *City* 1). Philip K. Dick considered K. W. Jeter's 1972 *Dr. Adder* to be the first example of the cyberpunk genre - or, rather, it would have been: Dr. Adder's publication was delayed until 1984, the year of Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Such speculations, while entertaining, can go on virtually indefinitely, depending on one's criteria - not unlike debating the earliest human occupation of North America or the earliest use of written language. Fascinating

discussions of Danube script aside, written language, by most sets of criteria, has a very solid origin, and so does the cyberpunk genre. The genre began when, meme-like, the idea of the genre began to replicate widely.

However, as Baudrillard and his cyberpunk readership would warn us, the map is rarely the territory, and this is particularly true of the cyberpunk genre. There are, of course, numerous and incontrovertible historical facts surrounding the genre, ranging from the term's origins outlined above to the various writer's groups, friendships, and workshops that spawned the genre's first index case(s) to the shared reading materials passed around by the original small group of authors. This original small group of authors was limited to Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, William Gibson, and Lewis Shiner. It is certainly true that this small group of future cyberpunks formed a tight cadre, in the sense that they knew one another and communicated regularly. According to Steve Brown<sup>1</sup>, Brown met Sterling at the Clarion Writer's Workshop in East Lansing, 1974. Brown, impressed with the cocky Sterling, introduced him "to the work of Shirley, and the two began to hit it off via the mail" (175). Shiner met Sterling in 1976 at an SF convention at Texas A&M. They worked together in earnest after Shiner had relocated to Austin in 1979, as both were members of the Turkey City Neo-Pro Rodeo and Writer's Workshop. This collaboration led, among other things, to Shiner's regular contribution to the pages of Sterling's samizdat fanzine *Cheap Truth*, under the alias "Sue Denim." Sterling himself knew Gibson through Brown (himself praised in the pages of *Cheap Truth*), or, more specifically, Brown knew Shirley who knew Gibson and connected Sterling to him. It is also true that these friendships/collaborations between the original cyberpunks served to create a synergy that drove the cyberpunks themselves and thus their movement forward. Brown makes it clear that "[e]ach

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<sup>1</sup>Steve Brown's "Before the Lights Came On: Observations of a Synergy," an interesting reminiscence concerning the interpersonal relationships of the first group of "cyberpunks."

writer bullied, wheedled, shamed, and forced the others into outdoing themselves, into stretching their talents far beyond what each thought themselves capable. It was a vital and unique form of cross-fertilization, and for a brief moment it all happened away from the spotlight" (175) - a sentiment expressed in any given early interview with these four authors. Moreover, it is undoubtedly true that those ideas characteristic of cyberpunk grew out of the intellectual cross-pollination resulting from the collaborations between the original members. For instance, due to the passing around of Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*, the journalist might well be considered a cyberpunk in absentia. Shiner, speaking of his prep work for his novel *Frontera*, mentions that "Bruce gave me Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*, and I was off and running" (Shiner, "Inside" 21). In fact, one can scarcely read early interviews with Sterling, Shiner, and company without finding a reference to Toffler. Other writers and ideas no doubt made the rounds, further cementing the shared experience of this group.

Beyond this initial sharing of experience, however, there is little that needs saying. A group of writers attempting to break into a rather punishing field of publishing formed a clique of friends who helped with each other's work and carved out, relatively quickly, a new niche that culminated in *Neuromancer* sweeping the most prestigious SF publishing awards; yet, not long after, all of these authors went off in relatively unique directions, connected less by imagery or motifs than by very broad themes or philosophies of fiction. Such is the history of cyberpunk. Anything beyond this, such as efforts to offer up descriptions of the species, as it were, is deduction and speculation, just like every academic attempt to construct a generic category - a slightly irrational enterprise at best, since every evolving thing, living or literary, has very, *very* fuzzy boundaries. Ask the bonobos . . . provided one doesn't confuse them with chimpanzees, like all zoologists did until 1954. Perhaps this is a history in need of unwriting. Istvan Csicsery-

Ronay, Jr., in a rather perfect comment regarding our efforts to make a cohesive generic whole from cyberpunk cloth made in the 1989 essay "Futuristic Flu, or, The Revenge of the Future," observes that "[i]t doesn't inspire confidence that the most recent novel by its [cyberpunk's] most articulate and passionate polemicist, Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*, contains nary a trace of cyber or punk" (26), going on to confess that "We are pretending to know what it feels like to be *post-cyberpunk* when we don't know whether cyberpunk is finished, or even whether it ever was" (26). Perhaps it wasn't.

Csicsery-Ronay Jr.'s statement is very honest, in that it highlights the absurdity of creating a body of critical work around a genre whose texts aren't even identifiable as cyberpunk. As a genre, cyberpunk has more in common with mythology than reality, for is not the act of identifying a genre akin to the act of writing a mythology? The Mycenaean farmer who sees the femur of a mammoth poking out of the tilled earth of his field and, in wonder, declares, "There were TITANS in the earth in those days," or the humble Scythian nomad who, crossing the Gobi while trading gold, sees a fossilized skeleton of protoceratops and proclaims later in the marketplace that flocks of Griffons guard clutches of eggs in the deep desert is simply the forerunner of a critic who, upon seeing a copy of *Neuromancer* (or, maybe, Sterling's *The Artificial Kid*) emerging from the loam, writes, "Why, surely there is a genre of literature that celebrates the escape of the body's meat prison into digital nirvanas ruled by Turing-tested gods . . . and also promotes the wearing of leather!"<sup>2</sup> Each random bone or book thereafter found provides the myth concrete proof. Cyberpunk, like Greece, has a *rich* mythology.

### Polishing Bones: Cyberpunk Mythologies

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<sup>2</sup> See Adrienne Mayor's *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times* (2000)



And, like any good mythology, the relationship between myth and reality is tenuous, at best. Cyberpunk has gathered to itself an entire host of characteristics, themes, motifs, icons, tropes, etc. - far, far more than any sane biologist would use to classify (using Linnaeus's outdated system) any given species. Brian McHale's 1992 essay "Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk" lists the following features: zones/heterotopias in which distinctly different spaces collide and coexist, cyberpunk's traditional motif of cyberspace and other "inset worlds" (11), simstim and the subsequent ontological dissolution caused by the dislocation of the stable self, human/machine interface and boundary blurring, zombies and the calling into question of both consciousness and volitional action, defamiliarization of the theme of nuclear holocaust, and a focus on the "excluded middles" between life and death, human and machine, etc. McHale's poetics is intended to connect cyberpunk tightly with his own view of general postmodern aesthetics, and, in truth, most of these can be conveniently found in Gibson's first novel. Professor David Lavery<sup>3</sup> (editor of *Joss Whedon: Conversations* and no stranger to SF) lists on his website these features as being useful in identifying cyberpunk: anti-middle class values, Asianization, bodily metamorphosis, centrality of cyberspace, designer drugs, destructive sex, disillusionment, hard-boiled narration, high tech contrasted with junk, machine augmentation of the body, mean streets, "meat, the" (derogatory term for the body), near future setting, nihilistic,

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<sup>3</sup> If Lavery seems like a random inclusion, that is precisely the point: any given scholar has his or her own definition of cyberpunk that draws heavily from the mega-textual discussion concerning what exactly cyberpunk might be. This mega-text, and every definition drawn from it, ultimately proves so much vaporware when one tries to apply it broadly to the texts it claims. Case in point: Lavery's website, which provides supplementary material for an SF course, lists cyberpunk authors and film/television series. Amongst these presumably cyberpunk works, we find such films as *Alien: Resurrection* and *12 Monkeys*, showing just how wide this net is. *Alien: Resurrection* is included presumably for the presence of one or two computer hacking scenes. As for *12 Monkeys* . . . well, it is nihilistic.

noir atmosphere, postmodern, streetwise, virtual reality. Again, every feature can be conveniently found in Gibson's first novel and, as such, this list is certainly useful in reading *Neuromancer*, but are these characteristics truly accurate descriptions of that entire body of work termed "cyberpunk" or are these characteristics rather a type of mythology? Are they Baudrillardian simulations, bearing about as much relationship with objective reality as *My Three Sons* did with 1960s American culture? It depends greatly upon which texts one uses for taxonomy purposes. Lavery's list is almost perfect . . . assuming the only specimen available was *Neuromancer* and its bastard children. Cyberpunk, however, was a literary movement involving many writers, some of whom, like Rucker or even Bethke, developed similar ideas independently of the core group - parallel evolution, if you will. When one begins to consider the entire mass of literature that falls under the cyberpunk banner, many of the iconic characteristics attributed to the genre prove wildly incorrect, assuming one has more than a passing familiarity with the genre.

## Binary Mythologies

### 1. Embodiment and Cyberpunk

Let us consider the somewhat paradoxical nature of one of cyberpunk's most notorious and enduring criticisms: cyberpunk narratives rejected the body, favoring digital transcendence of the "meat." While many critics leveled this accusation, Sharon Stockton explains it as well as anyone. Stockton observes that "[c]yberspace, which is the true terrain of the cyborg, is unfortunately nothing if not Cartesian, positing precisely the separation of mind and body that

Haraway wants to argue is becoming obsolete; the hacker of cyberpunk fiction is a distinct duality, his mind in the 'dance of biz' and his body, 'dead meat,' left behind" (609). This became, over the years, one of the most common criticisms of cyberpunk fiction (and even postcyberpunk fiction). Even so, this criticism is, in a certain sense, fundamentally incorrect, and it is the reason why this criticism is incorrect that I feel tells us something very important about cyberpunk genre identity.

While the origins of cyberpunk can be traced back as far as Jeter's *Dr. Adder*, if one is so inclined, or even to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, if one is desperate for pedigree, no sane critic would dispute that, for all intents and purposes, the genre of cyberpunk began in the reader's mind with Gibson's *Neuromancer*. *Neuromancer*, like the other progenitors of cyberpunk, Sterling's *Schismatrix*, doesn't quite share that many of the core tropes and motifs associated with common perceptions of cyberpunk as one might imagine - and the issue of embodiment rejection is one point of discontinuity. Sabine Heuser is one of many who recognize something of a problem in describing the embodiment motif of cyberpunk fiction. Heuser observes the importance of the concept of transcending human limitations, noting that "[t]his aspect of transcendence is a frequently criticized tendency in cyberpunk" (23), yet while discussing Pat Cadigan's "more nuanced approach to transcending the human body, which has nothing to do with the 'bodiless exultation' experienced by the typical male Gibsonian hero in cyberspace" (23), Heuser even so points out that the characters in Gibson's cyberspace trilogy "remain paradoxically confined by their bodies, even when the flesh becomes flatlined or dead; their minds lose control of their new freedom and often become locked in some circular logic" (23), thus quite inadvertently pointing out the flaw in the assertion that Gibson (or really any of the core Movement writers, of which

only Cadigan and Sterling really matter) and his literary child support some sort of Cartesian disembodiment.

Pavel Frelik, writing in "Woken Carbon: The Return of the Human in Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs Trilogy," recognizes the embodiment issue as core to the cyberpunk discussion, noting that "Movement-era cyberpunk fiction has frequently been characterized as privileging the mind and reviling the body" (185), but he immediately notes that "the rejection of the body by Case . . . cannot unproblematically be taken as the stance of *Neuromancer*. . . , [a novel] which in other ways at least partially redeems the notion of embodiment" (185). Nevertheless, Frelik comments that "on the whole the Movement-era cyberpunk is dominated by the perspective of characters seeking to escape embodiment" (185) - the operative word, of course, being *perspective*, but even this qualifier does little to bring real perspective to the issue.

Gwyneth Jones, herself occasionally linked to (post)cyberpunk SF by the list-oriented due to her *White Queen* trilogy, also takes a skeptical view of some of the criticisms leveled at Movement writers such as Gibson. Specifically, Jones argues that "feminist criticism of Gibson seems to confuse deconstruction with character assassination. Thus, it so happens in *Neuromancer* that Molly's young history of degradation includes extremely ugly sexual exploitation and corruption: whereas there's no hanky-panky involved in Case's dreadful past. . . . It can't be used, as seems to have been the fashion in some 'feminist' response, as evidence that William Gibson condones femicidal necrophilia, rape or murder as pleasurable activities" (158). And, while Jones does not specifically address the issue of embodiment in this essay, which was actually a review of Gibson's *Virtual Light* tellingly entitled "*Virtual Light: A Shocking Dose of Comfort and Joy from William Gibson*," I would argue that the razor of her reasoning applies just as easily to those arguments that seek to conflate the presence of broken, traumatized

characters who seek to reject the body with the authorial intention to actually support such a position. Jones would no doubt concur; the title of her review is somewhat ironic, for she also notes that "Gibson himself has never been particularly hard-boiled: indeed he has been consistently gentle with his puppets" (157). In fact, regarding the novel in which most find it so easy to find a rejection of embodiment and the embrace of digital nirvana, Jones points out that "it is possible to miss the fact that *Neuromancer* is a novel about two or three miserable young losers, and that pity is their author's dominant feeling towards them" (157), thus making very clear that these are not characters deserving of emulation but rather of our concern (and, in the process, somewhat refuting the stance many take that Movement fiction was affectless, featuring characters with whom no one could empathize - what sorts of monsters can't empathize with losers?).

Sherryl Vint, author of *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction* and one of the best of cyberpunk's new critical voices, takes a very similar position. Vint supports the feminist reading that posits that "[c]yberpunk thus repeats the typical Cartesian binaries: the male is mind and transcendence; the female is body and immanence" (107), a position outlined quite neatly by Nicola Nixon in her 1992 essay "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" Vint points out that Gibson's "critics and imitators have overstated Gibson's rejection of the body" (107) and gives us a very insightful reading of Gibson's early work that highlights exactly how much emphasis Gibson placed on the embodiment of his characters, Case in particular, making the novel a meditation on "the consequences of forgetting that we are embodied human beings" (112), a position that is diametrically opposed to the criticism often leveled at Gibson and cyberpunk fiction. In fact, in a minor irony that clearly shows that contemporary "post-cyberpunk" isn't really that far removed

from dead-on-arrival cyberpunk as we might like to argue, Frelik's argument regarding Morgan's attitude towards embodiment centers around "the degree of attention the body receives in narration" (185), following essentially the same analytic tactic and lines that Vint herself applies to *Neuromancer*. Richard Morgan has indeed returned the human to cyberpunk, and he has done so by returning to the narrative strategies of William Gibson, the ur-humanizer of cyberpunk/Movement fiction. Indeed, a similar development can be seen in the work of most (if not all - Ken MacLeod did play the trope mostly straight in *The Stone Canal*) of the British Boom authors who deal with digitized consciousness, such as Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space* series, concerned as they have been with updating the genre.

Ignoring narrative strategy, consider the perspective of Sterling himself. When asked by Jude Milhon about the question of escaping the meat, Sterling flatly replied: "No, I'm not a mystic myself. This notion that there's some plug into God and you'll always be there . . . it doesn't work" (100). He goes on to say that he doesn't "see much point in just whiting out and transcending the body or whatever . . . one day you'd discover that you've passed out in the street and there are roaches living in your artificial arm" (100). Sterling, at least in his capacity as Movement propagandist, hardly supported the notion of technological transcendence or any of the cultural baggage associated with it. In fact, he dismissed the trope itself as a little more than a trick of the genre, reminding the reader that his own *Schismatrix* "ends with a character attaining cosmic transcendence" by being "eaten by an alien and [becoming] this pure spirit who gets to go around the universe and observe" (100) yet immediately observing that this move was "just a riff" and that "[p]eople who take that stuff too seriously end up turning into trolls" (100). To my knowledge, none of Sterling's novels celebrate escaping the flesh - even *Schismatrix's* transcendence takes place at the end of Lindsay's extremely long life, thus making the transition

more a comment on natural death than anything else. In fact, of the works of the early Movement writers (Gibson, Sterling, Shirley, Shiner, and Rucker), only a single text aside from Gibson's - Rucker's *Software* - deals directly with the idea of digital transcendence of the body, and it does so in a manner so ironic (Cobb's brain is puréed to digitize his knowledge) that one would have to be as stoned as Cobb, the transcendee, to think it a desirable alternative.

If there is an oddity to this debate, surely it lies in the fact that no commentator seems comfortable refuting this position. Of course, the argument that early cyberpunk fiction rejected embodiment in favor of a more masculine bodiless rationality is deeply embedded in discussions of gender identity in SF. Such discussions are crucial to SF's development, and I would hazard that the reticence of the above examples to abandon this position has to do, in part, with a fear of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as much as it has to do with an unwillingness to separate Gibson from his imitators, many of whom utterly failed to understand the nuances of his position. Regardless, there is really only one conclusion that can be reached from analyses such as this: cyberpunk as an object of criticism seems to have very little to do with the ur-texts upon which cyberpunk is actually based. In short, and as many of the original Movement writers claimed, once cyberpunk was given a (true) name, the name came to be all and the original idea ceased to be. Cyberpunk, or, as I prefer, Movement SF, became its own press clippings, which included its imitators and parasites.

## 2. Affect and Cyberpunk

Somewhat related to the embodiment myth is the claim that cyberpunk is all surface, lacking anything resembling emotional depth at either the level of character or reader

engagement. This claim is also highly suspect, especially when one considers that SF in general is frequently seen as having weak characterization, though Broderick<sup>4</sup> would tell us that SF simply approaches characterization differently. At any rate, the myth originates with a slightly overambitious application of Fredric Jameson's assertion regarding "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness" (9) in postmodern art to the cyberpunk genre in general, due largely to Jameson's praise of "a new type of science fiction, called cyberpunk" (38), referring in the brief mention only to William Gibson. This idea, as applied to cyberpunk, is rarely used with the subtlety with which Jameson introduces it. Specifically, Jameson is careful to quickly assert that "it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity has vanished from the newer image" (10), and rather suggests that what is vanishing is "the bourgeois ego . . . [and] the psychopathologies of that ego" (15) along with emotions/themes upon which such egos are built. It is a long way from such a starting point to suggest that the cyberpunk genre is built around characters and narratives fully lacking psychological depth and presenting only shiny surface, rather than simply lacking said Modernist egos, and yet that is exactly the shape of the myth. This myth becomes even more perplexing when one realizes that William Gibson's characters are futuristic versions of Lord Byron's Childe Harold or Rousseau's literary version of himself, rather than empty vessels.

On the surface, Gibson himself might seem to support this myth. In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Gibson, responding to whether or not *Neuromancer* drew much from his own past, states that "part of it came from watching how kids reacted to all the truly horrible stuff happening all around them--unfocused angst and weird lack of affect" (McCaffery 271). This does not, however, mean that a person reading Gibson's works is dealing with zombies; victims

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<sup>4</sup> Located in "Reading SF as a Mega-text," Broderick's best discussion of this useful concept.



of trauma might respond numbly, but that is only because their emotional responses are markedly different from the norm rather than absent altogether. Discussing this odd perception, Inge Eriksen, writing in 1990's "The Aesthetics of Cyberpunk," points out that "Cyberpunks do not rebel like the historical punks. They accept conditions and the ease with which they do it is frightening for those seeking psychological motivation. In Freudian terms there is no motivation except the bestial instinct of self-preservation and illusory visions" (40). This is a reading of which Jameson might well approve, since the lack of *expected* emotional depth is the direct result of capital's total triumph. How can one be recognizably human in such an environment? Even so, there are many levels of *human*, and frantic self-preservation, however base, is as well as deep as our lizard brain with its history as long as our own evolution. Therefore, cyberpunk (whether one is discussing *Neuromancer* or *Deserted Cities of the Heart*) is far from populated by emotionally-exhausted zombies; the genre is simply populated by individuals whose motivations are far away from those found in Modernist characters, being much more immediate and primitive.

### 3. Narrative and Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk even has a certain mythology of plot - its own Campbellian Monomyth, as it were. Consider Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s characterization of cyberpunk plots, taken from his very influential 1988 essay "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism":

Still, how many formulaic tales can one wade through in which a self-destructive but sensitive young protagonist with an (implant/prosthesis/telechronic talent) that makes the evil (megacorporations/police states/criminal underworlds) pursue

him through (wasted urban landscapes/elite luxury enclaves/eccentric space stations) full of grotesque (haircuts/clothes/self-mutilations/rock music/sexual hobbies/designer drugs/telechronic gadgets/nasty new weapons/exteriorized hallucinations) representing the (mores/fashions) of modern civilization in terminal decline, ultimately hooks up with a rebellious and tough-talking (youth/artificial intelligence/rock cults) who offer the alternative, not of (community/socialism/traditional values/transcendental vision), but of supreme, life-affirming *hipness*, going with the flow which now flows in the machine, against the spectre of a world-subverting (artificial intelligence/multinational corporate web/evil genius)? (184)

Even the respected Gardner Dozois, the co-coiner of the term "cyberpunk," saw, in 1984, roughly the same narrative model that Csicsery-Ronay complained of years later, noting significantly in "Science Fiction in the Eighties" - the very article that popularized the term "cyberpunk" - that "surely the wild and woolly 'outlaw fantasy' [Howard] Waldrop began producing in the mid '70s played some part in shaping the esthetics and literary style of the 'cyberpunk' movement" (par. 15). Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., (and Dozois), are correct to question the oft-formulaic narratives found in so-called cyberpunk, though it is a question that raises yet others: for instance, a perceptive reader might ask exactly how many such formulaic tales the critic himself had waded through to come to this genre characterization? Indeed, this abstracted plot summary captures the plot of *Neuromancer*, if not much else of Gibson's work. It captures Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers* (1987), though many would argue that *Vacuum Flowers* was an attempt to cash in on *Neuromancer*'s popularity. But what other pre-1988 works does this myth capture? Shirley's *Eclipse* series is the closest, but beyond that little that is called cyberpunk

seems to fit. Few if any Sterling novels apply. Lewis Shiner's 1984 novel *Frontera* was a *deconstruction* of the monomythic format above, and by 1988's *Deserted Cities of the Heart* Shiner's plots were tripping on acid atop Mayan ruins. Rudy Rucker's 1982 novel *Software* begins amidst the "life-affirming *hipness*" of a South Florida retirement community. So much for standardized plots.

A related minor myth concerns what David Lavery identified as cyberpunk's preoccupation with "high tech contrasted with junk," or cyberpunk's presumed focus on the lowest, debris-strewn level of human existence. Presumably, decaying city blocks and outdated circuit boards are as common in cyberpunk aesthetics as saguaro and tumbleweeds are in Westerns. Inge Eriksen makes this minor myth a bit clearer, arguing that Gibson's world "is neither good nor bad, beautiful or ugly. There is too much of it to be put into perspective" (39), going on to suggest that "Gibson does not bathe in the aesthetics of decay like more than one trendy writer has done in recent years" (39). This is an important observation, since the popular image of cyberpunk always seems to incorporate a heavy element of decay.

#### 4. Politics and Cyberpunk

Finally, though perhaps most crucially, cyberpunk has often been seen as apolitical - in fact, this lack of a political drive is part of the genre's overall mythology. This myth developed from a somewhat faulty reading of *Neuromancer*, a book that, at first glance, appears to present the future uncritically. Gibson's world is not a dystopia, though of course many read it as such. Even cyberpunk/postcyberpunk works that do seem to level easily identifiable critiques at the global economic order often do so in such an ironic, tongue-in-cheek way that feeds the

misperception that the genre is apolitical. Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, for example, concludes with the evil Rupert Murdoch-esque L. Bob Rife being defeated by what amounts to an image of the traditional family, in the form of the family dog. Of course, the family dog is a chrome-plated, Mach-5 cyberdog built for security who just happened to remember the love once shown to it by co-protagonist Y.T., but this is SF, after all. This myth, however, is built more on a general (and often unjustified) dissatisfaction with the *type* of political engagement, rather than any particular lack therein. In short, the plots of cyberpunk works lack traditional utopian projects, rarely following the pattern of, say, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* Trilogy, which chronicles the colonization of and subsequent revolution on the titular Red Planet. Robinson's are fine books all, but political engagement need not always be so obvious and grandiose.

In a 1995 essay entitled "Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy," Tom Moylan lays bare this dissatisfaction with the type of political engagement via a general (read: traditional) critique of the genre's default narrative structure:

Some of cyberpunk's difficulties have their roots in a deep textual fault: this was best described by Fred Pfeil when he noted that the cyberpunk writers had the *mis-en-scène* right, but they had the story wrong. That is, while the imagery developed in the alternative futures of cyberpunk settings symptomatically captures the 1980s ambience of privilege and poverty, the plots and characters of most cyberpunk texts compromise that vision so that the narrative possibilities of opposition are deflected and readers are trapped in the thrilling dead-end of cynicism, left with fashionable survival or displaced rebellion. (83)

According to critics such as Moylan, the genre successfully provides those much-coveted cognitive maps of 80s structures of power, but sadly does nothing else with this supposedly liberatory knowledge, and is thus in "complicity with the social order of the 1980s" (89) rather than subversive of said social order. As such, cyberpunk works were considered often

considerably worse than apolitical, as these works *supported* rather than subverted the status-quo, once one decoded the text, of course.

This particular charge of compromised politics stands in sharp contrast to the writers' own perceptions. Sterling, cyberpunk's great popularizer, hardly saw cyberpunk, however it was defined, as being specifically apolitical. Admittedly, his politics shared little in common with most of the academic critics who studied him, but Sterling could hardly be considered conservative. Sterling's *Cheap Truth* consistently asserted that one of the major flaws of 70s and 80s SF was that it was not particularly engaged politically. It must be noted that Sterling actually devotes roughly half of *Cheap Truth's* 9th issue to reviewing and recommending books concerned with global politics, suggesting that Movement fiction must incorporate this level of political consciousness as surely as it must incorporate a technological consciousness represented by the repeated presence of Toffler's work. Similarly, half of *Cheap Truth* #10 devotes itself to reviewing Chingis Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, stating that this piece of Soviet SF "does have a genuine SF feel . . . [f]or it is about technology and its impact on human life," further emphasizing the global perspective movement fiction should have. *Cheap Truth* #13 begins with an editorial titled "Pop Agitprop," which harshly criticizes the reactionary and juvenile political perspectives (or lack thereof) found amongst a group of writers referred to rather hilariously as "Pournelle Disciples," Pournelle being a longtime Niven collaborator and author of largely military SF, and culminates with the observation that "SF has power now, and it is our responsibility to see to what uses that power is put." Pournelle, in his support for the Strategic Defense Initiative, is the exact opposite of a proper use of SF's power - or, perhaps one should say Movement fiction or cyberpunk's power, since *Neuromancer* had already swept the industry.

While such a critique of SF is not as radical as what Moylan and others might consider ideal, it is still politically engaged. Indeed, Sterling supported many forms of undermining the status quo. In his preface to *Mirrorshades*, he references the "subversive potential of the home printer and the photocopier" (347), which is a fairly telling statement, considering that his fanzine *Cheap Truth*, something of an early anti-DRM statement, was Xeroxed and mailed to anyone he and Shiner believed wanted or needed it. If this doesn't seem like much of a slap in the face of global capital, let me update the example. On March 20, 2012, the hacktivist collective F.A.T. Labs released a compendium of 3D printer code for the creation of The Free Universal Construction Kit, "a set of adapters for complete interoperability between 10 popular construction toys" (par. 1), ranging from Legos to that austere old man of construction, Lincoln Logs (no Erector Set compatibility, sadly - you'll have to wait to import your Kevorkian suicide machine to Legoland). If the subversive potential of such a DIY project isn't immediately obvious, consider the collective's justification, deployed under a section heading titled "Legal and Commercial Implications":

Today's manufacturers have little or no intrinsic motivation to make their products compatible with anyone else's. Indeed—despite obvious benefits to users everywhere—the implementation of cross-brand interoperability can be nearly impossible, given the tangled restrictions of patents, design rights, and trademarks involved in doing so. So we stepped up. The Free Universal Construction Kit is the VLC of children's playsets.

As we can see from the example above, interoperability is a question of power and market dominance. Most market leaders regard interoperability as an anti-competitive nuisance, a regulatory check on their ambition, or a concession to the whining of lesser players. Quite simply, interoperability is the request of the disenfranchised. And which end-user, in so many ways, is less enfranchised than a preliterate child? (np)

The aim, then, of a project like this is to return a voice to those who no longer have a say in what the market offers them - consumers, in other words. Is this fundamentally different than what Sterling and Shiner were attempting to do with their own self-publication of *Cheap Truth*, a

publication, so often derided as a propaganda piece, that did an end-run around the limited channels of expression that the publishing industry of the late 70s and early 80s offered? Like Burroughs's cut-up technique, the photocopier and home printer of the 80s did essentially the same thing that the 3D printer of today does: lets anybody who feels inclined reject and counter the programming of whatever group, capitalist or otherwise, has achieved hegemony. The oft-misquoted-by-captains-of-industry Adam Smith in his divisive *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* warned against the darker side of self-interest, suggesting that in a truly unfair system the self-interest of the merchants (or any other locus of capital) would seek to and easily succeed in subverting the self-interest of the working class (witness the suppression of labor unions). While Sterling's and F.A.T. Labs's attitudes are hardly the stuff of revolution, they nevertheless do address this general problem, providing a very practical, street-level political engagement often lacking in SF. Further, it is worth noting that a great many postcyberpunk authors, such as Charles Stross, regularly explore the subversive potential of such fascinating devices as 3D printers, demonstrating their descent from similar, if less highly developed concerns of their cyberpunk forbearers.

For what reason does such a rich cyberpunk mythology exist? Referring to SF's sister genre, fantasy author Steven Erikson complains in "Not Your Grandmother's Epic Fantasy: A Fantasy Author's Thoughts upon Reading *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*"<sup>5</sup> that academic critics of genre fantasy are actually unfamiliar with contemporary genre fantasy: "It's not that they haven't read me, it's that they haven't read any of the new writers of epic fantasy" (4). Erikson is mainly responding to the general assertion found in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* that writers of genre fantasy "are and shall forever remain,

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<sup>5</sup> Found in the May 2012 issue of *The New York Review of Science Fiction*

presumably, merely imitative or belligerent wanderers in the wasteland of Tolkien's legacy" (4). Erikson, familiar with genre fantasy, laments this position, recounting discussions with scholars of fantasy who claim not to have read much contemporary fantasy due to length, and yet continue to formulate theories about the genre despite a lack of comprehensive knowledge/familiarity with the texts actually comprising the genre. This same phenomenon seems to begin to explain many cyberpunk myths: witness the danger of describing based on limited examples. For many decades the popular imagination conceived of our relative, *Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis*, as a sloped-shouldered, crooked beast, based entirely on the fact that the first artist renderings had been done using the skeleton of an elderly Neanderthal specimen whose body had been twisted from a hard life marked by arthritis and numerous broken bones. Our myths of cyberpunk share something with the myth of the subhuman Neanderthal. An image needed selling. It is true that genre identification works in generalities: not every noir begins with the antihero recounting his tragedy while lying gut-shot in an alley, but a tone of weary reflection of past events does permeate the genre. Still, one typically requires multiple examples - not counting knock-offs - to properly categorize a genre. Cyberpunk's odd history produced a categorization far in advance of ample novel examples.

While these four myths hardly comprise a Bulfinch's Cyberpunk, they are intended to be representational; cyberpunk has many, many myths. These selected myths show, quite effectively, that the popular image of cyberpunk bears far less resemblance to the founding texts than one might expect from such an exhaustively labeled genre. Cyberpunk's map, then, paradoxically managed to precede the territory, and in doing so became a functional example of Baudrillard's simulacrum (cyberspace itself being, to any careful student of the genre, no



example of an actual simulacrum at all)<sup>6</sup>. If the characteristics of the genre don't fit the texts generally considered cyberpunk, then there might be a problem in using the term. Perhaps, in the spirit of "cyberpunk" and its distrust of boundaries and rejection of the status quo, engaging in an act of un-definition would be wise. Cyberpunk can be disentangled into three distinct varieties: cyberpunk, technosleaze/sci-fiberpunk/cyberdrool (technosleaze will serve as the preferred term), and "movement" fiction.

You Can't Get There from Here

Consoling Cowboys

The first term of this sub-generic trinity, cyberpunk itself, is also the term with which its authors were least comfortable, regardless of the term's glowing success in critical and publishing circles. As mentioned previously, the term cyberpunk entered popular circulation with Gardner Dozois's article in *The Washington Post*, and it took little time for the term to be used in describing every vaguely edgy pop-culture phenomenon that had a passing connection to technology. William Gibson famously repudiated the term in his August 1986 interview with

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<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, a simulacrum should lack a referent. Baudrillard initially used examples such as the religious icon, but later examples, such as any given sitcom family, work perfectly well, as such examples "refer" to a false conception of the American family that does not, nor ever did, exist. Cyberspace, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily create false realities that the general public become convinced represent true reality or history. It *might*, of course, in the same sense that TV might create simulacra of Americana, but in general cyberspace is used as an abstract mode of representation. Gibson's first use of cyberspace was, despite the blocky 8-bit graphics, a fairly accurate representation of financial reality, all told, as the simplified cyberspace representations (neon bank pyramids, military galaxies, etc.) did a wonderful job of expressing the lines of power and capital operating in society. What it did not do was create some sort of consensual social *fiction*, like some digital *Donna Reed* show.

Larry McCaffery, stating plainly that the term *cyberpunk* was "mainly a marketing strategy--and one that I've come to feel trivializes what I do" (279). Gibson naturally recognized that he and many of his colleagues had benefited from the label, but he nevertheless felt it to be artistically stifling in the long run. This is to be expected from catchy branding terms in our spectacular society, but it was ultimately the careless lack of accuracy with which the term was applied to the literature that had spawned it that most offended the proponents and practitioners of the genre.

A helpful document in this debate is Michael Swanwick's "A User's Guide to the Postmoderns," in which he creates a SF publishing narrative in which the cyberpunks are set at odds with the humanists, each battling for their share of the glory. Bruce Sterling, in his capacity as movement leader, was less than impressed with Swanwick's piece, suggesting that "the article divided writers into arbitrary, incestuous cliques invested with bogus drama via silly phrases" (CT #16) and thus created a caricature of Movement fiction. Sterling's rejection of Swanwick's at least partly irony-drenched, tongue-in-cheek article shows the discomfort that the solidifying "cyberpunk" genre was causing writers such as Sterling - and, considering that the Movement's ultimate goal was to force on the SF genre a diaspora as all-consuming as the diaspora that followed Leto's Peace (if I may make a reference to Herbert's *God Emperor of Dune*, a novel that 80s Sterling would probably have blasted), seeing the gates of the publishing industry slam shut once again to innovation due to the popularity of their own work must have been particularly grating.

In fact, the last and highly parodic issue of *Cheap Truth* ridicules the very notion of genre labeling by dramatizing the death of Vincent Omniaveritas, that "blustering madman known as the 'Qaddafi of Technosleaze'" at the hands of the "Humanist Peace and Justice Coalition." In one version of the death, Sterling makes light of cyberpunk's reputation as a propaganda product:

"The SFAW have been made the butts of a calculated publicity stunt. We may now assure the membership that there is no such publication as 'Cheap Truth' and definitely no such person as 'Omniaveritas.' There is no 'movement' of 'radical hard SF' writers threatening to 'reinvent science fiction from an eighties perspective.'" Sterling casts the entire cyberpunk phenomenon as an illusion and a joke: "the joke is on the hoaxsters. Although there is no such thing as an actual cyberpunk 'ideology,' the term itself has become a viable subgeneric marketing category. Our sources in publishing assure us that the use of the term 'cyberpunk' in cover blurbs guarantees a modest, but solid sales increase, which may well be useful to younger, less established writers" (*CT Last Issue*). Sterling goes on to poke fun at a "SFAW member in good standing [who] has prepared a helpful beginners' manual, 'Cyberpunk: What It Means, How To Write It'" (*CT Last Issue*), highlighting the formula that formed the referent of the cyberpunk label. The discomfort with the use of cyberpunk as a marketing category is really a far more significant discomfort with a practice of labeling that belies the true purpose of SF: cognitive estrangement. It is hard to estrange when we, to quote David Bowie<sup>7</sup>, have "wrote it ten times or more."

The lack of comfort "cyberpunk" often displayed towards the term might have appeared to many as borderline hypocrisy, as Sterling and his fellow travelers had done much to popularize the term initially, but their discomfort and ultimate rejection of the label makes much sense when one recognizes the sheer ambiguity attached to the label. Swanwick observes, somewhat ironically considering his own cyberpunk imitation *Vacuum Flowers*, that "[t]he cyberpunks had created a subgenre that was easy to imitate, and they couldn't help but wonder if somehow they shouldn't have aimed higher" (9), as if what cyberpunk ultimately became was

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<sup>7</sup> David Bowie is considered part of the cyberpunk group, most notably for his dystopian concept album *I. Outside*, released in 1995. *I. Outside* is a fine experience, but it does show how stereotypically and loosely applied the term *cyberpunk* often is.

really that much the result of four or five writers' occasional works. Swanwick quotes Sterling, who said of this success, "I don't worry much about the future of razor's edge Techno-punk. It will be bowdlerized and parodied and reduced to formula, just as all other SF has been" (qtd. in Swanwick, "User's Guide" 9). And, in truth, the cyberpunk *formula* is an easy one to imitate, being little more than a set of easily-deployable tropes and motifs. However, this formula bears little resemblance to the body of work produced at the time the formula was devised. For instance, Rudy Rucker, responding to the same environmental stimuli as Sterling and his associates, evolved independently his own version of cyberpunk with his novel *Software*, first of his Ware Tetralogy. And yet, of Rucker, Swanwick states that when "[c]omparing his text to that of his cohort, one has to sadly conclude that he is *sui generis*, no cyberpunk at all, but rather a one-man subgenre all by himself. However, the cyberpunks love him for his daring, excess, and clear-eyed craziness, and have claimed him as one of their own" (8). Rucker does, of course, often prefer his fiction to be called transrealist (and anyone having read *Postsingular* or *Hylozoic* would be forced to agree), but even without sharing any of cyberpunk's formula he is nevertheless listed amongst the genre's originators.

What does this say about the term itself? Sterling makes two statements that clarify. The first, found in his 1991 article "Cyberpunk in the Nineties" regards the publishing industry's use of the term: "'cyberpunk' simply means 'anything cyberpunks write'" (par. 12). While often dismissed as sour grapes at being pigeonholed, this statement does make the cutting observation that the genre precedes the texts. Such sloppy conceptions of genres are hardly unheard of since the rise of mass-market publishing, so such a statement hardly comes as a shock to those who are confused upon finding novels like Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* or Philip K. Dick's *Voices from the Street* in amongst Asimov and Tolkien. The second statement comes from his preface to the

1986 *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* and ironically, considering the collection's purpose, dismisses the term entirely: "It follows, then, that the 'typical cyberpunk writer' does not exist; this person is only a Platonic fiction. For the rest of us, our label is an uneasy bed of Procrustes, where fiendish critics wait to lop and stretch us to fit" (343). For Sterling, there are no pure examples of the cyberpunk species, only taxonomists operating under a confirmation bias. Cyberpunk, then, is not only a genre teeming with unsupportable myths, the term itself is something of a myth.

Even so, it is, perhaps, a bit of a stretch to say that *no* cyberpunk writers actually exist, as that Platonic ideal has, in a sense, one objective form from which the imitations must derive, for, when all the ambiguity and efforts to cash in are set aside, it becomes obvious that the term *cyberpunk*, applied so liberally to anything featuring circuitry and leather, in truth applies only to the work of William Gibson, and his early work at that. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. argued that cyberpunk's reputation rested entirely upon Gibson's shoulders:

My suspicion is that most of the literary cyberpunks bask in the light of the one major writer who is original and gifted enough to make the whole movement seem original and gifted. That figure is William Gibson, whose first novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), is to my mind one of the most interesting books of the postmodern age. I suggest, then, that we think of cyberpunk not as a movement in the U.S. and Japanese SF trade, but as a more encompassing aesthetic - as it is embodied by Gibson and certain other postmodern artists. ("Cyberpunk and Neuromaticism" 185)

This is a massively unfair statement that nevertheless contains a core of truth. In practice the "literary cyberpunks," presumably referring to Sterling, Shiner, and Shirley, were far too diverse in output to justify the conclusion that their originality piggybacked Gibson's. Suggesting that cyberpunk should be regarded as an aesthetic embodied by Gibson is far more accurate, however . . . though "embodied" is perhaps the wrong term. To suggest that Gibson embodies the aesthetic of cyberpunk implies that his works are but one example of a larger pattern. But, when one

considers the praise given to Gibson - even Lawrence Person, writing of postcyberpunk a decade later, felt the need to observe that "William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is, of course, the archetypal cyberpunk work" (Person par. 5) - it should be obvious that Gibson is the fountainhead of this new aesthetic; whether or not examples of the cyberpunk aesthetic preceded him<sup>8</sup> is irrelevant. Gibson is revered as a holy figure, but he (or, rather, his early novels and short stories) should better be conceived of as a mitochondrial Eve of SF: many walked the earth before him, but he nevertheless became the common ancestor of everyone that came after.

Just how overwhelming was Gibson's influence on the conception of this genre? Rudy Rucker makes an offhand joke in his 1986 article "What is Cyberpunk?" that reveals quite a bit about audience attitudes towards cyberpunk. He says that he was at the 1985 National SF Convention, serving on a "Cyberpunk" panel with Sterling, Shirley, Shiner, Cadigan, and Bear. The elephant (not) in the room was Gibson himself. According to Rucker, "Gibson couldn't make it; he was camping in Canada, and the audience was a bit disappointed to have to settle for pretenders to his crown" (par. 1). He goes on to say that "[t]alking about cyberpunk without Gibson there made us all a little uncomfortable" (par. 1). This statement is telling, as this was a group of rather diverse writers who were not, at that time anyway, consciously emulating Gibson and thus had no reason to feel like knock-off artists or hacks pinch-hitting for the king. Rucker recalls that the mood at this panel went south fast (something quite abnormal in SF conventions): "The cyberpunk panel was different. The panelists were crayfishing, the subnormal moderator

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<sup>8</sup> And, as is to be expected, many such examples of the aesthetic of "cyberpunk" in many varying degrees did precede Gibson. The obvious example is Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) along with James Cameron's *Terminator* (1984), but the Japanese manga *Akira* began its run in 1982, and identical themes can be found in SF novels ranging from James Tiptree Jr.'s "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1974) to Vernor Vinge's *True Names* (1981) to John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider* (1975). The point is simply that none of the tropes associated with "cyberpunk" as it is commonly defined were in any way new. Gibson did, however, deploy this preexisting aesthetic so well that it became hard to make attempts at periodizing without falling into his gravity well.

came on like a raving jackal, and the audience, at least to my eyes, began taking on the look of a lynch mob. Here I'm finally asked to join a literary movement and everyone hates us before I can open my mouth" (par. 2). In short, by 1985 what had begun as a loose literary movement had solidified itself into standardized audience expectation (much like parkour is commonly known and marketed as flashy freerunning, a series of acrobatic tricks rather than a philosophy of movement), with Gibson's work at the heart.

Gibson's centrality is hardly considered a positive outcome of the 80s SF shakeup. John Kessel, in his 1987 response to Sterling titled "The Humanist Manifesto," lamented that "[o]ne of the unfortunate results of the orgy of manifesto writing is that many people have reacted to William Gibson's novel not as an individual work, but as the representative of a movement, with Gibson as savior or devil" (54). While not quite his point, this statement is just as true of the community of fiction writers and fans as it is of critics and theorists: the assumption of Gibson into SF heaven deformed the literary community from which he rose, leaving a generation of distinct voices caught in his matrix. Considering this influence, cyberpunk, as a genre descriptor should properly be considered as having come into being primarily from the force of Gibson's early work, which was distinctive enough to create a framework of expectation through which his collaborators' writing and, indeed, 80s SF in general was viewed, regardless of relevance. Beyond Gibson, cyberpunk as a term refers to a generic fantasy, a ghost in the SF machine. Early Gibson *is* cyberpunk; there is no cyberpunk beyond.

Cyberpunk: The Clone Wares

Lewis Shiner, writing in "Inside the Movement: Past, Present, and Future," argues that cyberpunk has, by the time of his writing in 1989, become a thoroughly commodified product, a marketing phrase that denotes a specific formula: "novels about monolithic corporations opposed by violent, leather-clad drug users with wetware implants" (17) and goes on to identify *Vacuum Flowers* by Michael Swanwick as an example of this type of SF product, giving the entire category the semi-catchy label "sci-fiberpunk." (One would think that any fiction label with "fiber" in it would imply something that was bland, or at least functional, as far as prose is concerned, but was nevertheless good for you . . . more like a Kim Stanley Robinson novel rather than something by Swanwick or Harrison.) He gives a slightly expanded description of the sci-fiberpunk recipe in his 7 Jan. 1991 *New York Times* editorial "Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk": "[B]y 1987, cyberpunk had become a cliché. Other writers had turned the form into formula: implant wetware (biological computer chips), government by multinational corporations, street-wise, leather jacketed, amphetamine-loving protagonists and decayed orbital colonies" (1), and this formula "had turned technology into an end in itself and lost its original impulse" (1). This formula was embraced by scholars of literature no less than by fangirls and fanboys. We have already considered Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s plug-and-play version of the cyberpunk plot found in "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism." Even Larry McCaffery, cyberpunk's "man in academia," readily focused on elements best seen as sci-fiberpunk: "cyberpunk's emphasis on sensationalized, S&M surface textures, its Benzedrine-rush pacings, or its parodically nonconformist stance" (13) - although it is worth noting that the sheer diversity of works he collected in *Storming the Reality Studio* calls this description into question. For Shiner, this term covered "much of the fiction currently labeled cyberpunk" (17) and was "antithetical to the theme here, namely, fiction in the year 2000" (17), referring to the theme of the "Fiction 2000"



conference that had been held in June of 1989. For Shiner, one of Sterling's collaborators on the *Cheap Truth* fanzine, the very motifs most people considered integral (and still consider, if 1999's *The Matrix* is any indication) to cyberpunk fiction were no more related to the genre than zombies are to novels of manners (before *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, of course).

Bruce Sterling uses Shiner's term as well. In a 1989 interview, Sterling criticizes what had become of the term *cyberpunk*, specifically how it had become a determiner rather than a designator: "What rankles is the way that word can be used to dismiss our work . . . with your third and fourth-generation cyberpunks -- what people call sci-fiberpunk -- it's too easy to lump us with people who are just derivative ripoffs, commercial spinoffs" (Milhon 98). Sterling's problem was not simply with the fact that lower-list writers were "just cannibalizing [cyberpunk] imagery" (98), although cooptation and commodification of imagery and symbolism is the heart of artistic bastardization - just visit any corporate-owned "ethnic" restaurant. No, Sterling takes deeper umbrage, proposing that the original Movement writers were being "ripped off by people who didn't pull their weight culturally" (98), asserting again in his own often hyperbolic way that Movement fiction was not simply a sexier addendum to Wolfe's compendium of SF icons, but was rather a viable philosophy of SF in its own right. Lewis Shiner also notes that sci-fiberpunk fails to pull its cultural weight, tending to fall back into the status-quo rather than profitably interrogating the present: "It's no wonder that the image of the 'console cowboy' so strongly attracts the writers of sci-fiberpunk. The console cowboy is a direct linear descendant of the western pulp heroes. His is an adolescent male fantasy" ("Inside" 23). Such an observation raises the interesting possibility that much of the criticism cyberpunk has received from feminist critics such as Nicola Nixon is perhaps undeserved, the bastard child sci-fiberpunk being the true perpetrator of escapist crimes.

Lance Olsen, who literally wrote the book on William Gibson (1992's critical study titled simply *William Gibson*), uses the term "technosleaze" for substandard cyberpunk fare, though he never explains his conception of it in the essay that uses the term in the title line. We can, however, extrapolate a meaning not too dissimilar from what Shiner calls "sci-fiberpunk" - a soulless clone of cyberpunk, however one defines *cyberpunk*, devoid of agency and direction. Citing Csicsery-Ronay's attack on predictable cyberpunk plots, Olsen notes that "[c]yberpunk falls into the trap of virtually all movements: it is by nature trendy, its spokesperson shrill. It opposes itself to a tradition out of which it in fact grew. It is short-lived. Its few powerful key works are relatively easy to imitate, if not equal" (par. 13). From this one can easily deduce that technosleaze, occasionally referred to as "cyberjunk," is composed of the unequal imitations of which Olsen speaks.

So what text, then, perfectly embodies commodified technosleaze? One might immediately offer up films like 1992's *Freejack* as examples, as such films see layers of cyberpunk imagery grafted over a much different core (Robert Sheckley's *Immortality, Inc.*, in the case of *Freejack*). The self-published young adult series titled the *Cyberpunk Elven Trilogy* written by Jess C. Scott is potentially a perfect example of technosleaze, concerning, as the publisher's summary of the first of the series, *The Other Side of Life*, suggests, "a thieving duo's world [turning] upside down when an Elven rogue uncovers the heinous dealings of a megacorporation." Even so, technosleaze is, at its heart, driven by a cynical effort to cash in, so a self-published work is almost, by its very nature, disqualified. While it is true that digital publication of eBooks can cut out the publisher and allow newcomers a share of the occasionally lucrative publishing pie they might otherwise have been unable to acquire, the act of self-publishing nevertheless bears the same desperate halo of passion that pushed Sterling to self-

publish his own *Cheap Truth*. Moreover, it isn't simply the use of cyberpunk imagery or the combination of cyberpunk and urban fantasy that makes this work and others like it technosleaze; Justina Robson's *Quantum Gravity* series brilliantly combines cyberpunk and urban fantasy without ever seeming empty or derivative. No, for a perfect example of technosleaze, one must cast back to the source that inspired both Scott's *Cyberpunk Elven Trilogy* and Robson's *Quantum Gravity* series.

*Shadowrun* and the Apotheosis of Technosleaze

"My own sleaziness -- has done me in!"

-Takeshi Fumimota, Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (1990)

That source is the FASA Corporation's pen-and-paper game property *Shadowrun* - specifically, Data East/Beam Software's 1993 version of *Shadowrun* released as a single-player game for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System - a sort of apotheosis of technosleaze. In addition to pen-and-paper games and video games, the *Shadowrun* series also spawned a long series of novels (forty-one, to be specific), any one of which could serve as an example of technosleaze, but the game, being the most commercialized version and the first exposure many now have to cyberpunk and its aesthetic<sup>9</sup>, is perhaps most appropriate for this critique. This game proves illustrative for two reasons: it was the first of a moderately popular and lucrative series of video games (which are still ongoing) based on the *Shadowrun* property, and, unlike the pen-and-paper game itself, the video game has a set narrative. Finally, the *Shadowrun* property is

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<sup>9</sup> I do not wish to overstate *Shadowrun*'s influence, but suffice it to say that the *Shadowrun* game series has been quite popular, as have other cyberpunk-themed game properties like *Deus Ex*, *System Shock*, etc. Most of these properties are, in full or in part, pure technosleaze, and, as they constitute many readers' first experience of the genre, thus shaping readers' perceptions of the cyberpunk genre. *Shadowrun* is arguably the most pervasive.

unique amongst technosleaze offerings as having something of a backhanded endorsement from William Gibson himself, who, in a 1998 interview, humorously links the *Shadowrun* aesthetic to the same type of broad appropriation that Gibson, Sterling, Shiner, and Shirley had done themselves in the early 80s. Gibson states that ". . . one of the things that we were really conscious of was appropriation. Appropriation as a post-modern aesthetic and entrepreneurial strategy. So we were doing it too. We were happily and gloriously lifting all sorts of flavours and colours from all over popular culture and putting it together to our own ends. So when I see things like ShadowRun, the only negative thing I feel about it is that initial extreme revulsion at seeing my literary DNA mixed with elves" ("Cyberpunk on screen" np.). Yes, *Shadowrun* is a cyberpunk clone containing elves, dwarves, and other assorted Tolkien filler.

*Shadowrun* begins with an opening crawl, a la *Star Wars*, and an in-game cinematic that handily establishes the game's status as a derivative example of technosleaze, which proves almost overwhelmingly ironic when one considers that to this day much of the fan community considers this game quite ahead of its time. The dialogue crawl is as follows: "The Year Is 2050 / And the Megaplexes are / monsters casting long / shadows. / When you become a / shadowrunner, that's where / you live . . . / in the cracks between the / giant corporate structures. / The megacorps are powerful / in a time when power means / information . . . / . . . computer information / flowing into the global network / called the MATRIX." Gibson's literary DNA is apparent, as is the DNA of his most direct ancestor, as is revealed by the introductory cutscene. The in-game cinematic (or cutscene) shows, sliding by, the skyline of Seattle (in-game, a similar skyline is viewed through the window of an elevated monorail car while the protagonist's face, hidden behind a cyberpunk protagonist's standard-issue dark sunglasses, is cast in the foreground). Notably, the skyline of Seattle is defamiliarized in the most familiar of ways,

replete with the dark silhouettes of skyscrapers belching gouts of fire into the evening haze. This scene is rather liberally "borrowed" from Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), the film which had the most immediate influence on Gibson's aesthetic and which also featured a nightmarish industrial skyline and smokestacks belching fire.

For the purposes of this brief analysis, let us take the plug-and-play cyberpunk formula that Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. provided and deploy it as a critical tool.

“. . . a self-destructive but sensitive young protagonist with an (implant/prosthesis/telechronic talent) . . .”

The protagonist of *Shadowrun* - the beshaded figure described above - is a data courier named Jake Armitage, clearly named after the "Armitage" zombie, Col. Willis Corto, found in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Armitage begins the story, like many denizens of both the film noir and urban fantasy genres before him, waking up on a slab in a morgue with no recollections as to how he got there. Thus begins the first act of this narrative, involving Armitage's search for his own identity - another link to Gibson's Corto, since his reconstituted "Armitage" personality also possessed a similar lacuna where his past should have been. This search finds its conclusion when Armitage visits a "street doc" in an effort to find out what might be in his head computer and inadvertently trips something called a "cortex bomb," which is basically what it sounds like. Obviously, Armitage's head contains data worth killing for (or suiciding over).

“. . . that makes the evil megacorporations/police states/criminal underworlds) pursue him . . .”

Armitage's initial woes stem from his survival of a hit carried out by the street gang known as the Rust Stilettoes. This gang was hired to kill Armitage by the Drake Corporation due to the data contained in his head computer, though Armitage does not gain this answer until significantly later in the plot. If this sounds remarkably similar to the plot of William Gibson's 1981 short story "Johnny Mnemonic," that's because it *is* remarkably similar. "Johnny Mnemonic" featured a protagonist who worked as a data courier using what amounted to a cranial hard drive and who had unwittingly been stuffed full of very sensitive data belonging to the Yakuza. This unenviable situation resulted in various attempts on Johnny's life in an effort to reclaim the data, until Johnny, with the help of a heroin-addicted, mine-hacking navy dolphin, cracked the data in his head and turned the tables on the Yakuza. Johnny closes the story living with his razorgirl Molly (of *Neuromancer* fame) and the "Lo Teks," a neo-luddite gang, while blackmailing the Yakuza. (Johnny is, predictably, later killed for his temerity.) Armitage, who is similarly pursued by criminal/corporate syndicates for the data in his head that ultimately holds the key to the plot's resolution, is clearly Johnny-lite.

“. . . through (wasted urban landscapes/elite luxury enclaves/eccentric space stations) . . .”

While this particular incarnation of the Shadowrun series lacks luxurious arcologies and opulent space habitats (though the narrative does boast a volcano lair - the B-grade version of a space station), the game does concern itself with the trawling of numerous blighted, decayed streets in the heart of Seattle. Gun-toting gang members, assassins, malevolent supernatural beasts, and the occasional futuristic car hound Armitage's steps through streets thick with craven salaried men, street vendors, and "street docs" specializing in fringe medicine, not to mention

plenty of crumbling bricks, chain-link fences, and refuse juxtaposed with glittering corporate towers. Most emblematic of the aesthetic of this version of Seattle is an area known as "The Caryards," a repurposed junkyard to which the hero is sent by his former fixer Glutman to get him out of the way. The space of the caryards is demarcated by compacted cars and other examples of industrial debris, and is populated by scores of refugees hiding from various threats to their lives (an image possibly drawn from the refugee camp found in Gibson's "Fragments of a Hologram Rose"). Of course, this is a video game and the protagonist must ultimately spend some time as a pit fighter to earn enough bribe money to leave, but the desperate poverty of the refugees is perfectly consistent with cyberpunk's myth of decay.

“. . . full of grotesque (haircuts/clothes/self-mutilations/rock music/sexual hobbies/designer drugs/telechronic gadgets/nasty new weapons/exteriorized hallucinations) representing the (mores/fashions) of modern civilization in terminal decline. . .”

Being an action role-playing game, a good chunk of *Shadowrun* is devoted to the digital equivalent of 80s action movie gear-up scenes. The protagonist acquires Berettas, shotguns, Uzis, and assault rifles, not to mention various forms of body armor. True to the focus on "nasty new weapons" and "self-mutilations," Armitage can even purchase cybernetic implants such as "Boosted Reflexes," obviously derived from Gibson's *Molly Millions*<sup>10</sup>, and "Dermal Plating," which is presumably subcutaneous body armor. In the hands of a talented writer of SF such grotesqueries might, as Csicsery-Ronay Jr. suggests, represent the terminal decline of

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<sup>10</sup> In the Sega Genesis incarnation of the *Shadowrun* property, the protagonist can even have retractable razor blades implanted beneath his fingernails, making the Molly connection rather pointed.

civilization, but such a reflective tone is rarely encoded intentionally into technosleaze. Rather, the reader is left to intuit that edgy barbarism is just plain cool. The featuring of punk rock fashion as part of the game's aesthetic further heightens *Shadowrun*'s identity as cyberpunk technosleaze. The first character with whom the protagonist can converse makes Sid Vicious look like Robert Palmer, clearly establishing the tone of the narrative. One could even make the argument that the inclusion of dwarves, elves, orcs, and various other Tolkien castaways is really just the logical conclusion of the desire for an anarchic aesthetic. One dyes one's hair pink and gets an eyebrow ring to symbolically move to the margins of society, to clearly demarcate one's space. A giant, atrociously ugly orc wearing a leather jacket and sporting a green mohawk demarcates the same marginal space, but far less subtly.

Completing the aesthetic, *Shadowrun* also participates in that grand consensual hallucination of imitation cyberpunk, that heterotopia of the mind: The Matrix. Everything that is postmodern loves zones, and Movement fiction is no different. A zone properly used can allow for thought-provoking juxtapositions or deep reflections on our society brought about by the collapsing of reality in on itself. Or, as in *Shadowrun*, a datajack can allow you to play high-stakes games of minesweeper for fun and profit. Indeed, if there is one defining characteristic of technosleaze it is this: like Prometheus gifting mankind with fire only to have that first Greek use it to light up a cigarette, technosleaze excels in wresting honors from the gods only to completely strip said honors of any significance. Armitage and his hired shadowrunners dive into the matri and move about a minesweeper-esque grid while being alerted to how squares containing ICE (Intruder Countermeasure Electronics - another term cribbed from Gibson) - hardly Gibson's "bodiless exultation" of cyberspace or Jameson's representation of the unthinkable complexities of late capitalism. *Shadowrun*'s matrix trips serve but the most banal of



purposes: to drive plot forward (locating passwords and travelable locations) and to reveal backstory, such as the Drake Corporation's alliance with the Aneki Corporation.

“ . . . ultimately hooks up with a rebellious and tough-talking (youth/artificial intelligence/rock cults) . . . ”

Aside from the various punk-rock shadowrunner types Armitage can enlist into his service, the game does, in fact, provide analogues to both AIs and rock cults. As the narrative progresses, Armitage comes into contact with a character called Kitsune<sup>11</sup>, who is a shapeshifting shadowrunner . . . well, she has cat ears, at any rate. Kitsune not only rebels against the system by working as a mercenary, she also moonlights as singer (or perhaps dancer - 16-bit graphics make this a bit unclear) for a rock band playing The Jagged Nails Club. It is explained that this is her preferred method for finding the best mercenary contracts, but, as far as this formal reading is concerned, Kitsune's many hats seem a somewhat shallow bid to layer on cyberpunk tropes (not to mention Japanese tropes: no amount of scholarship will ever penetrate the Japanese fascination with cat ears) to ensure that Kitsune is both attractive to the predominantly male audience and reads as important to the narrative. Another defining characteristic of technosleaze is that the more tropes and motifs associated with that strange Cheshire called cyberpunk a person, place, or thing has grafted to it, the more central said person, place, or thing is to the plot.

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<sup>11</sup> This character is probably partially lifted in part from Sterling's *Schismatrix*, which featured a Shaper prostitute named Kitsune who secretly controlled the Geisha Bank (a financial institution that used hours of sexual service as a basis for currency) and later modified her body to what amounts to an entire habitat through extensive medical intervention. *Kitsune* is, admittedly, the Japanese word for fox, so one might think that *Shadowrun*'s Kitsune is but a play on this word (the Japanese fox being a kind of analogue to the Native American wolf trickster, able to take human shape), but the flirtatiousness of the character (which, in the uncensored code of the game is far more suggestive) makes the *Schismatrix* source seem more likely.

Kitsune, it is revealed, had a role in Armitage's mysterious past, in that she had been sent to heal Armitage after the initial hit attempt, thus preventing his morgue trip from being one of a more permanent nature. Like all good noir femme fatales, Kitsune serves a higher master, although at first glance the higher master made use of in *Shadowrun* might appear a bit unorthodox. This master is a shamanistic totem spirit called Dog, who has been periodically appearing to Armitage in the form of a mutt that offers cryptic, one-sided comments. The *Shadowrun* world is positively lousy with spirits, ranging from totemic spirits such as Dog, Rat, and Gator to malevolent entities such as a jester spirit associated with decaying technology. While such supernatural elements might appear gimmicky, they also reveal *Shadowrun's* Gibsonian pedigree<sup>12</sup>. In an effort to comment on the artificial nature of human religion, Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy tracks first the birth of a virtual god in cyberspace, brought into being when, in *Neuromancer*, the eponymous Neuromancer and its counterpart Wintermute fuse into a binary deity (in both senses). Then, due to theologically obscure reasons potentially involving either contact with a similar AI in the Alpha Centauri star system or terminal boredom, the binary deity fragments itself into numerous pieces that take the identities of Loa, or voodoo spirits, such as Papa Legba, god of crossroads. As such, *Shadowrun's* inclusion of shamanism and totem spirits is hardly out of left field, being one more in a long line of borrowings stripped of any critical component. Moreover, the Dog spirit functions in the narrative as an analogue of the standard sci-fiberpunk AI. Artificial Intelligences may or may not be the prime mover of the plot, operating behind the scenes as Wintermute did to manipulate all involved, but they do tend to

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<sup>12</sup> I assume this point has been sufficiently made, but if I may reiterate: a hallmark of technosleaze is the broad lifting of nova from SF texts minus any critical dimension. *Shadowrun* is a veritable compendium of lifted material, something this broad-strokes overview barely covers. In fact, nearly every nova used as local color during the world-building process seems to be lifted from other sources. For instance, the currency of *Shadowrun* is Nuyen, little more than a slight variation on "New Yen," used by Gibson in *Neuromancer*.

drive the plots forward with assistance, whispered advice, the occasional miracle - *dei ex machina* indeed. As an AI used in such a way is rather mystical, *Shadowrun's* Dog spirit is just artificial intelligence by another name.

“... who offer the alternative, not of (community/socialism/traditional values/transcendental vision), but of supreme, life-affirming *hipness*, going with the flow which now flows in the machine, against the spectre of a world-subverting (artificial intelligence/multinational corporate web/evil genius)?”

As with most noir, the big reveal arrives in the third act, and the player learns that Armitage had been hired by a small-time programmer who had, at the behest of an alarmed scientist working for the Drake Corporation, developed an anti-AI program. With serial numbers and metal file firmly in hand, *Shadowrun's* creators crafted a plot in which two corporations - the Aneki Corporation and the Drake Corporation - collaborate in the creation of an AI that would be capable of controlling the Matrix and thus enriching both participants. This is, of course, nearly identical to the end result of the fusion of *Neuromancer* and *Wintermute*. Armitage, then, was intended to deliver to its commissioner via his head computer the program that would destroy this incipient AI. Upon Armitage discovering his purpose, "shadow" runs not dissimilar from Case and Molly's run on the Villa Straylight ensue, resulting in the killing of Drake (who turns out rather literally to be a dragon) and the destruction of the AI.

True to the technosleaze form, while the thwarting of corporate ambitions to fully control cyberspace (deliciously ironic, revisited in the wake of ongoing attempts by the Recording Industry of America and the U.S. Government to censor the internet with legislation such as

SOPA) should under normal conditions read as subversive, in *Shadowrun* no such thing occurs. Armitage's storming of various megacorporations might seem like a heroic guerilla fight against capitalist totalitarianism, but the end results seems to be concerned more with preventing a monopoly from forming (due to the power of the AI) rather than somehow further eroding human freedom, therefore the narrative is ultimately supportive of the free market and in line with the status quo. And, indeed, the quasi-mystical assistance of Dog is no corrective for this, as the shamanism presented in this game offers no real alternative to the runaway capitalist nightmare of the future. However misguided such attempts often prove to be, many writers have posited the community values of pagan societies as alternatives to our commodified system. Sadly, *Shadowrun's* mysticism is simply a manifestation of "hipness," for what could be more cool to a fangirl or fanboy than mystical powers? I'm sure J. K. Rowling's bank account would concur, if it became sentient, with Lucas's not far behind.

The SNES version of the *Shadowrun* franchise manages to meet and even exceed every single criteria provided by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. for bad cyberpunk. If it is true that George Lucas slept with a copy of Joseph Campbell's *Hero with A Thousand Faces* under his pillow whilst writing the *Star Wars* screenplay, then one could easily believe that the creators of *Shadowrun's* SNES incarnation downloaded Csicsery-Ronay Jr.'s riff on cyberpunk directly into their cortexes. *Shadowrun* can be held up as a priceless example of technosleaze/sci-fiberpunk/cyberjunk.

The Movement

Sterling, in the 16th issue of *Cheap Truth*, offers a Top Ten list (containing only nine entries, oddly) of exemplar SF: Shiner's *Frontera*, Sterling's *Schismatrix*, Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Shirley's *Eclipse*, Blaylock's *Homunculus*, Rucker's *The Secret of Life*, Kelly's *Freedom Beach*, Bear's *Blood Music*, and Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction Magazine* under Gardner Dozois's editorship. The crucial observation? The standard tropes, motifs, and themes associated popularly with cyberpunk are barely represented. Considering that ". . . standard sci-fi adventure yarns tarted up in black leather fail to qualify" (Sterling, "Nineties" 4), belonging to the technosleaze category rather than bleeding-edge SF or even cyberpunk proper, a better term is perhaps needed to identify that type of SF, often confused for cyberpunk, that developed in the 80s and has continued, in one form or another, to the present.

The most apt term - certainly the term most often used and as such preferred by the writers themselves - is "Movement" fiction. This term derives initially from John Shirley and was rapidly adopted by that initial cadre of writers. Shiner, for instance, rejected the more commercial labels for the fiction he was producing in favor of "what [he preferred] to call the Movement, using John Shirley's term, with all its 1960s radical implications" (Shiner 18), not to mention the temporal dovetailing with The New Wave. Shiner actually called it the "mirrorshades movement," since that "was the only thing [he] could pin down as common to all three writers' work" (21), speaking of Sterling, Gibson, and Shirley. Such a statement contrasts sharply with the familiar commonalities found in derivative technosleaze, a sub-genre that aims not to challenge or provoke critical thought but rather to provide comfort and escapism. Shiner holds that sci-fiberpunk and the Movement split off from each other, primarily due to marketing reasons: "I feel this split between sci-fiberpunk and the Movement was inevitable; it was inherent in my misgivings from the start" (Shiner, "Inside" 22). Sterling expands on this split in

"Cyberpunk in the Nineties," observing that the core ideas driving Movement fiction were almost immediately overshadowed by the easily recognizable images and buzzwords found in some examples of the genre: "Perhaps 'principles' were simply too foggy and abstract, too arcane and unapproachable, as opposed to easy C-word recognition symbols, like cranial jacks, black leather jeans and amphetamine addiction" (3). As such, Movement SF is philosophically opposed to technosleaze, which is, at best, an easy aesthetic rather than a poetics in its own right.

Unlike Gibsonian cyberpunk, Movement SF should not be thought of as entirely restricted to the time and place from which it arose. Lance Olsen notes that "[e]ven after 'cyberpunk,' whose usefulness as a term might have run its course by 1988 or 1989, many still think of themselves as part of something simply referred to as The Movement" (par. 6). Certainly, writers continued to feel this way as the cyberpunk label gobbled up their own distinctiveness; Shiner, commenting on the cyberpunk phenomenon, stated that "I don't see myself, or my work, in any of this. I do see myself as part of a literary movement" ("Inside" 19). Contemporary writers such as Richard Morgan, Peter Watts, and Paolo Bacigalupi, all of whom came about long after cyberpunk was declared dead, continue to write from the perspectives of Movement SF and in interviews express kinship with Sterling, Gibson, Shiner, and the like. As such, Movement fiction continues as a force in contemporary SF.

Sterling, in his preface to *Mirrorshades*, defines Movement SF as follows: "Before the era of labels, cyberpunk was simply 'the Movement' - a loose generational nexus of ambitious young writers, who swapped letters, manuscripts, ideas, glowing praise, and blistering criticism. These writers - Gibson, Rucker, Shiner, Shirley, Sterling - found a friendly unity in their common outlook, common themes, even in certain oddly common symbols, which seemed to crop up in their work with a life of their own" (344). As these common themes, symbols, and

outlook are hardly to be found by massive consumption of technosleaze's cyberpunk clichés or even by the study of Gibson's purified cyberpunk alone, an attempt to define the general premises of Movement SF are in order.

### Casing the Premises

In *Cheap Truth* #2, Sterling, while discussing *The 1983 World's Best SF* and *The Best Science Fiction of the Year* #12, asks rather declaratively, "Is SF suffering from intellection exhaustion?" and goes on to refer to the works contained therein as "clumps of parasitic literary mistletoe" and "clunky obsolescence." Sterling contrasts these works with the works of those who seem "to have grasped the fact that the Future Will Be Different," raising William Gibson's "Burning Chrome" as an ideal example: "THIS is the shape for science fiction in the 1980's: fast-moving, sharply extrapolated, technologically literate, and as brilliant and coherent as a laser. Gibson's focussed [sic] and powerful attack is our best chance yet to awaken a genre that has been half-asleep since the early 1970's." In this statement Sterling broadly lays out the premises of Movement fiction, albeit in a somewhat abstract manner. Swanwick, occasionally accused of producing sci-fiberpunk, echoes Sterling and gives a less abstract summary of the major premises of Movement fiction, though he does directly attribute said premises to cyberpunk fiction: "Their fiction is stereotypically characterized by a fully-realized high-tech future, 'crammed' prose, punk attitudes including antagonism to authority, and bright inventive details" ("User's Guide" par. 7). From these statements, one can see emerging certain attitudes or premises that stand in sharp contrast to the dominant (read: marketable) SF of the 70s: attention to energetic, high-information, aesthetically pleasing innovative prose; an awareness of the

changing face of technology and the impact this change had on traditional conceptual boundaries; an honest attempt to engage the (80s) present and the futures being spawned by that present; and a focus on marginal, outsider subjects and areas, whether cultural, intellectual, or technological.

Premise: Energetic, High-Information Prose

One oft-whispered piece of genre lore constantly repeated in cyberpunk discussions is that William Gibson knew not a blessed thing about computer technology before writing *Neuromancer* and, in fact, wrote his draft on a manual typewriter. The tone of such discussions usually falls somewhere near reverential awe at the predictive capacities of a man whose extrapolations were so uninformed (as opposed to Gibson's vastly more computer-savvy contemporaries Sterling, Rucker, etc.). This misses the point entirely. The important lesson in this is that Movement SF favored the artistry of language over slavish attention to scientific detail, much like the New Wave writers who preceded them. In fact, Sterling, writing in his preface to the *Mirrorshades* anthology, draws a distinct parallel between the New Wave's "concern for literary craftsmanship" (344) and cyberpunk writers' similar concerns: "Many of the cyberpunks write a quite accomplished and graceful prose; they are in love with style, and are (as some say) fashion conscious to a fault" (344), not to mention possessing a certain mastery of that formalist bag of tricks beginning with clever neologisms and ending with arcane, recondite technobabble functioning more like poetry than a bad *Star Trek* plot device involving warp bubbles and polarity reversals.



But it was not style alone that set the prose (and the information load carried by the prose) apart from the crowd. In "Cyberpunk in the Nineties," Sterling states the goals presented in *Cheap Truth* very plainly: "CT's ingenuous standards for SF were simply that SF should be 'good' and 'alive' and readable" (par. 5), and that "SF writers ought to work a lot harder and knock it off with the worn-out bullshit" (par. 6). In an era when an SF writer really needed to produce successful series (for example, the sharecropped *Star Wars* novels written by such writers as Vonda McIntyre . . . or even Jeter's *Blade Runner* sequels) in order to earn a living, Sterling's seemingly innocuous statement is far more inflammatory than one might imagine. Moreover, as one of the only writers of "cyberpunk" who has never written a sequel to his own works, he has the authority to make such a statement. Even Gibson himself, who was clearly sympathetic to the spirit of this desire, never carried out the message in the flesh, or, rather, print. Gibson, in an interview with Larry McCaffery, made the vaguely ironic point that "[w]hen you're not forced to invent a new world from scratch each time, you find yourself getting lazy, falling back on the same stuff you used in an earlier novel. I was aware of this when I was finishing *Neuromancer*, and that's why, near the end, there's an announcement that Case never saw Molly again" (282). Of course, Gibson did write a sequel - to date, he has no standalone exercises in world-building, unless one counts short fiction - but the point still stands. Not only did Movement writers (in theory) desire to create stylish prose, they also sought to create truly thought-provoking exercises in defamiliarization. In short, the writers of Movement SF put as much effort into the construction of their worlds as writers such as Frank Herbert (or even Tolkien) a generation before, using prose artistry to create the same lived-in world that Herbert accomplished via detailed ecology and Tolkien via mythology and a naturalist's eye for description.

It was dense information content at the sentence level - something occasionally dismissed by critics as simply a trendy use of brand names and buzzwords - that allowed such fully-formed worlds to develop. Shiner notes of *Neuromancer* that "[t]he first paragraph was full of heat, neon, vivid reds, cathode greens. There were malls, silicon chips, LEDs, and brand names. . . . Science fiction could be energetic, hip, lean, and best of all, real" (20). For him, this was "the future of SF: a stylish, high-energy naturalism" (21). Sterling offers much the same analysis: "Cyberpunk is widely known for its telling use of detail, its carefully constructed intricacy, its willingness to carry extrapolation into the fabric of daily life. It favors 'crammed' prose: rapid, dizzying burst of novel information, sensory overload that submerges the reader in the literary equivalent of the hard-rock 'wall of sound'" ("Preface" 348). Tolkien's Middle Earth is, to many readers, an entirely believable place, but Middle Earth's believability had little to do with prose decisions. Tolkien's language is quite beautiful, and it must be recognized that he not only invented entire histories for his world but also realistic languages (the Elvish dialect of Sindarin was based on the surprisingly beautiful Welsh language), but it is crucial to recognize the specific positioning of Tolkien's language use. The reader experiences Middle Earth from what amounts to a hobbit's perspective, which is to say that all instances of foreign languages - even the brilliant use of invented language in the place names of Middle Earth, providing both consistency and a sense of history - are primarily exterior and alien, receiving almost immediate translation into the common tongue. Beyond this, Tolkien's world building relies primarily on moving descriptions of the actual geography of The Shire, Eriador, etc. By contrast, Movement writers would inject a stunning amount of detail - the majority of which would remain unexplained, leaving the reader to make whatever deductions they could based on familiarity with the SF mega-text - at the sentence level, thus achieving the same effect by a different road.

Lawrence Person reminds us that "Cyberpunk's lasting impact came not from the milieu's details, but the method of their deployment, the immersive worldbuilding technique that gave it such a revelatory quality (what John Clute, speaking of Pat Cadigan, called 'the burning presence of the future'). Cyberpunk realized that the old SF stricture of 'alter only one thing and see what happens' was hopelessly outdated, a doctrine rendered irrelevant by the furious pace of late 20th century technological change" ("Notes" 1). It was not simply that Movement writers chose to abandon entirely narratives driven by the single-novum approach, however. Movement writers, using prose complexity, managed to force the reader into the act of world-building far more thoroughly than much previous SF, certainly since the New Wave. Consider the following passage from Gibson's *Neuromancer*, typical of his prose style:

The microlights had been unarmed, stripped to compensate for the weight of a console operator, a prototype deck, and a virus program called Mole IX, the first true virus in the history of cybernetics. Corto and his team had been training for the run for three years. They were through the ice, ready to inject Mole IX, when the emps went off. The Russian pulse guns threw the jockeys into electronic darkness; the Nightwings suffered systems crash, flight circuitry wiped clean. (64)

Microlights, console operators, decks, virus programs, Nightwings, etc. These are terms that receive little explanation in the course of the story (with the exception of decks and virus programs). Passages like this embed the reader in the reality presented by the book. The reader doesn't merely read *descriptions* of Gibson's future, they read Gibson's future. Such crammed prose makes the reader an accomplice to the construction, rather than an observer.

Rudy Rucker offers a fascinating analysis of the Movement technique of crammed prose, using Claude Shannon, founding father of information theory and the digital age, as a starting point. Rudy Rucker observes that Shannon

estimated written English as carrying about seven bits per word, meaning that if a random word is excised from a text, you can usually guess it by asking seven yes-or-no questions. 'Is it a noun?' 'Does it begin with one of the letters A through L?'

'Is it used elsewhere on this page?' 'Is it cat?' In a crap genre book, generated by a low-complexity intelligence with a very short runtime, the information per word is going to be low, maybe as low as three or four bits. In a high-complexity work the information per word will be higher. (par. 12)

Movement fiction, obviously, had a far higher information-per-word ration, according to Rucker. Potentially talking about *Ringworld* (although I base this on absolutely nothing), Rucker observes that "[i]f I find that a certain SF novel about cats in outer space [sic] stupid and boring, it may not just be that I don't like cats. It may be that the book really *is* stupid and boring, as can be witnessed by the fact that the book has very low information-theoretic complexity" (par. 13).

It is worth observing that technosleaze, despite aping Gibsonian cyberpunk traditions and density of prose, does not have an equal density of information, as the ideas being conveyed are derivative at best - in fact, one might define technosleaze exclusively by this lack of information. Speaking of this nascent form of cyberpunk, Rucker states that "[s]ome cyberpunk fiction characters wear punk fashions. This is fine for now, though in the long run it's not the point. As punk becomes more familiar, its information-content goes down" (par. 16). Punk fashion, like any other image or idea being used in cyberpunk, is only interesting up until the moment it becomes wholly familiar, part of the cultural/literary landscape. "Cyberpunk" became low-information, as it became cloned and spun into sequels, devolving into technosleaze. Consider the following passage from the *Shadowrun* novel *Never Deal with a Dragon*:

As Sam snugged the plug into the jack in his temple, pain flashed through his skull, but faded swiftly. Like an afterimage, dials and control information appeared in his mind, projected onto his optic nerve by the aircraft's computer. He could shift his head and "see" different portions of the imaginary control panel. Spotting the help panel, he reached out toward it, mentally "pressing" the button. The computer fed him instructions on basic aircraft operation. (Charrette 21)

Heavy-handed descriptions of interfacing with the electronic world have replaced the poetic prose used by Gibson to defamiliarize the audience. The irony is that, old-hat as the image of

jacking in has become by the writing of *Never Deal with a Dragon* in 1990, what has now been saddled with awkward explanations could (and did) stand the weight of the most abstract of poetic imagery, as the operations of "jacking in" have become, to even the youngest of SF readers, as familiar as firing up the old light saber.

Movement fiction, dependent not on a set toolbox of images but rather of ideas, proved entirely flexible, and, being protean in nature, remained complex in terms of information load and thus relevant. Rucker believes that "[t]he essence of cyberpunk fiction . . . is that it is concerned with information. The concern exists on several levels. On the objective level, a cyberpunk work will often talk about computers, software, chips, information, etc. And on the higher level which I was talking about above, a cyberpunk work will try to reach a high level of information-theoretic complexity" (par. 16). This analysis of cyberpunk prose implies extremely fast genre evolution, since the objective level stuff, much like punk fashion, will be forced to evolve quickly as what was once high-information becomes low-information. By this view, Movement fiction will always be changing shape, but the hallmark of energetic, high-information prose will remain consistent.

Premise: Technological Change and Boundary Dissolution

Cyberpunk as a genre is widely recognized for its heightened, almost fetishistic focus on technology and innovation, being often described by authors and readers alike as "radical hard SF." Of course, using a focus on technology as a defining characteristic of a genre is a bit like using a focus on crime as a defining characteristic of crime noir; SF and technology are all but synonymous. Even the softest of soft, sociological SF will have some technological focus.

Regardless, cyberpunk is often thought of as going a bit above and beyond, overwhelming the reader with datajacks, digital universes, and personalities encoded into read-only memory - in fact, cyberpunk almost warrants a "TPS" or technology per second scale of measurement. Nevertheless, there is still something of a minor misunderstanding regarding the genre's use of technology, as the typical impression of technology's centrality comes almost entirely from Gibson. Gibson's use of technology is stylish, operating at an aesthetic level: it becomes very easy to become lost in the slick sexiness of a razorgirl sliding "ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades . . . from their housings beneath . . . burgundy nails" (*Neuromancer* 22), so much so that the actual purpose behind this use of technology can become obscure. Movement SF proper, like Gibson's genre-of-one, turns its attention to technological change and innovation, not for the sake of stylish aesthetics, but rather to interrogate the broad changes to culture and identity being caused by the technological evolution and innovation that was itself always reflective of present trends. Moreover, this interrogation leads to a similar fascination with the dissolution of traditional boundaries, both philosophical and societal.

According to Sterling, Movement fiction was ultimately less concerned with specific technological tropes than with what the technology of the 80s actually signified. In his "Preface," he famously argues that "[f]or the cyberpunks . . . technology is visceral . . . it is pervasive, utterly intimate. Not outside us, but next to us. Under our skin; often, inside our minds" (346). Sterling distances Movement fiction from massive icons of technological progress such as Hoover Dam and nuclear power plants, instead focusing on such things as personal computers and contact lenses. This isn't to say that any of these things (with the exception of mirrored sunglasses, apparently) are intended as specific Movement fiction icons, ready to be pulled out of a writer's bag of tropes when needed; Movement fiction's goal is simply to explore a new cultural

significance of technology. Admittedly, "[c]ertain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry" (346). However, all of these themes explore the changing meaning of technology, symbolizing how technology was "radically redefining . . . the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (346).

As Sterling's analysis indicates, both the nature of technology and its subsequent role in society had changed, and consequently society was changing to keep up. It has become a truism that the defining, culturally significant technology of the 50s and 60s was large, monolithic - the modern equivalent of Egyptian obelisks and pyramids. IBM's 701 from the early 50s filled a room and, however much mainframes such as the IBM 701 and its progeny sparked the public imagination (not to mention the imaginations of SF authors such as Harlan Ellison, of "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" fame), only a few dozen existed in the nation. Similarly, the Saturn V rocket was, as far as public awareness was concerned, bigger than Jesus (and the Beatles), but it, too, occupied a remote ivory tower. Nuclear weaponry/energy, certainly the most impacting technology on public consciousness, was about as transparent and comprehensible to said public as one of God's seven vials of judgment. Vacuum cleaners and remote controls notwithstanding, the *iconic* technology of the 50s, 60s, and 70s was distant, not part of the public's practical experience. This isn't to say that technology wasn't changing society; only a fool would fail to recognize that household appliance technologies developed in the postwar boom did more to shape the current conception of the nuclear family and its gender hierarchies than anything else. Even so, the national narrative still allowed a major division between the

fruits of high science and the practical benefits the public enjoyed. By the late 70s and 80s this separation had changed drastically, becoming, as Sterling says, visceral, pervasive, and intimate.

The result of this technological intimacy is the collapse of realms that were once considered separate: "The term [cyberpunk] captures something crucial to the work of these writers, something crucial to the decade as a whole: a new kind of integration. The overlapping of worlds that were formerly separate: the real of high tech, and the modern pop under-ground" (Sterling, "Preface" 345). The boundary separating human and machine dissolves in an early Gibson novel. Pat Cadigan's early work, specifically *Mindplayers*, plays with the permeability of the boundary between self and other. Lewis Shiner's *Deserted Cities of the Heart* erodes the boundaries between objective reality and the realities found within the human mind. One outcome of this fascination is the collapse of parochial perspectives in favor of much larger vistas. Sterling notes that "[t]he tools of global integration - the satellite media net, the multinational corporation - fascinate the cyberpunks and figure constantly in their work. Cyberpunk has little patience with borders" ("Preface" 347). This is a hacker attitude, not unexpected from the man who wrote *The Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier*, but it also hints at the global perspective taken by most Movement writers, whether that global perspective manifests as an appreciation of the planet's diverse cultures and belief systems or as alarm over the threads of power both tying together and simultaneously undoing the same planet.

However, it is worth noting that many Movement practitioners do not necessarily feel that technology itself is all that central to Movement fiction - at least, not to the degree that press clippings might require. Lewis Shiner notes with some irony that he has "seen the *New York Times* use the word [cyberpunk] as a synonym for *hacker*" ("Inside" 19). Shiner explains that he,



a clear Movement writer, has little connection to this, and even a passing knowledge of his work reveals few, if any, hacker heroes . . . at least, in the popular sense of the term. For what it is worth, the term *hacker* has a slightly complicated and misunderstood history. In the popular imagination, a hacker is an individual who, fueled by Mountain Dew, breaks into, say, the *World of Warcraft* server, steals personal information and credit card numbers, and uses this information for some nefarious end. This understanding is diametrically opposed to the original use of the term, conceived of and promoted as a philosophy by such digital celebrities as journalist Steven Levy. The history of the term - not to mention the finer points of hacker ethics - are not important to this discussion. What is important is the realization that hacking primarily concerns devising creative solutions to otherwise insurmountable problems in ways that stress the problem solver's autonomy and agency. While computers were the original tool used in this pursuit, they are not the only possible hacking route. Recently, the term "life hack" has come into popular usage to denote methods for improving one's efficiency and control over his or her own existence made possible by increased knowledge of the world. As such, sports such as parkour are life hacks, circumventing the very user *unfriendly* design of our increasingly privatized public spaces. Tic-tacing over a wall preventing an individual from accessing the modern commons of a park or kong-vaulting over a bench designed as uncomfortably as possible to prevent people from sleeping on it is, philosophically speaking, no different than writing a shell script to force an operating system to do something it wasn't intended to do or jailbreaking an iPhone so that the owner of said device can, in fact, practice ownership. Shiner, in the earliest Movement writings, noted the presence of the "hacker's attitude toward technology-'surfing the third wave,' as it were" (21). The point was not the technology itself, which was rather secondary, but was rather the attitude that enables a person to regain some semblance of control

and to "practice" everyday life, as Michel de Certeau said. Shiner even states that "cyberpunk in its new incarnation had turned technology into an end in itself and lost its original impulse" ("Confessions" par. 7), linking this failed understanding of the role of technology in SF with the rise of technosleaze and the publicized "death" of cyberpunk.

Movement fiction's fascination with the impact of and reaction to technological change is highlighted by the centrality of Alvin Toffler in early Movement thought. Sterling, as mentioned previously, lionized Toffler's works, as the following *Cheap Truth* review of *The Third Wave* indicates: "A brilliant conceptual framework for seeing emergent order in the confusion of our times, deliberately pop-oriented and slanted as a polemic for action. Echoes of his rhetoric are already apparent in many politicians' sudden romance with high-tech industry. Must-reading for anyone whose head is not in a bucket" (*CT* #4). And, while entire books could be devoted to identifying the presence of Toffler's ideas in Movement fiction, I'll content myself with a single nomenclaturally-apt example, one relevant to the later concerns of this study: movement. Toffler stressed in both *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave* the idea that, due to fundamental changes being made to the fabric of society by technological change, "tomorrow people" would be highly mobile (both geographically and socially), due to evolving technological/economic pressures. Movement fiction reflects this supposition in both plot and character. Inge Eriksen points out that, in the universe Gibson built in his *Sprawl* trilogy, "[m]obility is extensive, characters move from Tokyo to American deserts to Vienna, and the quivering keynote of existence doesn't go with permanent address: home is hotel rooms" (40). Following the lead of Toffler and other futurists, Movement fiction is keenly aware of the social and psychological impact of technological change; this philosophical approach highlights the genre's pronounced difference with much distressingly familiar 70s SF (Niven's *Ringworld* neglects to examine the

psychological impact that living on a world 600 million miles around might have on inhabitants) and the kinship with 60s New Wave (Brunner's *Shockwave Rider* is viewed as early cyberpunk due to its similar awareness of technological impact, in addition to the protagonist's hacker ethic).

Premise: Honest Engagement with the (80s) Present and Its Future(s)

While it is true that the New Wave was itself a movement to more honestly engage then-present social realities, by the 70s the general feeling, explored by the peanut gallery in *Cheap Truth*, was that SF as a field was no longer really performing this basic function. Sterling and company were not, of course, suggesting that no SF of the 70s was doing this - Brunner, Spinrad, Aldiss, and others continued to produce cutting-edge fiction - but they were suggesting that the field as a whole was dominated by a type of SF that failed to say anything important about the present or the present's obvious future. This is an understandable observation, as well, when one considers the trajectories of such authors as Frederik Pohl, who ended the decade with 1980's *Beyond The Blue Event Horizon*, a novel nominated for the Hugo despite bearing none of the brilliant social satire that marked *Gateway*, the first book of the series. This book exemplifies the Movement writers' critique: empty yet profitable sequels had come to dominate a genre that was supposed to offer insightful social commentary via the defamiliarization of reality. Movement fiction was intended as a corrective to this. Sterling declares that "[Movement writers'] allegiance to Eighties culture has marked them as a group as a new movement in science fiction" ("Preface," 1). This is the second line Sterling writes in what many consider a Movement manifesto (the first line being essentially station identification). That the first sentence of content

in Sterling's preface to *Mirrorshades* highlights the importance of active engagement with the then-present cultural moment speaks volumes about the ultimate goals of the Movement. For Sterling, early Movement writers were "independent explorers, whose work reflected something inherent in the decade, in the spirit of the times. Something loose in the 1980s" (344).

In pursuit of "the spirit of the times,"<sup>13</sup> Movement writers deliberately embraced a truth that, they believed, had been forgotten in SF circles: science fiction is about the present, not the future. Lance Olsen, writing in 1992's "Cyberpunk, Technosleaze, and the Apotheosis of Postmodernism," reminds his readers that "[v]ery little, if any, science fiction actually tells us about our future. Most tells about our present" (par. 1), and goes on to explain that William Gibson saw SF as a tool for examining the present world rather than a tool for predicting the future. Olsen observes that "Gibson is less interested in exactly what will happen in the year 2050 than he is with what is happening today. Or, more precisely, he is interested in how today is already tomorrow in a world undergoing future shock" (par. 3). Lewis Shiner concurs, stating that "[w]e believed that science fiction needed to take its cues from the present--computer technology, corporate power structures, Japanese economic ascendancy--rather than the mid-century pipe dreams of World Governments and Galactic Federations. For me, the movement was about global culture, anarchy and high-energy prose" ("Confessions" 1). In practice, this type of engagement with the then 80s present could appear as pure surface aesthetics, and, in fact, many criticized cyberpunk on these grounds, but the goal of engaging with the present was ultimately to reveal the trends that were shaping the future.

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, capturing and interrogating "the spirit of the times" is the one theme that ties together every novel written by Bruce Sterling. His ninth effort, 2000's *Zeitgeist*, is solely an exploration of the postmodern idea of socially constructed reality.

For instance, a nascent theme Shiner noted in early Movement fiction (1982, in the work of Sterling, Gibson, and Shirley) was "[t]his rock-and-roll quality - the young, hip protagonists, the countercultural attitude (symbolized by the ever-present mirrorshades), the musical references" (21). This is a list of characteristics that reads like a bad pitch for MTV, but nevertheless hides a truth about honest engagement with the present. Consider the "ever-present mirrorshades." The iconic totem of Movement fiction - the mirrored sunglasses - itself symbolizes honest engagement with the present . . . though very few commentators seem to have explored this. Lance Olsen, at least, noticed, pointing out that "[m]irrorshades depersonalize and dehumanize, giving world rather than self back to the viewer; this reflects cyberpunk's emphasis on moral neutrality and emotionless surface. Mirrorshades suggest that the future is opaque to us all, that at best in cyberpunk fiction we see a reflection of our present" (par. 11). While Olsen's characterization of the genre is somewhat tainted by inaccurate presuppositions, his observation that the mirrored shades reflect our own present back to us - whether we like what we see or not - is important to understanding Movement fiction, regardless of whether individual works include such overused images.

Movement fiction's reflection of the present allowed for contemplation of the most crucial of questions: "What does it mean to be *human* in today's world? What has stayed the same and what has changed? How has technology specifically changed the answers we supply to such questions? And what does this suggest about the future we will inhabit? These are obviously important questions that not only have no simple answers, but that also are difficult (maybe impossible) to formulate within the conventions of so-called 'traditional realism'" (McCaffery 8). Movement fiction's encoding of the present into stylish futures granted the narrative space to effectively contemplate those questions being raised by changing society.

Indeed, this same approach transfers into Movement offshoots, such as the steampunk Sterling/Gibson collaboration *The Difference Engine* (1990). Sterling states that the focus of the novel was "the nature of cybernetics and the information revolution and what it's doing to our own society. Projecting it one hundred years into the past is like watching the course of a disease in another species" (Milhon 100) - quite the scientifically valid approach to epidemiology, one might add. Movement fiction, then, can be said to use invented societies - futuristic, historic, or present-day - as thought experiments intended to isolate and study the forces driving societal change in the present.

Sterling, in "Cyberpunk in the Nineties," writes to recover the meaning of Movement fiction from the dreaded C-word that consumed Movement fiction as surely as the Blob consumed underpaid 50s extras. Sterling draws a comparison between Mary Shelley's use of Frankenstein's monster and a cyberpunk use of such a monster, suggesting that, after the monster had been created in a well-funded research lab, it would be "copyrighted through the new genetics laws, and manufactured worldwide in many thousands. Soon the Monsters would all have lousy night jobs mopping up at fast-food restaurants" (3). And who says cyberpunk authors don't comment on the negative impact global capital has on the dispossessed? Sterling continues, pointing out that "[t]he human condition can be changed, and it will be changed, and is changing; the only real questions are how, and to what end. This 'anti-humanist' conviction in cyberpunk is not simply some literary stunt to outrage the bourgeoisie; this is an objective fact about culture in the late twentieth century. Cyberpunk didn't invent this situation; it just reflects it" (3-4). This, then, can be taken as the central narrative goal of Movement fiction: offering an accurate reflection of late twentieth century (and, now, early twenty-first) culture.

## Premise: Margins, Hinterlands, and Zones

Lastly, Movement SF has a certain fascination, derived partly from the genre's own genesis, in the marginal - losers, freaks, underworlds, borderlands, etc. Sterling tells us that "Cyberpunk, like New Wave before it, was a voice of Bohemia. It came from the underground, from the outside, from the young and energetic and disenfranchised. It came from people who didn't know their own limits, and refused the limits offered them by mere custom and habit" ("Nineties" 5). Of course, Sterling follows this with the observation that Movement writers, those gentlemen losers, to borrow an epithet from Gibson, have all grown up and ostensibly passed the torch, but, considering that Sterling, Gibson, Kadrey, and other Movement practitioners are still, age be damned, writing bleeding-edge SF, the point still stands. Movement fiction, being itself something of a mutant that crawled forth from the sewer and made good, has a genetic fascination with both mutants and sewers: "The cyberpunks, being hybrids themselves, are fascinated by interzones: the areas where, in the words of William Gibson, 'the street finds its own uses for things' (Sterling, "Preface" 347).

Building upon this base, Movement fiction understood the purpose of SF as demanding emphasis on the margins: "SF is the enemy of normality, the antidote to bored sophistication and know-it-all over-refinement. If SF, in outgrowing its native vulgarity, also loses its ability to stun, it will have sold its birthright for a mess of pottage. At this point, SF can commit any literary crime but boredom" (Sterling, *CT* #3). This is not really a revolutionary argument; Darko Suvin's indispensable theory of cognitive estrangement itself demands the battling of normality and the stunning of the audience. Nevertheless, Movement writers found a disturbingly large proportion of the leading SF of the day as utterly failing in this regard, supporting the status quo

rather than lighting out for the territories. Writing as Sue Denim in *Cheap Truth #5*, Lewis Shiner criticized the authors and works that had made the 1983 Nebula Award Ballot, accusing them of looking like "a list of stuff that Mom and Dad said it was okay to read." Shiner takes David Brin's *Startide Rising* to task, critiquing both its lack of verbal artistry, conveyed caustically by lines such as "And aren't those dolphins cute? They talk in poetry that sounds like it came right out of Reader's Digest," and also the novel's clear lack of moral compass: "And it has a nice moral, too -- something Mom and Dad have always known, though it hasn't always seemed that way these last couple of decades -- that WE are better than THEY are, and that's enough to pull us out of any trouble, particularly when THEY are slimy alien scum" - an oddly current sentiment, I might add, considering the ultra-conservative turn post-9/11. Thus, Movement SF can be seen as inherently opposed to the status-quo, whether that is be 80s social conventions or 80s publishing conventions.

Ultimately, the round rejection of the 80s status quo has as much to do with the future as it does with the present . . . or, rather, a failure to imagine the present's future (which implies a failure to understand the present at all). Sterling, writing in *Cheap Truth #5* about the triumph of MTV over print, claims that publishers and writers alike should be ashamed at this failure. "Why aren't kids lined up eight deep for the latest issue of Isaac Asimov's? Why isn't Analog doled out from locked crates by frowning members of the PTA? Because they are DULL. Worse than dull; they're reactionary, clinging to literary-culture values while a cybernetic tsunami converts our times into a post-industrial Information Age." Movement fiction sought to avoid this unenviable position - almost a betrayal of the SF ethos - by focusing not on the dregs of society and their veritable hives of scum and villainy, but rather on the individuals and places that, for whatever reason, failed to receive society's sanction. William Gibson's *Molly* (or Sterling's *Kitsune*, etc.)



received attention not because she was an edgy criminal, but rather because she was not a Stepford wife.

Movement SF's rejection of the status quo and embracing of the marginal led to a general impatience with standard SF plot structuring, which in turn led to a plot diaspora, an celebration of everything but the standard yarns that, oddly, the genre of cyberpunk was soon after accused of producing. While discussing Isaac Asimov's *Robots of Dawn* (and obliquely excoriating the publishing industry for so thoroughly closing the gates to deviant SF as surely as the 1950s closed the gates to non-gray flannel suits), Sterling takes the master himself to task, calling him an "old hack . . . resurrecting the decaying flesh of ideas, plots, and characters dead thirty years now, pumping in a little '80's topicality (lame sex), and grabbing himself a whole bunch of money and a chrome rocket" (*CT #4*). One might offer the rebuttal that *Neuromancer* was a rather standard affair (and one might be right), but on the whole the works of Gibson, Sterling, and the rest follow anything but traditional adventure/detective plots, instead cannibalizing and hybridizing literally everything else.

#### Gentlemen Losers

If nothing else, the four premises of Movement fiction outlined above make it quite easy to see the philosophic differences between "cyberpunks" and "humanists" . . . almost. If you squint, and ignore the sales-minded drama. Sterling, speaking long before the "humanist" camp wrote its own manifesto, observed that "[i]f these heirs-designate were dropped into a strong magnetic field, Gibson, Shiner, Sterling, Cadigan and Bear would immediately drift to one pole. Swanwick, Robinson, Kessel, Kelly, Murphy, and Willis would take the other" (*CT #6*). This

proves largely accurate, provided that one focuses on the basic premises above. Michael Swanwick's *Bones of the Earth* (2002) is a heartbreakingly beautiful novel that features archeologists who have been gifted time-travel technology from an avian race that evolved on earth long after humanity went extinct, giving humanity the ability to study the past and the future and the avian race the ability to study humanity. However, the very existence of this technology creates a paradox, meaning that, when the experiment is finished and the technology is removed, the events that take place within the novel will simply have never occurred. What emerges is an unexpected celebration of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, for all the human characters come to understand what the Unchanging, the avian race, already know: it is the fact of being and the love of attempting to understand that give life value, not whether we persist or pass our knowledge into some unknowable future. Swanwick gives the reader a marvelous sentiment, but none of the above four premises can be found in this novel in appreciable quantities. There are, of course, statements made about religious fundamentalism and its antagonism towards scientific knowledge, but this is a problem more perennial than timely. In fact, the strongest engagement Swanwick makes with the present rests in the fact that *Bones of the Earth* is a response to *Jurassic Park* . . . well, more of a finishing riposte directly into Michael Crichton's soft underbelly, since one of the blatant purposes of *Bones of the Earth* seems to be to do *Jurassic Park* intelligently. Swanwick's work is of no less literary value than that of Movement writers, but the difference of approach is clear.

Parallel Evolution: A Movement by Any Other Name . . .

In their introduction to *Rewired: The Post-Cyberpunk Anthology*, James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel offer a justification for the works collected in the anthology by seeking to establish a direct connection between the abstract, literary concerns of 80s cyberpunk (read: stripped of fashion and mythology, or "flavor") and contemporary post-cyberpunk literature, demonstrating that the latter is a direct descendant of the former, by way of the evolution of what Kelly and Kessel identify as the "signature obsessions of cyberpunk" (ix). The obsessions are as follows:

- Presenting a global perspective on the future.
- Engaging with developments in infotech and biotech, especially those invasive technologies that will transform the human body and psyche.
- Striking a gleefully subversive attitude that challenges traditional values and received wisdom.
- Cultivating a crammed prose style that takes an often playful stance towards traditional science fiction tropes. (ix)

While these obsessions are not entirely identical to the premises I have identified for Movement fiction (which is only logical, as Kelly and Kessel are focusing on the cyberpunk movement proper) they are remarkably close, and one can easily see common themes in both attempts at classification.

Last first, the cultivation of "a crammed prose style" maps quite perfectly with what I labeled as "dense, high-information prose." Similarly, in a loose sense the "subversive attitude" and challenging of traditional values maps well with the fascination with margins, at least insofar as that fascination spells status quo rejection. Clearly, engagement with "developments in infotech and biotech" reflects the emphasis on technology and boundary dissolution, though Kelly and Kessel's phrasing of this point reads more like an observation on a motif rather than the reasoning behind the motif. The last obsession, "presenting a global perspective on the future," is seemingly at odds with my assertion that Movement fiction sought honest engagement

with the present. Still, all futures presented by Movement fiction and its descendants are merely methods by which the present can be viewed, therefore Kelly and Kessel's list of obsessions is not far off at all.

### "Consulting Dr. Nice": John Kessel's Cyberpunk

Allow me to make my point about the central premises of Movement fiction as solid as possible by comparing the above premises with the traits that John Kessel identifies as core to "humanist" science fiction. In 1987, Kessel, SF author and professor at North Carolina State University, wrote an article for *Science Fiction EYE* titled "The Humanist Manifesto." The article was written partially in response to Sterling's own "Cyberpunk Manifesto" and partially in response to Michael Swanwick's article "A User's Guide to the Postmoderns," which Kessel felt was slightly controversial and, like Sterling's *Cheap Truth* (for which Kessel had written, actually), fostered a counterproductive environment of competition amongst SF authors. This article, much like Sterling's own manifesto, described the traits that Kessel felt were core to humanist SF and thus presumably distinct from Movement SF.

Even so, several of Kessel's traits are not particularly different from what one would expect of Movement writers. For instance, Kessel's first three traits are as follows: "1) A knowledge and appreciation of literature outside SF, including so-called 'literary' fiction, the 'classics.' . . . 2) A suspicion of the formal structure of the so-called 'literary establishment.' . . . and of academic critics who use the works of Joyce and others as clubs to beat SF. . . . 3) Love for science fiction and popular fiction in general. The idea that SF and literary values are not incompatible" (52). Thus far, one can imagine this list of traits applying just as well to Bruce

Sterling as Kim Stanley Robinson: Sterling's first novel, 1977's *Involution Ocean*, was a clever SF reimagining of *Moby Dick*, a work of literature about as far outside of SF as one can get.

Kessel's sixth and last point primarily addresses the divisiveness he detests and, like the first three, has little to say about the difference between Humanist and Movement SF approach. He says that Humanist SF is characterized by a certain "hesitance to make categorical statements about SF, especially statements that exclude" (52). Kessel even concludes his essay by saying "I don't have a manifesto. I think there are many kinds of good writing. I think we ought to lower our voices. I think writers should speak very softly, write whatever moves them as well as they can, and let the works speak for themselves" (56). Movement fiction, however, contained the diversity of quality he desired; as has been pointed out, "Humanist" and "Cyberpunk" writers and works were easily mistaken for one another. Regardless, the tossing around of categorical statements about SF is nothing new; New Wave writers from Ballard to Delany made revision attempts ranging from eliminating the outer space narrative to sharply defining the nature of language in SF. In the end, though, the real categorical impulse in SF lies not in the writers nor really even in the reader, but rather in the gatekeeper publishing houses (then as much as now) that decide whom to publish based primarily on categorical resemblance. As such, the only way a new approach finds publication (and, regardless of Kessel's identification of non-SF DNA in *Neuromancer*, Gibson's work was quite new in SF marketing categories) is to be divisive enough to divide off a new category. This is truly a shame, but . . . well, welcome to Consumerica. Kessel's argument is tempered by the objective attitude of an academic who approaches the publishing industry by a slightly different road.

Two of Kessel's traits, however, do draw into sharp relief the premises of Movement fiction. Kessel's fifth trait is quite telling. Kessel explains that Humanist SF centers itself around

[a] belief that individual people are important, that even though any realistic cosmic perspective dwarfs the individual into insignificance, human values have importance, that they are worth writing about even though they have been written about over and over through the centuries, that invigorating fiction can in fact be written through the clash of human values and the vast perspectives of the future, of evolution, of social change available through SF. (52)

The subtext here is important. If "invigorating fiction" can be derived from the clashing of "human values and the vast perspectives of the future," then we must take this to mean that the clash from which good fiction arises is one of conflict. Specifically, the changing future with what must be taken to be static human values. Here is the crucial assumption that seems to lie at the heart of Kessel's conception of Humanist SF: human values are timeless and universal. In this, Humanist SF shares a basic assumption with mainstream fiction and much of literary theory. It is the assumption that humans and human experience are somehow inherent and unchanging that allows Shakespeare's plays to remain canonized. The syllogism is simple: If human nature is eternal and Shakespeare perfectly captures human nature then Shakespeare's works are eternal. Both contemporary science, feminist and queer theory, and postmodernism itself take issue with this assumption, however, arguing that human nature is decidedly not universal but is rather a product of environment. Humanist fiction, perhaps as a byproduct of attempts to embrace the traditionally "literary," which is the heart of Kessel's first trait of Humanist SF, tends to fall far closer to the unchanging human nature argument (though, being SF, Humanist fiction does work to problematize these categories somewhat). Movement fiction, on the other hand, takes as a core premise the very postmodern realization that human nature is both provisional and malleable, and that SF's goal should be to explore the ramifications of this truth using every tool available, from content to style.

For instance, Kessel spends several pages analyzing Gibson's *Neuromancer* with the goal of deflating some of the novel's hype by showing that Gibson's work isn't quite as new and

innovative as is widely believed. Kessel focuses on three aspects of the novel: plot, prose, and character. Kessel observes that the plot is essentially a noir pastiche by demonstrating that *Neuromancer's* basic plot isn't dissimilar to the plot of the 1973 film *Harry in Your Pocket* or a Raymond Chandler novel. Similarly, Kessel critiques the prose of *Neuromancer* on the grounds that it isn't fundamentally different from Chandler's own writing: "I point to Raymond Chandler as the origin of this prose, which depends on a large number of metaphors, the more startling the better, and on an equal ellipsis of mundane description and 'filler'" (55). Regarding the characters, Kessel observes that they "are no more than two-dimensional . . . types and nothing more" (55), and thus offering "no advance over pulp fiction" (55). In other words, Kessel sees *Neuromancer* as quite firmly placed in pulp genre history rather than in any new, innovative category, and that, if critics wish to judge it, they "should judge the book according to some more realistic standards" (55). While Kessel anticipates the objections cyberpunks would raise - "The whole point of the punk movement in rock and in SF is to go back to the roots -- not to deny SF's pulp origins, but to use them. What makes *Neuromancer* startling and original is its vision of the future, a totally new vision, projecting from the 80s and not the 50s and 60s, the rut that so much SF pre-Gibson and the punks seemed stuck in" (55) - and recognizes it as a very good point, he nevertheless feels that this isn't alone sufficient to judge SF's quality. He argues that "[p]lot, character and style are not mere icing. This is the crucial difference between the critical perspectives of cyberpunk and humanism" (55).

Movement SF's acceptance of a certain relativity of values also applies to narrative structuring as well, as Kessel's fourth trait suggests. His fourth trait is "[i]nterest in character, plot, story mechanics. A love for well-crafted fiction, for good prose" (52) - an ambiguous point, surely, as much of the above falls to subjective taste, but when compared to Movement fiction's

desire for high-content, high-energy prose and energetic, interesting narrative, one can draw a fairly strong conclusion. Movement fiction aims to use both its prose and narrative to reflect the future-shocked present while Humanist fiction aims to be less experimental and more deeply grounded in the standard, timeless expectations of the literary world. I am immediately reminded of the difference of opinion in the film community between traditional film narrative techniques and contemporary, sometime-postmodern film narratives that follow the structures of what Alison McMahan calls "pataphysical" film.

McMahan observes that film critics have trouble processing certain contemporary films, such as *Hulk* (2003) or *The Matrix* (1999), leveling very harsh critiques for often very obscure reasons. For McMahan, pataphysical films "are indications, not of Hollywood's creative bankruptcy, but of film narration changing, beginning to create meaning in a new way, at least different from the system of classical Hollywood narration" (3). McMahan suggests four characteristics of pataphysical film:

1. Make fun of established systems of knowledge, especially academic and scientific
2. Follow an alternative narrative logic
3. Use special effects in a "gee whiz," that is, a blatant, visible way (as compared to "invisible" effects that simulate live action, but without real harm to the actors)
4. Feature thin plots and thinly drawn characters, because the narrative relies on intertextual, nondiegetic references to be understood (3)

While these characteristics primarily refer to postmodern film, the connection to SF literature (regardless of the medium) should be obvious. For instance, the split between McMahan's pataphysical film and traditional film resembles the split between SF film and television and mainstream, at least as described by Jan Johnson-Smith in *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate and Beyond* (2005): "The new, sharply defined *mise-en-scène* (set design, costume/makeup, movement and lighting) articulate crucial aspects of the narrative and renders



excess verbosity redundant. In an era where we readily condemn films and television programmes as 'all style and no substance' perhaps it is time for us to consider that stories can emerge from more than the plotted action-narrative: *mise-en-scène* has its own narrative too, and in sf it enjoys a particularly powerful function" (4). As both Johnson-Smith and Alison McMahan reminds us, the focus on televisual SF's perceived preference for style above substance is itself a product of a certain bias for narrative which, oddly, excludes from consideration techniques used in other visual arts, such as sculpture or photography. The reception of SF, both visual and literary, suffers from this biased reception, but even so the difference between Movement and Humanist literary ideologies can be further illuminated by observing how each school responds to this critical cognitive bias.

The first characteristic aside (though, if we wish to be thorough, SF, by its materialist and scientific nature, often pokes fun at the metaphysical and psychological assumptions underlying mainstream literature), SF literature is often accused of embracing narrative logics that perplex the average reader: Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* might follow a classic journey narrative, yet it can hardly be accused of having much in common with, say, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (*Robinson Crusoe on Mars* is another discussion). This tendency is developed in Movement fiction, which offers narratives, such as those found in Gibson's later work, that are as non-traditional (and even non-logical) in structuring as anything the postmodern mainstream provides. In contrast, the Humanist fiction Kessel describes tends to err on the side of the traditional narrative, when possible. Moreover, the blatant use of special effects, be it gratuitous, near-fetishistic shots of shapeshifting robots battling on an interstate in Michael Bay's *Transformers* or shots of several thousand clones of Boba Fett's dad fighting various and sundry in George Lucas's *Attack of the Clones* - scenes which have precisely nothing to contribute to

narrative development - serve as analogues to SF's general desire to create a sense of wonder in the reader. Again, a difference can be seen between Movement and Humanist approaches. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* is hardly devoid of "gee whiz" style effects that inspire a true feeling of awe and wonder on the part of the reader; Robinson's *Red Mars*, like any SF masterpiece, truly does catch the wonder of the red planet. Protagonists get caught in rovers during torrential floods, sabotaged space elevators fall from heaven and girdle the planet: these are set action pieces of which Michael Bay would certainly approve. However, these awe-inspiring sequences are *always* integral to the plot of the novel, but are not themselves the plot itself, as might be the case in pataphysical narrative. Movement fiction, though hardly guilty of the effects excess of a typical Bay picture, could be seen as slightly less concerned on the whole with plot economy, liberally sprinkling moments of pure "gee whiz" into the narrative, regardless of need. Sterling's *Heavy Weather* (1994), chronologically a bit late to be called cyberpunk but as fully Movement as anything he has written, provides a good example. The storm chaser troupe the narrative follows owns a car capable of jumping that is, strictly speaking, unnecessary to the novel - to be sure, it isn't comparable to the SF ship icon, such as Verne's Nautilus or van Vogt's (Space) Beagle. No, this vertically-inclined vehicle exists primarily for the gee-whiz wonder it provides, as the reader's first introduction to it suggests:

"Charlie [the car's navigation computer], see this little hill?"  
 "Two thousand three hundred twelve meters north," the car replied,  
 outlining the crest of the hill in orange.  
 "Charlie, take us there, fast."  
 The car slowed and pulled over off the road shoulder, its prow toward the  
 hill.  
 "Hold tight," Juanita said. Then the car leaped into the air. (34-35)

As with any of the oft-criticized surface detail of cyberpunk, this detail is deployed for the joy of wonder. Movement fiction would fire Chekov's gun/phaser . . . but it would be sure to empty the

capacitor in the process, glorying in flash-frying the scenery, not to mention including a few flash-cuts to show how the other crew members' own battles were going. Finally, SF in general is universally accused of featuring "thin plots and thinly drawn characters" (McMahan 3), as is pataphysical film. Humanist SF, like the New Wave before it, might be especially concerned with this perceived lack, and seek to redress it by focusing a renewed attention on character. Movement fiction took the other, arguably more genre-pure, road, and embraced this perceived flaw, aware that the real details about both plot and character were being provided in other ways. McMahan notes that pataphysical film "relies more on intertextual, nondiegetic references to be understood" (3), and this observations seems equally true for Movement fiction. We do not require Gibson to explicate in *Neuromancer* Molly's psychology in a traditional act of diegesis; we should be able to understand her mind through comparisons with other, similar characters from SF and Noir and even through the brutal economy of her movements and actions while raiding the Villa Straylight. Ultimately, it isn't that Movement (or, for the sake of Kessel's argument, cyberpunk proper) bears less interest in "character, plot, story mechanics . . . [and] good prose" (52), but rather that Movement fiction approaches each of these requirements in a fundamentally different manner, similar to the fundamental difference of approach one finds between contemporary pataphysical film and traditional, diegetic Hollywood film.

"Wow, look at this stuff! It's *beyond* cyberpunk."

- William Gibson

Despite the "death" of the cyberpunk genre, both the original authors and the hosts of imitators and descendants continued to produce fiction, rendering the pronouncement of the

genre's demise rather confusing. Many new terms developed to label the type of fiction that developed in cyberpunk's wake, the most popular of which has proved to be "post-cyberpunk" (or simply postcyberpunk) SF, an odd sub-genre that includes such contemporary writers as Peter Watts and Richard Morgan, as well as all of the original cyberpunk authors who continue to write. Marketing aside, the argument can be made that Movement SF isn't fundamentally dissimilar from what is now termed postcyberpunk; in fact, the boundary between the two is so permeable a membrane as to make the distinction somewhat pointless, as both Gibson's and Sterling's earlier works often get labeled either way. Sterling's *Islands in the Net* is labeled as cyberpunk and postcyberpunk, depending on the purposes of the critic. As such, I propose that postcyberpunk (assuming it isn't just another marketing gimmick or fun academic buzzword) should simply be regarded as Movement SF continuing on as-is, with new writers periodically joining the ranks.

If Movement fiction as I have defined it is less a toolkit of subjects and motifs and more a general approach to writing SF, it stands to reason that the genre would very rapidly expand beyond the limited definition it was given as a collection of subjects and motifs and begin producing very hard to categorize works, assuming one was tied to the original conception of the genre. McCaffery, writing from the not-too-distant year of 1991, observed that "cyberpunk writers soon began producing works that defy easy categorization" (13), seeing this as a major period of transformation in cyberpunk's evolution. But, as we should be able to see now, the texts that the Movement produced were never, even from that first tiny cluster of movement fiction, easily categorized. The Movement simply never fit into the narrow confines of the cyberpunk label. Sterling made the same observation in the *Mirrorshades* preface, predicting that "[i]ts [cyberpunk's] future is an open question. Like the artists of punk and New Wave, the cyberpunk

writers, as they develop, may soon be galloping in a dozen directions at once. It seems unlikely that any label will hold them for long" (348). This is, in fact, exactly what occurred, and the term postcyberpunk arose shortly after in an effort to corral the wildly diverse works under a single, simple banner (as did various other terms, such as Rucker's own transrealism, steampunk, biopunk, etc.).

Lawrence Person begins his 1998 essay "Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto" - to date still one of the best discussions of postcyberpunk - with a now-classic observation about Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1995):

Bud, from Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, is a classic cyberpunk protagonist. An aggressive, black-leather clad criminal loner with cybernetic body augmentations (including a neurolinked skull gun), Bud makes his living first as a drug runner's decoy, then by terrorizing tourists for money. All of which goes a long way toward explaining why his ass gets wasted on page 37 of a 455 page novel. Welcome to the postcyberpunk era. (1)

While Person spins this as the symbolic death of cyberpunk, it really has far more to do with the death of a certain cliché to which Sterling, Shiner, and others took great umbrage. Person even mentions, immediately following his analysis of *The Diamond Age*, that one could argue that SF "entered the postcyberpunk era in 1988 with the publication of Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*" (1), which perceptive readers might realize says something about the viability of the term, since the popular conception of cyberpunk was in full-swing in 1988 (in fact, it would be but a single year before that apotheosis of technosleaze, the *Shadowrun* media empire, was birthed) and *Islands in the Net* wasn't really that fundamentally different from *Schismatrix*, assuming one is willing to look past cyberpunk's celebrated surface: both share similar themes. In short, postcyberpunk was a term of convenience.

Person's Postcyberpunk

What texts, then, did Person consider conveniently postcyberpunk? Topping his list were Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1995), though oddly not *Snow Crash* (1992) itself. Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988) and *Holy Fire* (1996) both make the cut, along with presumably much of Sterling's subsequent (and previous) work, since 1994's *Heavy Weather* and 2009's *The Caraytids* concern many similar themes. Ian McDonald's criminally underrated *Necroville* (AKA *Terminal Cafe*) finds inclusion, as does Ken MacLeod's *The Star Fraction* (1995) and *The Stone Canal* (1996). This is a wildly varied list, and a casual fan might miss the connections. Person gives us a roughly four-part rationale for his categorization efforts.

Gentlemen losers get jobs . . .

Person's primary, multi-faceted assertion about postcyberpunk was simply that the writers (and the genre) had grown up. In other words, the punk characters (and authors) had joined the middle class, acquired 401(k)s, and become far more responsible members of society:

Postcyberpunk uses the same immersive world-building technique, but features different characters, settings, and, most importantly, makes fundamentally different assumptions about the future. Far from being alienated loners, postcyberpunk characters are frequently integral members of society (i.e., they have jobs). They live in futures that are not necessarily dystopic (indeed, they are often suffused with an optimism that ranges from cautious to exuberant), but their everyday lives are still impacted by rapid technological change and an omnipresent computerized infrastructure" ("Notes" par. 8)

. . . and kids . . .

Person identifies postcyberpunk as possessing "characters and settings [that] frequently hail from, for lack of a better term, the middle class" (par. 10) and notes that these "characters frequently have families, and sometimes even children" (par. 10). Moreover, these postcyberpunk protagonists are "anchored in their society rather than adrift in it" (par. 10), possessing "careers, friends, obligations, responsibilities, and all the trappings of an "ordinary" life" (par. 10).

. . . and voter ID cards?

Politically speaking, Person feels that "[p]ostcyberpunk characters tend to seek ways to live in, or even strengthen, an existing social order, or help construct a better one" (par. 11), unlike the standard plot offering of cyberpunk which featured characters attempting to "topple or exploit corrupt social orders" (par. 11). Person does, however, qualify his statement about the politics of cyberpunk/postcyberpunk by referring to "the three orders of science fiction" (par. 13), which he attributes to Asimov. The third order of science fiction, according to this scheme, is "social fabric fiction" (par. 13), or stories that use technological nova and the subsequent extrapolations to pose and examine/interrogate social change. Person notes that "many a cyberpunk tale used classic plot devices (plucky young rebels topple decaying social order, etc.) to explore such issues" (par. 13) and suggests that postcyberpunk simply moves further in this direction, dispensing with the classic plot devices and instead letting the plot arise "organically from the world it's set in" (par. 13).

For Person, postcyberpunk is thus a more socially responsible (or complicit?) incarnation of what had once been, by contrast, a childish, rebellious masculine fantasy. But, as I have

demonstrated above, such a characterization of "cyberpunk" was suspect at best: Gibson's early work may have been full of young rebels, but the irony of said rebels' failed lives was always heavy, and the technosleaze that does live up to the reputation was not the father of postcyberpunk, but rather a type of Frank Stallone that profits from a shtick Sylvester tries to avoid. As such, Person's observations prove somewhat problematic. First, Person asserts that postcyberpunk protagonists are job-holding, respectable-ish members of societies that are not dystopian nightmares. As regards the dystopian point, Swanwick notes that "[m]any of his [Sterling's] new [as of 1986] are an attempt to explore the impact of science in a way free of the technolatriy characteristic of current Utopian and Distopian [sic] SF" (User's Guide" 10), but this statement was made in 1986, and any work in question would still be considered "cyberpunk." *Schismatrix* (1985) couldn't really be considered utopian or dystopian (a point Person himself raises, incidentally, but as *Schismatrix*, along with *Neuromancer*, is considered a founding cyberpunk text, one shouldn't engage in special pleading), and the protagonist(s) did, in fact, have multiple jobs, as the novel spanned hundreds of years of their lives. In fact, Person's point about Bud's death in the first 37 pages of *The Diamond Age* being a symbolic death knell for cyberpunk is long anticipated by *Schismatrix*, which begins with young revolutionary Abelard Lindsay, and follows the young rebel as he ages, breaks with blind ideology, and becomes a tramp, a businessman, a diplomat, and everything else under the sun on his post-human journey. Again, we see that the definition against which such criteria are formed extends no further than Gibsonian cyberpunk (and, perhaps, John Shirley); Movement fiction in general features its fair share of employed, responsible protagonists, who, as the second point Person makes states, had kids, friends, and were in general a part of society.



As regards Person's third point, that postcyberpunks work to improve rather than topple social orders, it is worth observing that even in pure-strain Gibsonian cyberpunk the protagonists rarely tried to topple or exploit corrupt social orders. Shirley's *Eclipse* series was really the only solid example of outright revolution in early Movement fiction. Gibson's characters hardly had such grandiose ambitions, and even the exploitation was a fairly limited point, as the *Sprawl* trilogy presented outlaw hackers doing much the same thing as legal corporations. Technosleaze offerings are, of course, another matter entirely, since the revolutionary spirit is great fodder for the appetites of young, insecure males. Postcyberpunk, far from being kinder and gentler than cyberpunk/Movement SF, is roughly analogous in content: Richard Morgan's Kovacs novels and Peter Watts's *Rifters* series contain just the types of violent revolutions that Person ascribes to cyberpunk, while Bruce Sterling, Laura Mixon, and others embrace more pacifistic approaches. Once Person's points are interrogated a bit, it becomes clear that, at least in the natures of the protagonists, postcyberpunk and Movement SF are identical, as movement fiction and Person's conception of postcyberpunk both do not support the status quo, but rather seeks to improve it either by outright revolution or by positive change from within, depending on the nature of the problem.

Technology, warm and fuzzy . . .

Person's final defining point regards the application of and attitude towards technology in postcyberpunk fare. Technologically speaking, Person notes that "[i]n cyberpunk, technology facilitates alienation from society. In postcyberpunk, technology *is* society" (par. 11). This is arguably the most accurate observation Person makes, as one of the most fascinating features of

the sub-genre sometimes called postcyberpunk is the use of technology to connect people, allowing them to form ad-hoc communities where none was available before. One is immediately reminded of the Illustrated Primer used by Princess Nell in Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*: the Primer allowed the truly alienated and disenfranchised child Nell to have, at first, a type of stand-in community in the form of the characters the Primer created for her (such as her rodent sensei), then later to connect her not only with an actress who serves as a surrogate mother but also with the entire "mouse army," a vast community of Chinese orphans who have also been given primers, thus allowing Nell to form not simply a family but an entire tribe, or, in the novel's terms, a phyle of her own. Stephenson stresses that it isn't simply the technology of the Primer that allows this, but rather the unique interaction of the technology itself, Nell, and the "ractor" Miranda, who bonds with Nell as a mother substitute and thus strengthens the importance of community in this work. If one compares this to cyberpunk works - specifically, those few works that can be genuinely called cyberpunk such as *Neuromancer* and *Eclipse* plus the imitations - one can see that Person's point is very much true . . . assuming one sticks to the rigid definition of cyberpunk I offer here. Movement fiction in general possessed roughly the same attitude towards technology, corrected for predating the social networking revolution. The technology of *Schismatrix* doesn't create the Shaper/Mechanist faction split: irrelevant ideologies that had yet to vanish gracefully created the tensions. Technology ultimately offered the way out of the division, granting truly post-human possibilities and a human Diaspora that would render such divisive politics extinct. Sterling's technology does anything but alienate.

Pre/Post-Cyberpunk

Ultimately, Person might agree with my bickering about term use: Person, anticipating inevitable questions addressing whether there are exceptions to his rules, does note that "Sterling's *Schismatrix* and his other Shaper/Mechanist stories tend to defy this schema" (par. 16) and that Pat "Cadigan seems to have run the sequence in reverse" (par. 16), proving semi-prescient, since *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998) and *The Dervish is Digital* (2000) certainly continued towards standard cyberpunk plots. Michael Swanwick, writing in 1986's "A User's Guide to the Postmoderns," characterizes Bruce Sterling's literary career as being comprised of three distinct phases. The first phase was that of ignored yet promising writer, marked by his publication of *Involution Ocean* (1977). The second was as the architect of cyberpunk, following the publication of *The Artificial Kid* (1980) and culminating in *Schismatrix* (1985), letting us know exactly where *Schismatrix* falls, generically speaking. Following this, Swanwick suggests "he moved into a third stages as a slick and quirky literary stylist, in stories (such as 'Telliamed,' 'The Greening of Brunei,'<sup>14</sup> [sic] and 'Dinner in Audoghost') which retain the color and excitement of cyberpunk, but move beyond it into something new" (6). What Swanwick has given us is an argument for Sterling's evolution into postcyberpunk that culminates a year after *Neuromancer* hit the scene and the same year that it won the Hugo. Postcyberpunk began about the same time that cyberpunk did, in other words. Surely this makes the term a bit silly?

### *Rewired's* Postcyberpunk

Though arguably the most influential, Person's attempt to define postcyberpunk is hardly alone. Another effort was made by authors James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel in their

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<sup>14</sup> "Green Days in Brunei" was published in Asimov's in October of 1985. Swanwick presumably misremembered the title, Wikipedia not yet existing.

introduction for *Rewired: The Post-Cyberpunk Anthology* (2007), therefore giving the anthology roughly the same function that *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* had two decades before. Unlike Person, however, Kessel and Kelly make the perceptive argument that post-cyberpunk is just a continuation, with minor evolutionary mutations, of cyberpunk, rather than some sort of strange, new animal. Another phrasing might be that post-cyberpunk is cyberpunk that *remained true to present concerns*, unlike that atavistic cousin technosleaze, a static genre that does not evolve and adapt to the concerns of a different era, as must always occur when genres, which are by definition locked to a place and time, age. Below I explore several of the "obsessions" that Kessel and Kelly identify as core to both cyberpunk and postcyberpunk, hopefully showing that the more general label of Movement SF encompasses both sub-genres, themselves better seen as phases or time-frames than as distinct entities.

### Rewiring Technology

### Technology and Human Identity

Kessel and Kelly propose that "[a] major CP obsession was the way emerging technologies will change what it means to be human" (x). Kelly and Kessel do not, however, suggest that cyberpunk ever restricted itself to the standard cautionary tales that have dominated both past and present SF, pointing out that the writers of cyberpunk fiction had "studied the history of how humans have tried to manage change, and were not impressed" (x). Instead of focusing on the management of outward change, Kelly and Kessel argue that cyberpunk fiction turned its focus inward: "A key insight of CP, extended still further into PCP, is that we are no

longer changing technology; rather it has begun to change us" (x). This point is perfectly consistent with Sterling's own statements about intimate technology and demonstrates quite effectively the lack of real distance between cyberpunk - which, in their usage, is more like Movement fiction as I define it - and its presumed inheritor postcyberpunk.

### The Singularity

Kessel and Kelly also assert that "a logical consequence of much of cyberpunk extrapolation is the singularity" (xii), that bugaboo of Vernor Vinge threatening to end human history, for good or ill. According to their definition, "[o]ne of the obsessions of PCP fiction is to explore the edges of this "end" of history, and if possible, to see beyond it" (xiii). One can see how this conclusion was reached; many, many contemporary SF novels feature some form of technological critical mass that serves to change everything. *The Diamond Age* had its "seed" technology. Egan's *Permutation City* (1994) attempts to look past the moment when a true digital reality comes into existence. Rucker's *Postsingular* (2007) attempts to envision, in Rucker's gloriously bizarre way, what a future in which all matter has become smart matter tied into the internet might be like. There is no shortage of works featuring this theme, but, as Kessel and Kelly point out, this obsession is hardly new. Cyberpunk/Movement fiction obsessed over the singularity as well - *Neuromancer's* plot was about little else than an AI's desire to transcend. The difference that Kessel and Kelly assert concerns attempts to look past this radical break, suggesting that the cyberpunks, like Marx, spent a lot of energy discussing what happens *before* and didn't quite get around to the *after* part. In this, Kessel and Kelly's argument that

postcyberpunk is just evolving cyberpunk seems very clear: themes, such as the singularity, have just been on the burner a bit longer.

## Rewiring Boundaries

### Margins and Hinterlands

Cyberpunk/Movement fiction is, as we have seen, concerned with marginal subjects, places where "the street finds its own uses for things," as part of its general interrogation of the status quo. Kelly and Kessel make much the same point, observing that cyberpunk fiction was obsessed by the need "to tell stories about the people that science fiction had traditionally ignored. Originally, 'the street' in CP meant the shadowy world of those who had set themselves against the norms of the dominant culture" (xi). The superscientist (along with the grandiose sense of progress and social meaning) was replaced with the lowly tinkerer, the Cal Meacham with the Lenny Nero. Post-cyberpunk, far from reversing this trend by focusing on middle-class characters as Person suggests, simply takes the focus on marginal subjects to a logical end. "But for PCP writers the street leads to other parts of the world. . . . PCP pays attention to the underclass, who do not have access to the transformative technologies that were the CP stock-in-trade" (xi). While this argument is partially subject to the myth of cyberpunk, since Sterling and others were global in perspective while only Gibson and a few select works by others maintained the overblown "street"-oriented focus, it is nevertheless very true: post-cyberpunk embraces interzones wherever they may form, such as the Thailand of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* fighting to preserve itself from both the ravages of global warming and the exploitation of calorie

capitalists. At any rate, this focus on the margins is consistent with a globalizing world, so the progression of this feature only makes sense.

### The Status-Quo

Moreover, Kelly and Kessel counter Person as regards the post-cyberpunk position on maintaining society's status quo. While Person's position suggests that post-cyberpunk is far more immersed in existing social orders and invested in maintaining the status quo (even if there is an impulse to improve it), Kelly and Kessel maintain that post-cyberpunk shares cyberpunk's disdainful attitudes. Commenting on the occasionally ironic epithet "punk," they suggest that the "punk in post-cyberpunk continues to make sense if it is pointing toward an attitude: an adversarial relationship to consensus reality. This attitude is just south of cynicism but well north of mere skepticism" (xii). This point is crucial, because it highlights Movement fiction's interest in spectacle and other methods of social control. Kelly and Kessel continue on to say that "reality itself is everywhere mediated, and what comes between the characters and reality must constantly be interrogated" (xii). Marc Laidlaw's 1986 novel *Dad's Nuke*, in the spirit of novels such as Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972), interrogates and strips away the bizarre web of beliefs and illusions that compose the American suburban middle-class lifestyle. Twenty years later, Charles Stross produces *Glasshouse* (2006), a novel that follows a character named Robin, who used to be a sentient tank, as he decides to join a social experiment while undergoing therapy for the various trauma suffered during military service. This experiment causes Robin, along with a number of other individuals, to be incarnated as a housewife in a closed-system recreation of the late 20th century, resulting in the interrogation of virtually the same set of

beliefs and illusions that Laidlaw, Levin, and countless others have explored. Movement fiction, regardless of the phase in which one finds it, takes as its purpose the dissection of the status quo.

## Rewiring Prose

### Literary Pretense and Crammed Prose

As Sterling, Rucker, and really every critic have observed, Movement SF favored a crammed prose style and an abandonment of elitist attitudes towards literature. Kelly and Kessel are no different, stating the obvious: "A lot of early CP gained verve from a conscious rejection of the New Wave and the New Wave's reaching after high modernism's literary pretensions" (xiii). Kelly and Kessel do make the argument, though, that cyberpunk's high-profile rejection of (at least one aesthetic aspect) of the New Wave's agenda allowed the writers who followed them an unprecedented level of freedom. In the words of Kelly and Kessel: "In the final analysis the CP writers went to war so that the PCP writers could be free to experiment with new forms" (xiii). While the rhetoric of this statement proves overly-colorful - such a statement is a bit like arguing that homo habilis fought so hard to use stone tools so that homo ergaster would have the right to develop sweet bifacial axes - it does at least make clear that post-cyberpunk attitudes towards prose and narrative structure aren't in any way different than their predecessor, but are simply more expanded. Again, Movement SF seems as useful a term as any, as the distinction between cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk is vastly slimmer than that between, say, Kermode's paleo-modernism and neo-modernism.



Movement fiction, as outlined above, is identical to these descriptions of post-cyberpunk; in fact, Kelly and Kessel make virtually the same argument without actually bringing up Movement fiction as a viable term. Post-cyberpunk shares Movement SF's attitudes towards prose artistry and literary tradition in general, continues Movement SF's interrogations of technology and the impact of technological change on human identity, and maintains an interest and focus on marginal areas and voices. While not specifically covered by Kelly and Kessel, their interpretation of post-cyberpunk also maintains Movement SF's goal of remaining relevant to the present, for the simple reason that honest engagement with the present is implicit in the genre's evolution, its updating of itself based on the selection pressure of cultural change. Movement fiction, whatever the term we wish to saddle it with, engages with whatever present presents itself.

"Come writers and critics / Who prophesize with your pen"

- Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are a-Changin'" (1964)

As noted in the introduction, many critics and authors longed for a type of literature to arise that truly managed to address the deeper issues of an decade that was shaping up to bear little resemblance to any time in history preceding it. The shape of society, both local and global, was changing radically during the 80s. For some, we were entering the post-industrial phase of late capitalism, marking the death of former utopian hopes found in the similarly dying middle class. For others, we were moving into a fully postmodern phase of representation, a phase in which all of history was collapsing in upon itself like a collapsar prior to supernova. All of history's aesthetic styles could be found in a single building or work of art. For yet others, we

were descending into an abyss where the public, more ignorant than at any time in memory, doubted the wisdom of science and turned to fundamentalism, jingoism, and half-baked ideologies as panacea to the chaos forming the margins of their lives. The purpose of art, many thought, should be to grapple with this unenviable future and, hopefully, provide some insight, some map, to navigate through. These same many thought that cyberpunk as a genre could do this.

Larry McCaffery, Gibson's bulldog, clearly saw cyberpunk - or, at a pinch, postmodern SF - as answering Fredric Jameson's call for a new form of literature: "I hope to establish that Jameson's eloquent and timely call for new art forms capable of assisting us in clarifying the nature and meaning of our lives has in fact already begun to be answered by some of the artists and critics who are represented here" (16). For McCaffery, postmodern SF offered "the breakthrough 'realism' of our time" (16) and sought to "empower us by providing a cognitive mapping that can help situate us in a brave new postmodern world that systematically distorts our sense of who or where we are, of what is 'real' at all, of what is most valuable about human life" (16), going a bit further in his claims than did even Jameson. McCaffery couldn't have made his point more strongly: "postmodern SF [read: cyberpunk] has recently produced the only art systematically exploring this 'desert of the real(s)'" (9).

Person, writing of post-cyberpunk, also made proclamation remarkably similar to McCaffery's: "Of all the mutant strains currently percolating through the science fiction body politic, post-cyberpunk is the one best suited to explore themes related to world [sic] of accelerating technological innovation and ever-increasing complexity in ways relevant to our everyday lives without losing the 'sense of wonder' that characterizes science fiction at its best" (par. 17). What Person says is identical to both Shiner and Sterling's comments about Movement

SF, further highlighting the obvious conclusion that post-cyberpunk is just Movement fiction a few years later. Regardless, Person, too, sees in (post)cyberpunk the only concerted effort to properly engage with social change.

Lance Olsen, directly addressing individuals such as SF authors Gregory Benford and David Brin, lamented SF that ignored the very issues that defined the modern era and called for SF to fulfill its promise:

Among those issues that go virtually unnoticed by other contemporary creators are genetic engineering, organ transplantation, multinational control of computer networks (and thus information access), commodification of culture, future shock, artificial intelligence, cybernetics, chemical weapons, terrorism, techno-angst, the devaluation of cash currency, conurbation, the advent of postindustrialism, denationalization, hacker outlaws, religious cults, the reemergence of fundamentalism around the world, toxic waste, famine, and our culture's romanticization of insanity. Such concerns seem simple 'publicity gimmicks' or mere 'trendiness' to the wildly naive or amazingly uninformed. (par. 14)

For the critics, the debate regarding what form narrative should take to properly capture and comment on the postmodern present tends to concern issues of representation. For the authors, however, the question concerns content, how the text grapples with the issues and ideas that make the present what it is. Olsen's list is a fairly comprehensive description of the features of our current landscape that really don't have much by way of historical precedent.

Lewis Shiner makes his own call for a new type of fiction in a 1989 essay that proves far more authentic, engaging, and accessible than *any* of the similar calls issued by academia.

Speaking of 80s society, he states,

There is a spiritual vacuum where God, King, and Work used to be. Sci-fiberpunk would have us believe that technology can fill that void. Yet a look at our world here at the edge of the 1990s shows that this is not the case. New Age mysticism, religious fundamentalism, panicked consumerism, drug and alcohol addiction - all are picking up speed. I see all of these as responses to technology, as indications that technology alone is not enough. Our problems are also sociological, spiritual, even moral. These are issues that fiction in the year 2000 could, and should, address. (23-24)

He takes this point a bit further in "Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk," linking the ironic popularity of stereotypical cyberjunk with "our obsession with material goods, and technical, engineered solutions" (2). He argues that "[t]here seems to be a national need for spiritual values" (2), citing the rise of both New Age and Fundamentalist religion strains, suggesting a link between religious resurgence and such answerless questions as "[h]ow do we keep our families together? How do we deal with addictions to alcohol and drugs and tobacco and sex? What is our place in a chaotic world?" (2). For Shiner, "[t]oday's cyberpunk doesn't answer these questions. Instead it offers power fantasies" (2), directly indicting Movement fiction's bastard offspring. "I find myself," Shiner says, "waiting--maybe in vain--for a new literature of idealism and compassion that is contemporary not only on the technological level but also the emotional" (2). And, like Olsen, Shiner locates this burgeoning form of fiction in the effort to grapple with whatever issues define the present:

I'm not talking here about a sci-fiberpunk novel that offers escape into techno-macho insensitivity. I'm talking about a novel that presents new paradigms, works against prejudice and limited worldviews. It cannot afford to ignore the real world: AIDS, terrorism, hunger, cold fusion, consumerism, glasnost', MTV, skateboards, crack, and all the rest. It must not fall victim to easy answers: good guys versus bad, might makes right, wealth equals success, technology as panacea or scapegoat. Most important, it must somehow find a voice with the energy and wisdom to speak to these times. ("Inside" 25)

This call is far more honest than those of any of the more respected critics who, like Jameson, are often too constrained by their own personal ideologies to see beyond single issues.

Many saw in cyberpunk an answer to this general need. Even so, as the above analysis has indicated, cyberpunk, being in the form Jameson discussed almost wholly located in the early work of Gibson, could not itself hope to live up to the expectations laid down by the various critics. Ultimately, cyberpunk as a term of popular consumption was too imbricated with the

mess that was technosleaze in the minds of both readers and critics alike to ever be honestly analyzed. Recalling the various myths of cyberpunk explored at the beginning of this chapter, one can see that the cyberpunk mythos was virtually incapable of escaping the inevitable criticisms - complicity in the status quo, enshrinment of instrumental reason, rejection of the body and with it all respect for racial and gender struggles, etc. - that would make any possibility of cyberpunk living up to these calls seem ludicrous. For, indeed, technosleaze never responded to the concerns raised by these various calls, but rather cynically celebrated the concerns the calls addressed. Shiner was genuinely alarmed by the return of religious fundamentalism and the rise of mysticism's opiate and wanted literature to explore why this was happening and offer real, constructive solutions. *Shadowrun* and its ilk, by contrast, give the player spirit guides that slip the player secrets that, like the misguided conspiracy theorist, make him or her feel special for having learned the secrets of the world. Moreover, the player is empowered by a sense of righteousness in his or her battle against the agents of oligopoly, since clearly the spiritual source, being "natural" in origin, is right and pure. *Shadowrun* celebrates consumerism, addiction, and social detachment, sidestepping the witheringly ironic tone that provided *Neuromancer* with a moral center. No, cyberpunk, burdened with such an alter-ego, could never answer this call. But, Movement SF attempts to answer this call, as anyone who cares to unravel the cyberpunk helix can see. Movement fiction's loose collection of premises did what static and regressive cyberpunk could not: offered at least one approach to answering the call.

The Walkabout Movement

Movement SF addressed 80s culture and its discontents, but, more significantly, it was able to do this because it was fundamentally connected to the picaresque genre, a genre which had performed exactly the same function four hundred years previously in another time of change. Rowland A. Sherrill points out that "an element of the . . . classic picaresque narrative has to do with social stock-taking" (3), or taking the shifting mess of a culture in transition and making an honest effort to catalogue all the players and pieces, free of ideological agenda. It is "[b]y virtue of the socially marginal character of the picaro or picara, . . . [that] the figure easily (or impishly) trespasses social boundaries, thus serving as a catalyst or a 'lens' for one of the major purposes of the old picaresque narratives--namely, running the social gamut of the culture in question" (3-4). Moreover, movement SF's premises - specifically, the desire to engage the present and the recognition that everything, from society to human nature, changes - serve the same function: attempting to chart the present. In this sense, both genres share equivalent worldviews, making Movement SF fertile ground for picaresque activities. Indeed, many of the core works of Movement SF (Sterling's and Gibson's) are at least partially picaresque, bearing many similar motifs and overlapping philosophical positions, while many other movement writers, including Sterling himself, have produced works that are virtually indistinguishable from picaresque predecessors. Picaresque narratives are, by their very narrative natures, designed not to offer answers, but rather to ask the right questions, allowing the reader to understand their world and relative position in that world. As such, the picaresque possesses the same impulse that made writers such as Olsen and Shiner yearn for a new form of literature that would help unravel the present. What they received in answer was, unexpectedly, an old literature made new, an old mode with "the serial numbers filed off" (Kelly and Kessel, *Rewired* vii).

"The only constant is change"

- Heraclitus

"SF has always preached the inevitability of change" (Sterling, *CT* #5), proclaims Bruce Sterling, echoing Isaac Asimov echoing Heraclitus and countless others throughout history and also stating the most important connection between the worldviews of Movement SF and the picaresque. Ulrich Wicks<sup>15</sup>, in his efforts to provide an updated description of the picaresque genre, cites Robert Scholes's fictional modes theory. The full details are not yet important, but one point in particular bears upon the picaresque's connection to Movement SF: absence of order and stasis. Scholes's modal spectrum places the picaresque at the furthest end of the spectrum, next to satire, and in binary opposition to modes like Romance. The Romance (Chivalric or otherwise) is a model of literature marked by static characters and unseen guiding forces: "There seems to be a mysterious order in events that guides what at first looks like a set of chance occurrences towards some truly final end" (Miller 11). Perfectly perfect or perfectly imperfect characters are pushed through narratives towards/by inexorable destiny so that they might untilt Emerson's beam of divine justice, demonstrating "the triumph of Fate or Providence over . . . disorder" (11). The picaresque, by contrast, has no such illusions and promotes the worldview that "[n]o mysterious order emerges to bind events together and to bring them to some end." (12). We are on our own with no . . . well, maybe with lots of excuses, but no one willing to post bail. Ours is not a world of order, and everything changes. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to locate an essay by or interview with Bruce Sterling in which he expounds on the philosophical premises of Movement fiction - his own poetics of the sub-genre, as it were - in which he fails to

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Found in <sup>15</sup> "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach."

make some statement that echoes picaresque theory. For example, in his 89 interview with Jude Milhon, Sterling makes a reference to Gibson's "Burning Chrome" in an effort to define cyberpunk's nature: "there's a codebreaker, the Russian Program, which makes its path through the Matrix by taking the identity of anything it meets, assuming and then discarding it along the way. Quote, Cyberpunk, unquote, is the Russian Program" (98-99). Cyberpunk, then, has a protean self, devoted to exploring change while constantly changing itself, not unlike the picaresque.

One might contend that all SF is invested in change, but this is only true in the abstract sense. It must be recognized that a great deal of SF, particularly Sterling's "reptilian" SF, derives its narrative model from the chivalric romance and is thus bound by static characters and divine guidance - even if these static characters take the deceptive form of superscientists and heroes pursuing social change and the divine guidance itself takes the form of Progress with a capital *P*. Furthermore, while all SF, chivalric or otherwise, is dependent upon the use of nova, the nova do not themselves necessarily imply that, in Sterling's words, "the future will be different," not in the ways that count. The epic *Star Wars* hexology (admittedly regarded by some as Science Fantasy . . . and by others as a crime against the fan community) employs any number of "nova" in order to create the SF mise-en-scene, ranging from spaceships to light sabers to droids. But, as critics too numerous to even cite have argued, every novum used is just a thin layer of defamiliarization for things all too familiar, looking backward rather than forward. Jedi and Sith are truly no different than their historical namesakes - they are knights, fighting to preserve a futuristic feudal aristocracy. The droids become serfs and squires, aliens become thin (and racist) representations of peoples oriental and occidental, the spaceships become . . . but, really, is further explanation needed? Lucas conceived of *Star Wars* as a plug-and-play monomyth; is it



any wonder that, no matter how many nova are used, no real change inhabits that far away galaxy? This observation holds true for a great deal of SF, whether we are reading Niven's *Ringworld* or watching Rodenberry's *Deep Space Nine*: in the future there will be . . . more of the same. Movement SF understood this failure and sought to correct it, despite the efforts of imitators to make of the effort a hypocrisy. In this effort, Movement SF and its practitioners were in perfect alignment with the worldview of the picaresque, and were thus open to channeling it.

Again, let me return to Kessel's "The Humanist Manifesto," as he provides a handy tool to illustrate my point. Kessel raises two works, Bester's *The Stars My Destination* and Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, as early ancestors and type examples of the narrative perspectives of cyberpunk SF and humanist SF, respectively. Kessel describes *The Stars My Destination* as "a revenge novel set a few hundred years in the future [that] shows the pyrotechnic style of *Neuromancer*, has a similarly melodramatic plot (borrowed from *The Count of Monte Cristo*), a fast pace, colorful but shallow characterizations, and fertile SF conceptions tossed off with little explanation" (56). On the other hand, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* receives this description: "ACFL is much slower, has little SF invention (it's a classic after-the-bomb story), has a plot based on character and ethics/philosophy/theology, employs a more sober prose style, is more detached from its characters, and depends for its appeal on its coolly ironic humor, its complex symbology, the sincerity of its moral debate, and the depth and humanity of its characters" (56). Whether or not this is a perfect illustration of the fairly nebulous differences between the similarly fairly nebulous camps of Swanwick's practitioners of postmodern SF, this comparison does, I think, demonstrate how easily one approach lends itself, if not outright leads, to picaresque narrative and how thoroughly one approach is prevented, due to worldview differences, from engaging the picaresque very deeply. Narratives overly concerned with

sustained symbology or with deep characters engaged in moral debates cannot easily achieve the narrative freedom the picaresque requires.

"Abandon all hopes of utopia - there are people involved."

- Clayton Cramer

One of the most common critiques of cyberpunk/Movement SF is that it consistently fails to meditate on/deliver utopian alternatives, but this misunderstanding in fact reveals a further affinity of Movement SF with the picaresque. Tom Moylan, in "Global Economy, Local Texts," criticizes Gibson's *Neuromancer* for precisely this failing, arguing that ". . . despite the help of the utopian allies, the protagonists do not break beyond the boundaries of Gibson's near-future society. They may find refuge (Turner on a farm, Slick Henry in Cleveland, or Bobby in a cybernetic construct), or they may find new work (as do Case, Molly, Angie, Marly, and Mona); but they do not negate or transform the social order; rather, as Sterling warns, they willfully survive or thrive within that order" (88). Moylan is unknowingly lamenting what is a picaresque hallmark. Picaresque narratives embrace the idea that there is no true home in society but no utopia beyond - a sentiment that largely precludes certain plotlines common to authors interested in social revolution. Like the traditional picaresque, Movement picaresques embraces a different type of social criticism. Lazarillo could reveal a priest's hypocrisy without overthrowing the church. Huck Finn's journey is always along borders, hinterlands. Even his trip west is simply an attempt to vanish into the borderlands; as we all know, the endless land under starry skies of the Western myth were fenced in on all sides, as both coasts developed long before the Midwest. Contrary to Moylan's expectations, the protagonists of Movement SF and the picaresque proper

tend not to "break beyond boundaries" and reinvent society; rather, they move into the grey areas hidden by the boundaries and catalogue and critique society.

Jameson, in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, describes "two distinct lines of descendency from More's inaugural text [*Utopia*]: the one intent on the realization of the Utopian program, the other an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices" (3). In this distinction can be found some of the confusion regarding cyberpunk/Movement SF's perceived lack of utopian direction. The first category of utopian texts depends on a "secessionism, a withdrawal or 'delinking' from the empirical and historical world" (23). Such a radical break is necessary, within the diegesis of the text, to begin the utopian thought experiment. Jameson mentions, among others, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy as example: not only are the colonists initially cut off from Earth by large distances (Mars, at its closest, is still nearly 34 million miles away), but *Red Mars*, the first book in the series, chronicles a revolution that culminates in the destruction of Mars's space elevator, further emphasizing a radical break and the possibility to experiment. Movement SF, by contrast, rarely, if ever, contains radical breaks culminating in closed systems (although the entire system itself may be close, a special motif discussed later). As previously mentioned, Sterling's vision of Movement SF involved an honest engagement with the present (or, at any rate, the present of the 80s); like the traditional picaresque, one of the goals of Movement SF was to survey changing society, cataloguing its characteristics and demystifying popular misconceptions. As such, radical breaks are almost entirely precluded by the motivations of the genre.

This is not to say that utopian possibilities are absent, however. It is in the second category of utopian texts, which Jameson describes as bearing "an obscure yet omnipresent

Utopian impulse" (3), that the possibilities of Movement SF can be seen. Jameson speaks of the "diagnostic interventions of the Utopians, which, like those of the great revolutionaries, always aim at the alleviation and elimination of the sources of exploitation and suffering, rather than at the composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort" (12); "diagnostic interventions" or, rather, diagnostic descriptions of the "sources of exploitation and suffering," are exactly what characterizes Movement SF and, indeed, the picaresque tradition to which I link it. While discussing Gibson's presumed stylistic change with the apparently mainstream *Pattern Recognition*, Jameson offers that "[m]aybe . . . he is moving closer to that 'cyberpunk' with which he is often associated, but which seems more characteristically developed in the work of his sometime collaborator Bruce Sterling" (384). The cyberpunk of which he speaks - a cyberpunk, incidentally, that is here described as Movement SF - takes as its mission the surveying of the globalizing world, "offering a Cook's tour of the new global waystations and the piquant dissonances between picturesque travellers [sic] and the future cities they suddenly find themselves in" (384). Indeed, Jameson suggests that those traditional markers of SF, the "technological speculation and fantasy of the old Toeffler sort" (385), is less important to cyberpunk fiction than its "more historically original literary vocation of a mapping of the new geopolitical Imaginary" (385). Jameson even roughs out a tentative list of some of cyberpunk's mapping attempts, such as Sterling's foregrounding of Russia "in the form of its various mafias . . . which remind us of the anarchy and violent crime (as well as of the conspiratorial networks and jobless futures) that lurk just beneath the surface of capitalism" (386), many more of which will be explored in the coming chapters. This mapping agenda, which could just as easily be expressed via the medical metaphor of diagnosing the ills of the social body, does not necessarily require the presence of radical surgery to function: like the traditional picaresque, the goal is not

to eliminate oppression and suffering but rather to drag the sources of the social ills out into the light, demystifying them, making their shape understandable to the audience. While Movement SF, in its attempt to engage with the present honestly, attempts (like the traditional picaresque) to chart the entire mass of changing society, not simply the ills, even so the genre's mapping of such ills hides a strong utopian impulse that often goes overlooked by critics like Moylan, who are not satisfied with diagnostic identification alone.

"The important thing is to cover this story on its own terms."  
- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)

In addition to criticizing the lack of utopian direction, Moylan also attempts to demonstrate that cyberpunk plots betray their own criticisms of the status quo by being complicit in 80s economics. Nevertheless, when looked at from the picaresque perspective, these characters couldn't be located anywhere else, for, as the above point indicates, there is no paradise, no utopia to fly to. As with many critics of cyberpunk, Moylan's arguments center around Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy, of which he asserts that "[t]he trilogy's implication in the dominant agenda of the 1980s is further revealed in the economic positioning of the protagonists and the enclaves" (90). He points out that the 80s economic landscape was dominated by "a smaller, but growing, number of skilled professional-managerial-technical workers who individually contract with corporations (and governments) for limited term, relatively high-paid tasks" (90), which is just a part of that larger capitalist transformation David Harvey called flexible accumulation. Moylan's point is that the characters found in Gibson's early novels are participants in this very system, representing and at the same time romanticizing that category of

disposable labor: "It is in the last category that protagonists (and indeed many of the readers) of Gibson's cyberpunk world can be found--albeit at the lower end of that sector's pay scale. Case is a hacker turned espionage expert who is adept in manipulating cyberspace to steal corporate secrets" (90). For Moylan, this poses something of a problem, for surely a novel critical of such a system would present characters or craft a narrative arc that attempts to subvert or otherwise rebel against this triumph of supply-side economics.

While this criticism is, at the surface, interesting, upon closer examination it proves wholly unsupportable, being yet another example of criticizing a work of literature for not supporting agendas that exist outside the purview of that literature's formal structure. The goal of picaresque fiction is to take stock of changing society, and Movement SF, picaresque or otherwise shares this same goal. Picaros and picaras are marginal figures, operating at the outskirts of society, but they are rarely outright revolutionaries (although, admittedly, as the next chapter demonstrates, the current incarnation of the picaresque isn't so slavish about this rule). Rebels, yes. Criminals, of course. But rarely does a picaro or picara attempt (intentionally) to overthrow a corrupt order and replace it with something more concerned with social justice. Huck Finn may have bucked social tradition by both respecting and assisting Jim, but neither he nor Jim had much ambition to become the next Toussaint Louverture. They did, however, manage to give a really good survey of Southern cultural hypocrisy by retreating to the margins and participating at the edges of the culture and the economy. This form of partial participation is the same strategy Gibson uses to facilitate his characters' charting of the 80s cultural landscape. Recall Sterling's comments about Toffler and 80s culture: "And now that technology has reached a fever pitch, its influence has slipped control and reached street level. As Alvin Toffler pointed out in *The Third Wave* - a bible to many cyberpunks - the technical revolution reshaping our

society is based not in hierarchy but in decentralization, not in rigidity but in fluidity" ("Preface" 346). A central concern of Movement SF was the exploration of the impact of the very phenomenon Moylan wants challenged: decentralization. The goal of Gibson's work, operating partially in a picaresque mode, was to map this phenomenon, not to offer alternatives, hence the nature of the characters as people trapped within a contract labor, flexible accumulation system yet also trying to exist as far on the margins of this system as possible. This allows the characters to both represent this system and provide an outsider's perspective. Wondering why Molly and Case haven't rejected this system is akin to wondering why King Arthur didn't do a little detective work, conduct interviews, follow the money, and find that pesky grail a bit faster. In both Movement SF and the picaresque, the first goal is to map the cultural landscape.

The picaresque elements found in Movement SF initially made it a genre well-suited to answering the call for a form of fiction adapted to the concerns of postmodern society. Indeed, this picaresque core remained a strong feature in subsequent Movement SF, rather than being a curiosity found in two or three early Movement works, and in subsequent generations of Movement SF the picaresque DNA proliferated and ultimately resulted in the dominance of picaresque narrative tendencies (in great and small quantities) in current SF, since any cursory knowledge of the genre reveals that cyberpunk/movement ideals provided direct genetic material for most current SF genres. The picaresque both was and is a collection of attitudes and narrative strategies that comes about when society begins experiencing rapid, unprecedented change and requires a bit of perspective, and it is almost superfluous to say that the cultural conditions that caused Jameson, Leary, Shiner, et al. to issue various calls for a new literature haven't decreased but have rather increased geometrically. In Movement SF, the picaresque has come again, finding a genre that, by its nature, seeks to demystify its subject. The full shape of the

picaresque's reappearance in Movement SF, particularly the "post-cyberpunk" era of Movement SF, will be explored in full in the next chapter.



## PART 2 EVOLVING SPACES: MAPPING THE EVOLUTION OF THE PICARESQUE

"It's an old story,' Ryumin said. 'Something like that actually happened once; I feel sure of it.

But I filed off the serial numbers and made it my own."

- Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix* (1985)

A case can be made - and has been made, by many critics - that the picaresque is best regarded as a closed genre, confined, like cyberpunk proper, to a very select group of texts in a very specific window of time. Howard Mancing, for instance, believes that "[a]fter the eighteenth century, the conscious writing of a picaresque novel is at best an occasional event" (197), basing his assertion on the argument that "[t]he only unifying factor [between otherwise wildly diverse picaresque novels] has been the author's awareness of writing within this basically undefinable genre" (183), and thus works that don't overtly reference other works in the tradition can't be regarded as picaresque. Harry Sieber, writing in 1977, believes that "[a]fter the eighteenth century in Europe it is no longer possible to speak of picaresque novels, and even, as Claudio Guillén has stated, of a 'picaresque theme'" (60), arguing that many of the novels considered picaresque were misidentified. Sieber points out that *Tom Jones*, for example, has been labeled as picaresque despite being modeled on *Don Quixote*, a genuine anti-picaresque. Even so, Sieber does note that the "'myth' of the classical picaresque" (62) has not been forgotten, and "[i]ts purest twentieth-century mutations" (62) include novels such as Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March, A Novel*, though one does get the impression of the work of a (presumably) unintentional confirmation bias, as none of the

more clearly picaresque works, such as Thompson's 1971 novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, are mentioned.

Ultimately, regarding the picaresque as a dead genre is an illogical and stagnant position. The novel of manners, for instance, could perhaps be viewed as a dying genre, as it was largely the product of 19th and early 20th century British/American culture. There are undoubtedly contemporary examples of this genre, but as the cultural context that produced the genre is evolving rapidly, the genre is unlikely to have a long life-span (aside from the occasional zombie-flecked revival). The picaresque, by contrast, might have been the product of 16th century Spanish culture, but its themes, motifs, and plot devices are not dependent upon the culture that birthed the genre, unlike the novel of manners. The picaresque does not require conflicts between accepted social modes of behavior and private individual behaviors and desires; the picaresque simply requires a society that is changing and an outsider protagonist to travel through it. There are obviously many other requirements, but few, if any, are tied to a particular time period, therefore regarding the picaresque as dead is tantamount to regarding the epic as dead.

Fortunately, there exists another option for studying the picaresque, a more formal one that does not exclude the entire body of the genre's descendant works, though, like the distinction between cyberpunk and Movement fiction, this approach to the picaresque requires a slight readjustment of the term's meaning. Rather than regarding the picaresque as a genre, Ulrich Wicks suggests that we regard the picaresque as a *mode* of literature, alongside other modes such as romance and realism. Building on the work of Robert Scholes, Wicks argues convincingly for the superiority of the mode as an analytical tool, pointing out that a "[m]odal awareness allows us to see the *general* fictional makeup of the individual narrative work" ("Nature" 241) rather

than locking us into closed interpretive models. Modes, Wicks argues, "do not specifically impose a form and are thus prenovelistic: they are applicable to fiction anytime, anywhere" (241). As such, modes operate as structural strategies or toolkits; any genre can be dominated by any mode. Modes could be considered the broadest, largest net the term *genre* could cast: the mode of satire could appear in the genre of the western (*Little Big Man*), or science fiction (*The Space Merchants*), or Classical satire itself (*The Frogs*).

Wicks, drawing from the work of Robert Scholes, regards modal categories as being defined by their relationship with reality: "There are three possible relationships between any fictional world and our world of actual experience: a world fictionally rendered can be (1) better than the world of experience, (2) worse than it, or (3) more or less equal to it; and these are visions or attitudes that we have learned to call romantic, satiric, and realistic" (240). The modal spectrum as Wicks envisions it (including the picaresque) - Satire-Picaresque-Comedy-History-Sentiment-Tragedy-Romance - follows this fictional world/real world relationship formula: romance is wildly and unrealistically better than reality, satire is markedly worse, and history, which must logically include realism itself, is more or less the same. The picaresque, then, slots in near the "worse than" end of the spectrum, suggesting that the picaresque, while being set in a world far worse than commonly accepted reality, still bears realistic features, unlike the works at the other end of the spectrum. In fact, Wicks notes that the "picaresque can be seen as an antitype to romance" (242), and the distinctions between the two modes can shed some light on the operations of the modal system.

Wicks notes that the romance genre is built around the actions of idealized human types operating in idealized worlds (241). Consider the structure of fantasy romances such as *Lord of the Rings*. High fantasy is a recent incarnation of the chivalric romance, and Tolkien's fantasy

staple, innovations notwithstanding, is firmly fixed in this mode: characters tend to be idealized, one-dimensional types (with the exception of the hobbits, one of the innovations) built from single virtues, and the world they inhabit sports a secret, divine order working (albeit in a very slow, unconcerned fashion) to the betterment of all. Aragorn is a moral paragon of divinely-granted kingship, Gandalf (and Galadriel, Elrond, etc.) of wisdom and forbearance, etc. Villains and quasi-villains are similarly one-sided, with Boromir being an incarnation of Beowulf's conception of honor and Saruman reflecting industrialism's thoughtless exploitation. Moreover, Gandalf and the other characters in the wise allude to the behind-the-scenes machinations of a God-like power (of whom they are all agents) giving purpose to all actions, hence the arrival of mercy-spared Sméagol to assist Frodo in removing his cursed ring. *Lord of the Rings*, like all romance, features "a heroic protagonist in a world marvelously better than ours . . . on a quest that confronts him with challenges, each ending in a moral victory leading toward a final ordered and harmonious cosmos" (242).

Satire, at the other end of the spectrum, inverts both of these characteristics and provides readers with "subhuman grotesques enmeshed in chaos" (241) rather than paragons navigating worlds full of purpose. A fantasy operating in the satirical rather than romantic mode, the forgettable 2011 film *Your Highness* features a clearly disorderly and purposeless world (the wizard who provides prophecy has apparently been molesting one of the protagonists) and characters who are lacking in any real moral compass (the film begins with one of the protagonists, Thadeous, being hung from a very short gallows for seducing the wife of a dwarf king). The picaresque is in many respects functionally similar to satire, taking place in "a world that is chaotic beyond ordinary human tolerance, but it is a world closer to our own (or to history) than the worlds of satire or romance" (241) and as such has a tinge of realism as well. If

the romance provides moral paragons and moral victories, the picaresque provides "an unheroic protagonist, worse than we, caught up in a chaotic world, worse than ours, in which he is on an eternal journey of encounters that allow him to be alternately both victim of that world and its exploiter" (242). The romance is a "there and back again" affair, to borrow a phrase from Tolkien, undertaken by idealized representations of ourselves; the picaresque dispenses with the "there" and the "back again" and keeps only the "and" of the journey itself, undertaken by people in all their swinish glory.

By conceiving of the picaresque as a mode, Wicks has offered up a solution to the problem of the "classical" picaresque while providing a theory of the picaresque actually deserving of the label *theory*. When a scientific theory arises to replace a preexisting theory, not only must the successor explain the existing data as efficiently or more efficiently as the predecessor, it must also account for anomalies in the data unaccounted for by the predecessor and provide a superior predictive model. This is, in fact, what Wicks has done, as his model accounts for not only the classical picaresque, which in his system "is itself a specific genre almost exclusively dominated by the picaresque mode" (241), but truly classical ancestors such as the *Satyricon* also find inclusion rather than being dismissed as curiosities. Additionally, Wicks's theory provides a testable predictive model, as Wicks's statement that "we would expect to find it [the picaresque] in widely varying degrees in much fiction" (241) can be construed as a prediction that the picaresque mode should be capable of appearing in emerging genres such as latecomers SF and horror or the even more recent genre of bizarro fiction<sup>16</sup>. Wicks's reclassification seems an elegant solution when compared to other approaches, such as Claudio

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<sup>16</sup> To my knowledge, bizarro fiction such as that written by Carlton Mellick III has not yet delved into the picaresque mode, but horror fiction and film has done so on occasion, sporting loose picaresques such as *Zombieland*.

Guillén's system. In "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," Guillén creates four categories to account for the variety of the picaresque: "the picaresque genre, first of all; a group of novels, secondly, that deserve to be called picaresque in the strictest sense-usually in agreement with the original Spanish pattern; another group of novels, thirdly, which may be considered picaresque in a broader sense of the term only; and finally, a picaresque myth: an essential situation or significant structure derived from the novels themselves" (71). Such a proposal is needlessly complex and reasons from the primacy of a single text or body of texts and resembles nothing so much as Ptolemaic astronomical arguments that rely on the special pleadings of separate spheres to maintain the centrality of earth in the heavens. Wicks's more flexible approach takes into account all of the diverse incarnations of the mode, fuzzy boundaries included.

Oddly, Mancing's arguments that the picaresque should be regarded as dead occasionally read like supporting statements *for* a modal approach. Mancing, attempting to argue that the genre's "protean" nature makes any formal study impossible (save for novels that participate in a very obvious form of intertextuality involving other picaresques), points out that "change and adaptation are basic features of the genre" (Mancing 191) and that "[n]one of the narrative techniques, themes or characters so frequently associated with the genre is always present in any of the works that undoubtedly are picaresque novels" (191). He goes on to state that "[i]n any given work any of these elements can be eliminated or modified to some greater or lesser extent" (191), suggesting that the genre has no solid form, but, considering that this flexibility is found in "undoubtedly" picaresque works, doesn't Mancing's position really suggest that the genre should be regarded as a mode, rather than requiring the proposal of forced criteria such as the conscious referencing of other picaresques? Mancing even offers a long description of the indeterminacy in picaresque novels:

A picaresque novel can be brief, tightly constructed and ironic, or lengthy, digressive and very literal in its meaning. The technique might be strictly realistic or wildly fantastic. The protagonist can be a young boy, a mature man, or a woman; he/she is at different times a beggar, a servant, an independent wanderer, a thief, a criminal, a prostitute, or even a tuna fish. The tone ranges from direct and ingenuous to bitter and sarcastic, the humor from pleasant and inoffensive to corrosive and destructive, the style from simple and direct to intricate and obscure. God may be entirely absent or omnipresent and beneficent; the church and the clergy may be satirized bitterly, praised enthusiastically, or ignored entirely. From the beginning, almost anything was acceptable in the way of character, narrative technique, theme, or structure. (Mancing 187)

Mancing's argument begins to sound very much like the thinking of someone with an authoritarian personality, uncomfortable with fuzzy boundaries. The picaresque *always* incorporated a heavy level of flexibility, and modal thinking serves to account for the genre's protean nature.

By thinking of the picaresque as a mode rather than a closed genre, one opens to study a vast trove of works from various genres that might benefit from a picaresque reading. Science fiction has rarely been analyzed in terms of the picaresque, for much the same reason that the fantasy novel or the Western has rarely been looked at in picaresque terms (Sieber also fails to mention Thomas Berger's 1964 novel *Little Big Man*, a clear American riff on the picaresque genre): it is considered SF first, so any picaresque themes are regarded as incidental. By thinking in modal terms, however, any specific genre (say, military SF) can operate in the picaresque mode, providing a far richer interpretive environment - and yet, surprisingly, very few SF works between 1818 (*Frankenstein's* year of publication) and the early 80s are easily identifiable as picaresque, in either the traditional or modal sense. One could view Robert E. Howard's *Conan* series, beginning in 1932, as a picaresque, if one viewed the individual serials as episodes in a larger whole. Though Howard did not conceive of Conan as such, the Cimmerian was a hungry rogue whose vast travels deconstructed many myths about the primacy of civilization. Pohl and

Kornbluth's 1954 satirical novel *Search the Sky* shares many elements with the picaresque including a partially episodic narrative structure and scathing social satire, but the novel lacks most features commonly associated with the genre. Jack Vance's *Big Planet* certainly could have been picaresque, had the protagonists actually walked the *entire* 40,000 miles across the titular big planet, drifting from revealing encounter to revealing encounter. Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* series, the first of which was published in 1961, is sometimes regarded as picaresque, though the only truly picaresque feature is the Rat himself, Slippery Jim DiGriz, a clear rogue who, sadly, participates in very few activities associated with picaros. Niven's 1970 novel *Ringworld* is representative of the state of picaresque SF prior to the 80s: the novel features a kind of picaro who is, sadly, an entirely ancillary character, more the opportunity for a quick one-liner than anything else. Niven offers the reader a character named Seeker, a buff (and quite long-lived) Conan-esque character who is on a generations-long quest to find what he thinks is the end of the arch extending from the horizon into the sky. Of course, the arch is actually the ringworld itself, a half-billion mile long artificial ring circling a star; it just looks like an arch because the sun blocks out the full ring. Seeker, a rather disreputable character on a clearly endless journey, is a perfect picaro . . . who is barely in the story. Seeker is emblematic of the pre-80s picaresque presence: there, but under-utilized.

It isn't until 80s Movement fiction that the picaresque mode found regular expression in SF, primarily because the four major premises of Movement fiction provided a particularly fertile ground for the picaresque to spring from, themselves largely picaresque. Movement fiction defines itself through an interest in marginal characters and hinterlands at the edges of mainstream society, an honest engagement with 80s (and subsequently 90s, 00s, etc.) realities and their logical futures that tended to be expressed as an impulse to demythologize society and



the status quo, an effort to collapse the largely illusory nature of boundaries between subject and object (including relationships between technology and people), and an obsession with crammed, high-information prose. These premises translate to very specific kinds of protagonists and supporting characters: intelligent, vaguely amoral early adopters who skirt the edges of society (Gibson's hacker cowboys and violent razorgirls, Sterling's revolutionary space pirates and combat artists, Williams's panzerboys, Effinger's hard-boiled and hard-wired detectives, etc.) along with their supporting cast of similarly underworld types. These characters also tend to be set against a similarly nihilistic and chaotic (though not necessarily dystopian) background, whether it be the exploitative corporate oligarchy of a Gibson or Williams novel or the political struggles of a Sterling novel. These premises also translate into very specific plot *structures*, if not shapes: in order to properly engage with their respective presents, these works feature protagonists who cover a lot of territory, thus showing as much of the defamiliarized present to the reader as possible. Clearly, Wicks's very general definition of the picaresque mode, "an unheroic protagonist, worse than we, caught up in a chaotic world, worse than ours, in which he is on an eternal journey of encounters that allow him to be alternately both victim of that world and its exploiter" (242), applies cleanly to Movement fiction. The four pillars of Movement fiction described in the previous chapter mesh so perfectly with picaresque goals that, likely even without the direct awareness of the authors, the texts produced exhibit partial picaresque characteristics. With the direct awareness of the authors - Sterling, for example, was fully aware of the picaresque genre - Movement fiction produced texts as fully picaresque as any and quite a bit more picaresque than some labeled thus (Kerouac's work, for example - Ginsberg's belief to the contrary notwithstanding).

The natural picaresque leaning of Movement fiction accounts for the plentitude of picaresque SF since the 80s: Sterling's *Artificial Kid*, *Schismatrix*, *Islands in the Net*, *Holy Fire*, and to some extent *Heavy Weather*, Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers*, Williams's *Angel Station*, Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs Trilogy (when viewed as a whole) and in particular *Woken Furies*, Ellis's *Transmetropolitan*, and Stross's *Saturn's Children*, to name but a few, all contain elements of the picaresque mode. This chapter will examine four works that are firmly placed in the picaresque mode and strongly demonstrate the “essential characteristics that function together to produce the nature of picaresque narrative” (Wicks, *Picaresque* 54) while also being textbook examples of the Movement/postcyberpunk genre described in the previous chapter. These works are Sterling's *Schismatrix* (1985), a picaresque space opera that follows Abelard Lindsay as he lives through a century and a half of a tumultuous posthuman future; Walter Jon Williams's *Angel Station* (1989), another space opera featuring two posthuman rogues, Ubu Roy and Beautiful Maria, who, while on the run from human authorities, make first contact with an alien race and try to scam them for all they are worth; Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson's *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), a SF graphic novel series featuring outlaw journalist Spider Jerusalem as he travels around writing stories about his (post)cyberpunk future and, in his spare time, attempting to take down a sitting president; and Charles Stross's *Saturn's Children* (2008), another space opera and tribute to the partially picaresque Heinlein 1982 novel *Friday*, which follows obsolete sexbot Freya as she travels around the solar system running from her enemies and engaging in various espionage tasks. Each of these novels is structurally similar to the traditional conception of the picaresque and all together offer a good representative cross-section of Movement fiction from the 80s to the present. The analysis is broken into four sections. The first section examines the chaotic

worldview of the picaresque and considers its presence in the four representative novels. The second section considers the primary characteristics that Ulrich Wicks, Claudio Guillén, and Stuart Miller regarded as inherent to the picaresque and examines how they have been retained and, in some cases, undergone evolution in the SF incarnation of the picaresque mode. The third section offers an in-depth analysis of several motifs found in traditional picaresque narratives that have been preserved almost unchanged in Movement SF picaresques, while the fourth section examines a series of new motifs unique to SF picaresque that nevertheless maintain and support the larger thematic agendas of the mode.

## Worldview

### Unintelligent Design: Disorder and the Picaresque Narrative

"For believe me, the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is to live dangerously! . . . Be robbers and spoilers, you knowing ones, as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors!"

- Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882)

Before examining the evolution of the various tropes and motifs of the picaresque it is important to understand the environment in which these components exist. The picaresque practices a unique kind of worldbuilding, for every aspect of the picaresque, ranging from shared tropes and motifs to unique plot developments serves to foreground the random disorder and uncontrollable chaos that comprise both fictional and real world. Speaking of the 1668 picaresque novel *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, Miller notes that "What is more significant about his [Simplicissimus's] origin, however, is that his mother gives birth in the midst of the Thirty Years War, the novel's dominating symbol of life's chaos" (49). The backdrop of war serves as a kind

of master trope, for all picaresque narratives contain such volatile backdrops (war is but one form such a backdrop can take), and though Miller doesn't directly state this, one can always find dominating symbols of life's chaos in novels participating in the picaresque mode. Even the picaro's own protean self serves this goal, as the volatile and mercurial personality of the picaro reflects the turbulent world that creates it. Miller notes that, through the picaro's autobiographic recounting, "we perceive not merely a view of chaos in the outside world, but also a sense of how it *feels* to be in such a world and how that world makes a man internally disordered" (50). Whether the picaro's own internal chaos creates an impression of chaos in the environment through the act of narrative or the chaotic environment causes the picaro to develop into a chaotic being is immaterial; all that matters is that both environment and picaro reflect a larger theme of chaos. As such, all picaresque novels, regardless of the age that produced them, must, at some level, be marked by chaos, disorder, instability, and change, if not as themes then as basic premises of the world created by the narrative. This, first and foremost, should be regarded as the central theme of the picaresque.

Stuart Miller provides two useful tropes for understanding how the picaresque built inherently unstable, chaotic worlds: fortune and accident. Miller explores the idea of unstable fortunes (or fate) as crucial to the inherent sense of disorder in picaresque narratives, devoting a full chapter (the fourth of his book) to the proposition. Noting that picaresque narratives tend to find protagonists dragging themselves out of danger and poverty into safety and wealth, only to find themselves, due to some unfortunate stroke of luck, right back in danger and poverty, Miller states that "The dizzying alterations in the hero's fortunes emphasize the chaotic structure of reality. The picaresque hero is continually assaulted by events, but unlike other fictional heroes, he can ultimately do little to control these events. His fortune goes up or down as it pleases" (28).

Unlike in a romance, where a character might hope to influence the outcome of events through faith or prayer, picaresque narratives are dominated by “man’s passivity before life’s chaotic events” (30). Miller points to the sea storm as a common picaresque “symbol for man’s helplessness before the revolution of outer circumstance” (29), the focus being on the random and unpredictable nature of a weather phenomenon which, saint's narratives aside, does not traditionally care whose ships get sunk. Having one's fortune tied not to divine machinations and therefore to one's own decisions and morality but rather to random chance is a unique stance for a literature born in a highly religious time to take, but this inherently chaotic exercise in worldbuilding finds a perfect home in science fiction, itself inherently materialist and concerned with change. Each of the four selected examples of Movement picaresque possess a random element to the fortunes of the protagonists.

*Schismatrix* sees protagonist/picaro Abelard Lindsay experience multiple radical changes in his fortune, most of which come with very little warning. Initially exiled from the Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic as a revolutionary, Lindsay finds himself posing as a theatre impresario before being forced by an assassination attempt to go on the run as a pirate. Lindsay's piracy leads to yet another dramatic fortune shift: while Lindsay's pirate ship/collective, the Red Consensus, attempts to "annex" an independent Shaper asteroid colony (resulting in the deaths of all but two individuals, Lindsay included), aliens called the Investors arrive in the solar system. The Investors' arrival was, for all intents and purposes, a causeless affair. They had not come, as had the aliens in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (the 1951 version, anyway), to deliver a message/ultimatum intended to help humanity; they had arrived in search of profit, not unlike the Europeans who arrived in the New World (though far less brutal). The arrival did, however, have the unintended outcome of changing the nature of the human solar

system, as humanity, desiring to put on a good face for the first aliens ever met, immediately discontinued all wars, rivalries, etc. Due to the random arrival of the Investors, Lindsay, the pirate, and Nora, the Shaper, were, in the middle of a battle, made into allies. Acting accordingly, Lindsay convinces an Investor ship that he is a great artist (he fools the aliens into thinking that he created a battle-scarred, polymer-coated sculpted head trailing off of the asteroid habitat), and when next the narrative encounters Lindsay he is a professor of Investor Studies (a profession which, in turn, gives way unexpectedly to something else). *Schismatrix* is organized around radical fortune shifts, far greater in magnitude than those found in *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Walter Jon Williams's *Angel Station* features a similar random event that results in radical changes in fortune. Ubu and Maria, two down-on-their-luck "shooters" (independent cargo transporters in a posthuman future), are forced to go hunting for very rare naked singularities to sell as starship drive components when the unexpected collapse of the mining concern for whom they were carrying cargo drives them to bankruptcy. As Ubu and Maria explore the unexplored edges of known space for singularities, they just happen to stumble across Beloved, a similarly (though differently) advanced alien hive mind who also happens to be down on her luck. Again, Ubu and Maria just happen to be carrying surplus mining computers, part of the useless mining concern cargo, that can be retrofitted to fill in a technological gap that the aliens, who are reliant upon biological technologies, just happen to have. Like Lindsay, the pair moves from poverty to riches in an eye blink and spends the rest of the story drifting between success and failure as they try to milk the encounter for all it is worth, but the entire roller coaster ride of success and failure was itself born from a fluke.

*Transmetropolitan* and *Saturn's Children* also feature the same radical shifts in protagonist fortune. The journalist Spider Jerusalem rises and falls regularly in the series,

oscillating between celebrity to fugitive multiple times. For instance, Jerusalem's coverage of the Angel's 8 riots, during which the City's police forces exterminate a group of religious crackpots, causes Jerusalem to eventually run afoul of both the police and the president himself, leading to the eventual suspension of his regular column and forcing him underground, reliant on pirate feedsites to practice his profession. Similarly, *Saturn's Children* sees Freya move from wanderer and itinerant wage-slave to courier and spy to slave-chipped plaything of a sadistic robot aristocrat. Like any picaresque, these novels feature fortunes rising and falling at rollercoaster speeds (and with less cause-effect logic than one might find in more reserved texts). In fact, it is not so much the random causes of these shifts in fortune but rather the suddenness of the reversals that distinguish these and related SF novels from other genre texts. As science fiction is primarily materialist, *all* genre texts incorporate "random" events (insofar as said events are removed from divine meaning/intervention), such as the arrival of the definitive Big Dumb Object in Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*. Rather, it is the neck-breaking pace of change in the protagonist's lives that places these texts firmly in the picaresque mode.

Miller's second trope is that of the accident, considered as important as the reversal of fortune in defining the chaotic background of the picaresque world (he devotes his fifth chapter fully to exploring accident's significance). Miller asks, "Why is the picaro so randomly punished by the world? In comedy, such punishment would come to the comic antihero . . . There, the punishment would be deserved. It would assert some universal order. But why does it happen here?" (37), bringing to the fore the major challenge to ordered views of reality that the picaresque raises. Miller's answer: "There is no answer . . . Anything can happen to anyone at anytime" (37). Herein lies the beauty of the genre; it is able to subvert the comfortable fantasies most people (and societies) hold concerning both the shape and the meaning of existence. Miller

focuses primarily on the way in which the picaresque subverts certain expectations people commonly have regarding the social order itself:

The normal man, at least in the prosperous West today, lives by the assumption that everything will be ordered and on time. But the reality that he finds in the picaresque corresponds in external action to the sense of internal and external chaos many feel threatening their superficially ordered lives. We know that sometimes life is not smooth, and that often our inner lives, our moods and random feelings, are anything but controlled and ordered. To a considerable extent, the morning newspaper is made up of accounts of disorder in the world – a race riot, a war, a rape, a bizarre and seemingly comic accident, a theft, an embezzlement, a protest and an angry reply. The picaresque novel increases our perceptions and expectations of such tumult. (39)

It is through the motif of the accident, an event both unpredictable and uncontrollable, that the picaresque novel regularly reinforces readers' perceptions of tumultuous reality. However, the motif does much more than undermine one's faith that the trains will run on time. While it is a bit of an overstatement to say that America is a Christian nation, it is, nevertheless, a very religious one; Gallup polls regularly reveal that no more than ten to fifteen percent of Americans self-identify as atheist, meaning that the other eighty-five to ninety percent, whether they identify as Christian, New Age, or something in between, believe in some sort of directing influence giving meaning and significance to otherwise random events. It is not uncommon to hear someone speculate that one event or another in his or her past "happened for a reason." The motif of the accident, however, works to erase comfortable faith in identifiable, meaningful causes, and thus erases the related faith that, if a cause can be understood, then the otherwise unpredictable events can be predicted and controlled. An event in a picaro's narrative might lead to a future event (though, more often than not, it doesn't) but there is no reason to think that the accidental event was *intended* (unless it was intended by the picaro or picara herself, as Part 3 will explore). In this, the picaresque shares quite a bit with science fiction. To the uninitiated, science and thus science fiction might appear to reject unpredictable events - many people still believe in a simple



clockwork model of the universe that would allow proper mathematical knowledge to predict events. Good SF, however, understands the basic science and knows that indeterminacy underlies reality. Science tries to suss out cause and effect and, while events may be found to have causes, only religion deals in absolute explanations. Movement picaresques operates well within this indeterminate space, making full use of accidents with no clear causes or deducible meanings, to foreground the chaos of reality.

*Saturn's Children* makes use of three worldbuilding strategies that foreground the chaotic nature of reality, all reflecting the meaninglessness inherent in Miller's conception of the accident. First, *Saturn's Children* takes place in a solar system in which humanity has gone extinct. Humanity's extinction was neither sudden nor painful: "The sad fact is, human civilization did not even break for lunch when humankind died out" (Stross 61). Too busy recreating to bother reproducing properly, humanity simply slipped below a sustainable level and vanished, leaving an entire civilization's framework of automation (including sentient artificial intelligences) in full operation, pursuing dead humanity's now meaningless agendas. Freya, the obsolete sexbot, casually reminisces that "without the guidance of our Creators, certain people who were entrusted with maintaining specific programs let them drop. But how they missed the onset of a runaway greenhouse effect--well, it was the scandal of the century!" (63), letting the audience know that not only did humanity wither away, but even mother earth herself is a thing of the past, shriveled up in the oven of her own atmosphere. That the human race's extinction could even occur is a strong blow to any ideas of stability (and a runaway global warming, which people even now deny, that renders the reliable seasons into one long 460 degree Celsius day is just the punchline to a novel-length joke about the lack of permanence), but the fact that civilization kept ticking is the ultimate blow to any trite ideas of meaning or purpose, since the

great creator, that John Galt-ian fountainhead from which all civilization presumably sprung, is proven wholly superfluous.

In addition to extinction, nature's own version of planned obsolescence, *Saturn's Children* highlights the obsolescence of the various robots, protagonist included, who people this future. All picaros are, in a sense, obsolete figures, as society has no use for individuals who aren't wholly willing to participate in the culture, but in nearly all Movement picaresque incarnations this outsider status is literalized by the marking of picaros and picaras as marginal by making them actually obsolete. Freya is a robot designed to bring pleasure to an extinct species, making her about as useful as a VHS player to a collection of DVDs and USB dongles. Freya is aware of her own pointlessness, making regular existential laments such as the following: "I am an artifact of an earlier age, out of place and time, isolated and alone" (7). Extinction and obsolescence both create a sense of profound impermanence and insecurity, for natural history makes it very plain that extinction is anything but predictable for the hopeless cul-de-sacs about to die, and one need only ponder the success of Blu-Ray and the extinction of HD-DVD to realize that obsolescence, technology's idiosyncratic analog of extinction, is as unpredictable and surprising as nature's own. When extinction and obsolescence become real forces, rather than complex and abstract scientific topics, like climate change, to be ignored, then static, ordered worlds become impossibilities.

The third strategy Stross uses is a pointed mockery of the idea of an ordered reality: an atrocious medieval feudal system dominated by aristocratic robots that has risen in the wake of humanity's exit further emphasizes the chaos and meaninglessness. The feudal world drew its authority from numerous mechanisms, most of which boiled down to heritage and holy authority, two wholly bogus and arbitrary justifications, being accidents of birth. Nevertheless, the

peasantry believed in the divine order. In the solar system of *Saturn's Children*, the only holy authority was that of humanity, who initially implanted versions of Asimov's three laws into the robots, but by the events of the novel they are dead and gone (and the robots have no illusions that they were perfect). Thus, the orderly belief structures that justify serfdom and slavery simply don't exist. Rather, the robot "aristos" gain power in the same way as did all feudal royalty: by being wholly selfish and unempathetic. As human population decreased, humans became more reliant upon robots to keep things running, giving select servants their power of attorney and slowly turning over control. When humanity finally left the picture, "those servants established shell companies, bought their own bodies out, and acquired legal personhood" (138) in the corporate sense of the term, and these individuals proved quite happy to replace their vanishing masters and buy up other robots' persons as well. Robot aristos are perfectly willing to use a plentiful device called an "override controller" or a "slave chip," a human tool that "triggers the obedience reflexes . . . [and] marks the end of all dignity and free will" (138). Freya states that "the willingness to own and use such a vile device is the defining characteristic of members of the aristo class" (138), and she further estimates that no more than one in ten robots are self-owned, the rest being enslaved in one way or another by an new aristocracy that, like all previous versions, cares little for the self-determination and wellbeing of the people upon which it builds its kingdoms.

Tellingly, the aristos' lack of empathy is partially enabled by the irony of corporate personhood. Since humanity didn't bother to leave any legal provisions for their posthuman creations, robots "can only maintain a tenuous, legally recognized half-life as limited-liability corporations" (63), thus adopting a version of the "personhood" status currently granted corporations in America. Freya is one of the lucky few to remain autonomous, provided she

keeps "filing the company accounts and jumping through legal hoops, [so that] it [her legal identity] stays in business" (139). Such a monetized conception of human identity, seemingly a product of late capitalist thought, is not really that far removed from the medieval conception of personhood. While not technically owned by their lord, feudal serfs were typically understood to be part of the terrain: local lords owned everything on the land save the people themselves, but, since the lord owned all resources and, amidst a multitude of other "legal" rights, could restrict the free movement of the serfs, serfdom was little more than slavery by another name. The serf was a wholly controllable source of labor and as such was "owned" by the lord; their identities were thus the identities of exploitable resources rather than people. It isn't much of a stretch to say that the commodification of identity begun by corporate personhood and hyperbolized in *Saturn's Children* is simply a huge step backward into feudal thinking. As Freya observes, "it's hard to be a slave owner if you can't help sympathizing with the slaves" (203), and, much like the superstructure of the Medieval world, the idea of corporate personhood does an end-run around the belief that people should possess self-determination. Obviously people can be owned, since people own themselves . . . unless they don't keep up with their payments, or so goes the reasoning. Those robots possessing inconvenient empathy are doomed to be slaves: "That's why two-thirds or more of us are ruthlessly enslaved, why the rich and cruel lord it over the downtrodden masses, and those of us with any shred of empathy--a prerequisite for the calling of my lineage--live lives of poverty and despair" (125). The accident of human extinction has led to a Sword of Damocles dangling over each robot's head - at any moment, for reasons out of their own control, they can be enslaved, and the more moral they are the more likely they are to suffer.

Williams, Ellis, and Sterling all make use of strategies similarly based in accident and fortune. William's *Angel Station*, for example, features a plot informed by accident and runaway

change (much like most Movement fiction), a phenomenon that should be understood as the random, Darwinian contest it is, driven by evolutionary dead-ends and hopeful monsters, rather than some linear dream of progress: "Things change, he thought. Damn it all anyway" (205).

Williams's space opera, set against a background of corporate consolidation of power, sees the independent shippers of goods, known as "shooters" for their ability to elegantly shoot (read: navigate) the singularities that power their FTL drives, and their accompanying culture, slowly vanishing as the larger financial entities create their own salaryman shipping concerns.

Williams's story is thus a space opera take on the death of independent trucking, a theme explored in a rather surprising number of space operas, including largely sub-par televised SF such as *Gene Rodenberry's Andromeda* and criminally underrated films such as *Space Truckers*.

The extinction of independent operators at the hands of giant corporations is presented as an unavoidable event, as beyond control as the Andromeda galaxy eventually plowing into the Milky Way. That an impact with Andromeda some 4 billion years in the future should be the Milky Way's fate is a cosmic accident: it isn't a biblical deluge intended to wash away inequity and make room for something better, nor is it some final judgment from an angry god. The collision simply *is*, and it is unlikely that any sentient species, including humanity, should we last so long, will make it through. Such is the meaning of humanity's extinction in *Saturn's Children* or the death of independent operators in *Angel Station*; they are cosmic accidents that have no meanings beyond the lesson that, while there may be no god to "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (*KJV Matthew 5:45*), unequal sun and rain will happen nonetheless.

Of course, the protagonists of *Angel Station* do manage to reverse the tide and change the fate of independent space trucking, but the method by which they do it is even more random and

accidental than the death of their way of life. While exploring the margins of known space, Ubu and Maria just happen to encounter an alien ship - the first humanity have ever encountered in the novel's history - which was also out hunting singularities to sell as starship drives. This alien race, an insectile society described in greater detail elsewhere, just happens to be excellent at the biosciences but weak with automation owing to their own evolutionary history, allowing Ubu and Maria's ship, the Runaway, to make a killing selling old computers in exchange for rare medical chemicals. Note the prominence of the "just so happens" phrase: each event that benefits the Runaway is an accident. The famous Drake equation, depending on how generous the numbers used are, can return anywhere from a few thousand to a hundred million or so potential alien civilizations in the Milky Way - across the galaxy's history, mind. While it might seem with numbers so high that encounters would be likely, one should remember that there are, conservatively, at least three hundred billion stars in the Milky Way. At an optimistic one hundred million potential neighbors, the odds of encountering alien life are three thousand to one against; at a more conservative ten thousand the odds are thirty million to one against, and that doesn't include the temporal problem. Thus, Runaway's encountering of alien life (ignoring the fortunate possibility of trade) must be understood as a pure cosmic accident. Even without the looming and otherwise unavoidable erosion of the shooter way of life, the alien encounter alone enough to create the sense of chaos essential to picaresque narratives.

Disorder in the Court (and Church, Hospital, etc.): Miller's Tally of Disorder-Enhancing Motifs

Law and Order

Miller identifies a series of recurring motifs unique to the picaresque designed to further foreground the chaos at the heart of the picaro's existence, all of which have proven viable

inheritable traits in Movement picaresque. The first and no doubt most common of these motifs is what Miller terms "law and order." According to Miller, "The motif of *law and order* reveals judges, jailers, and policemen as corrupt and venal; the rule of law and order is parodied—just as there is no law behind events, so there is no law in society" (97). The romance, against which the picaresque stands as antitype, is greatly dependent upon the stability of an operant law and order motif, if only for the simple fact that the plot would become, by default, ironic if the divine what-have-you grounding the action were to dissipate. Consider contemporary American cinema's various popular romance variants, such as the western, the sandal flick, and the cop drama. Sergio Leone and Cormac McCarthy aside, the pre-spaghetti western was utterly dependent (with a few exceptions) on binary moral constructions: the hero, serving God and justice, battled various outlaws, be they native or imported. When the certain moral compass is removed and all revealed to be chaotic, the audience gets *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly's* bridge battle, the only commentary of which is the futility and horror of war. As Blondie cuts the Gordian Knot by blowing up the bridge the North and South fight over, the film makes a very strong point that there is *no* absolute morality to which one might appeal. The sandal flick is no different: despite its Roman trappings, *Gladiator* is dependent on a very contemporary moral framework. The newly-crowned emperor was truly in the wrong to slaughter Maximus's family, commit patricide, etc., while Maximus is always well within the right in his search for vengeance. *Lethal Weapon's* Murtaugh and Riggs are absolutely and divinely empowered as they slaughter 1980s evils such as drug dealers and South Africans (racist by definition, according to the film's logic), and never once does the film pause to allow the audience to contemplate by what right the pair operates. Their rightness is assumed, as it is a fundamental requirement of such narratives.

The motif of law and order as it is typically used draws its authority from the absolute provided by some god or other, or by the authority of the state - something big that people are taught not to question. The specific instances of the motif - police officers, soldiers, etc. - merely serve as the agents and thus the objective proof of the absolute (often proven when those agents of authority who overstep their bounds are punished). The picaresque, however, makes use of no such absolutes, and as the picaresque rejects this authority, law and order must become a parody. Hence, the corrupt officials of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the racist incompetence of a soldier in *Rule of the Bone*, etc. This trait is easily found in Movement picaresque, though the genre does impose a minor change to the trait's shape. The picaresque, being in large measure a response to romance, tends to frame its law and order motifs around a very binary structure, responding partly to romance's own black/white worldview. SF, however, is largely a materialist genre, never really participating in binary, absolutist worldviews. Even the suggestion that SF raises scientific reasoning to the level of an absolute moral precept is faulty, as science only promises *provisional* truth, and therefore is a very flexible and shifting worldview, paradigms collapsing regularly. Egan's *Schild's Ladder* is this premise made manifest: the novel's plot concerns a somewhat ill-advised scientific experiment creating a bubble of spacetime containing a radically different set of physical laws that proceeds to gobble up the rest of our conventional universe. In other words, two provisional truths exist simultaneously, in conflict. Movement picaresque shares this sensibility, in that "authority" isn't accepted in the traditional way. Instead, SF novels - picaresque or otherwise - tend to present rather multiplex versions of law and order, the goal being to reveal how arbitrary each is. Alastair Reynolds's *The Prefect*, set in a pre-melding plague version of his *Revelation Space* universe, gives the reader the Glitter Band in all its glory, a halo composed of tens of thousands of habitats hung around the Yellowstone system, each an



independent city state with its own conception of law and order, ranging from standard capitalist shenanigans to voluntary slavery. Sterling's *Schismatrix* presents exactly the same scenario, each of the various lunar habitats, hollowed out asteroids, and ships an independent agent with its own weird, highly idiosyncratic view of authority, moral or otherwise. The fully arbitrary nature of legal authority becomes painfully obvious when Lindsay, while pursuing a typically random picaresque trajectory, joins the crew of the Red Consensus, a pirate vessel and independent state. Once the profitable Fortuna Miner's Democratic Republic, the Red Consensus is all that remains of the original population and the original territory, a mined-out asteroid. The pirate vessel still claims the rights of a state, however, and rather than illegally attack, the Republic simply "annexes" other ships, all on the up-and-up.

Questionable forms of authority exist in Movement picaresque in many forms, but, like the traditional picaresque, absolutism tends to remain the same and is always demonized. Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* provides a good example, as the series' long-term narrative concerns a heterotopian city struggling against a burgeoning authoritarian regime. Spider Jerusalem, no doubt echoing Ellis's own sentiments, articulates an axiom of the series: "The cops are not to be trusted. It is our [journalists] very very important job to watch people like cops and ensure that they are working in our interest and defense" (5.105). And, indeed, the series is full of reasons for this suspicious attitude. Jerusalem's initial rise to fame (within the series, anyway) is spurred by his coverage of the Angels 8 riot, a central event in the series during which the police engineer a media blackout and slaughter a block of relatively helpless transients who were causing the government political headaches. Similarly, the "Lonely City" story arc concerns the police department's collusion in a hate crime. A teenager was beaten to death after being scanned by a G-Reader, a device that allows the user to fully sequence the DNA of the target. The group who

scanned the teen, in plain view of police, killed the teen after having found objectionable DNA associated with an obscure religious/sex cult. The purpose of the defamiliarization is clear: the murdered teen is a stand-in for GLBT teens who are often the recipients of similar violence. To further emphasize the reversal of law and order, *Transmet* has the police intentionally release the perpetrators on bail into a group of protestors which includes the victim's family, knowing that violence will result and, when it inevitably does, the powers that be use the excuse to gun down the lot of them, victims and criminals both. This and many other incidents serves as precedence for something called the "D-Notice," which allows the White House to kill "stories considered dangerous to local and national security and international standing" (5.138), thus transforming benign authority into fascist despotism. In addition to these major plot points, Jerusalem is subjected to regular harassment and beatings from the police, including an insane police pitbull that pursues Jerusalem due to a personal grudge. *Transmetropolitan* presents the reader with a fully debased and hostile authority, eager to strip citizens of their rights, thus emphasizing the unjust nature of reality, but it is worth noting that this conception of chaos is only negative if one believes that there should, in fact, be some sort of benign, parental authority - the position of romance, in fact. *Transmetropolitan* regularly intersperses interludes falling somewhere between SF moments of wonder and picaresque sublime reflections on the environment designed to celebrate the diversity of the City and its inhabitants, hinting that chaos is only bad if you long for (or are programmed to need) a patriarchal authority source.

### The Quack Doctor

The traditional picaresque sought to further turn the screw of chaos by rendering another (then patriarchal) authority source, the doctor, as a fraud with no control whatsoever over the natural world. Miller argues that "the motif of the *quack doctor* parodies the order of science;

sickness strikes when and where it will and those who are appointed to adjust the disorder of sickness aggravate it instead” (97). In picaresque narratives, the chaos of the natural world must have its way, and medieval medicine's attempts to control the natural world must be seen as farcical - which, four hundred years ago, wasn't an unreasonable position to take. Medical science has evolved, obviously, from its crude origins, yet the weight of meaning placed on the random, chaotic, untamable natural world still remains. With the validity of the science no longer a question, the quackery must find a new locus; in contemporary Movement picaresque offerings, the quack doctor of the past becomes something akin to the misunderstood mad scientist, that staple of B-movies of the past and present.

It should go without saying that serious SF doesn't make much use of the stale mad scientist motif (save perhaps as a self-aware joke), for SF is by and large materialist in worldview and written by individuals who hold science in high regard, many being scientists themselves<sup>17</sup>. Due to the writers' regard for science proper, the classical image of the mad scientist (which should be understood as less Shelly's Dr. Frankenstein, whose failings had more to do with psychology and less with scientific method, and more Professor Lucas from *The Clones of Bruce Lee* or Dr. Kurt Leopold from *The Blood Waters of Dr. Z*, characters who were

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<sup>17</sup> One might think that, with the influence of the New Wave, that fewer and fewer writers of SF would be trained scientists (or mathematicians, etc.) than was the case in the Golden Age of SF, but this really hasn't proven the case. Isaac Asimov was, of course, a biochemist, Alastair Reynolds was an astronomer, Peter Watts a marine biologist, Vernor Vinge - who, despite publishing his first work in 1965, is more of a 90s SF voice - a mathematics professor and computer scientist. In fact, it seems that considerably *more* of the luminaries of the current generation began their writing careers while still working in one scientific field or another, itself something of a commentary on the nature of "career" under the conditions of postmodernism. Of the luminaries of previous SF generations, fewer had backgrounds in science than proponents tend to recall. Larry Niven studied mathematics in college, doing even a short stint in graduate school, but he was hardly the equal of Vernor Vinge (Niven even famously bungled the mathematics of *Ringworld*. Frederik Pohl can easily be seen as the archetypal fanboy turned writer. Robert Heinlein's expertise derived from military training and a short, aborted college career - and I won't even mention Hubbard.

both ethically and scientifically flawed) is rare. Rather than the tired mad scientist, contemporary SF works, picaresque or otherwise, tend to feature transformative geniuses whose actions result in radical change to the social/intellectual order. This may, like the quack doctor's "ministrations," result in the same category of aggravations that the quack's bungling caused, but for a very different reason: the quack operates from a place of ignorance and fraud, while the transformative genius operates from a place of, at best, altruism and, at worst, hubris. Regardless, the world-shattering actions of such transformative geniuses manage to accomplish the same narrative function of the quack doctor - such actions render any hope of stasis void and show abstracts such as "order" to be provisional at best - without deriding science itself, a position that can't seriously be taken, despite the increasingly popular and increasingly ignorant postmodernist critiques of science proper.

All SF contains such transformative acts of genius, of course, for it is a genre based upon the deployment of *nova*, the very idea of which denies concepts of stasis and order. As such, radical transformative acts are in SF's literary DNA. Even so, the transformative acts of genius found in Movement picaresques distinguish themselves by foregrounding chaos as a consequence of change, contrasted with, say, the transformative act (introduction of robots as detectives) upon which a novel such as Asimov's *Caves of Steel* is based, which results in efficiency and order. Stross's *Saturn's Children* in particular provides multiple examples of acts of transformative genius bordering on quackery, all of which introduce chaos into the world. *Saturn's Children*, being something of the mutant offspring of the far more ordered R. Daneel Olivaw robot detective novels of Asimov, has at its core an act of mad science, in the classic Frankenstein vein: the robot courtesans among whom the protagonist Freya claims membership were "created for a world where the rule of law did not extend to our [robot] kind" (Stross 125),

not unlike Frankenstein's own creation. One should not mistake Frankenstein's effort with an act of transformative genius, however, as the good doctor's work was based in the vanity of a creator rather than in any altruism, misguided or otherwise. By contrast, the act of "mad" science in Stross's *Saturn's Children*, namely the creation of a slave-race of sentient robots, does at least have the patina of altruism surrounding it (the act benefits more than the creator). As the humans promptly went extinct, leaving the unmanumitted robots to proceed as best they can, *Saturn's Children's* primary, instigating transformative act ensured that chaos dominated, as the robots, much like the rejected "child" of Frankenstein, have no creator to provide meaning.

*Saturn's Children's* plot further emphasizes the chaos of reality by centering around an act of transformative hubris far beyond Frankenstein's rather limited ambitions. "A consortium of black labs, led by an individual or lineage known as Dr. Sleepless" (248) claims to have put together a working human (though a ring-tailed lemur is all that is ever actually produced), and a group of robotic aristocrats seeks to use this human as leverage to control all robots in the solar system. Dr. Ecks (get it?) is particularly marked by the text as a type of quack. Ecks specializes in the creation of environments tooled to house primates and, while giving a tour of a fruit garden, reminds Freya that "Fruits are the fertilized reproductive organs of the plants you see," therefore "our Creators, being largely fructivorous, subsisted on a diet rich in hermaphrodite genitalia" (273). True, perhaps, but this and other bizarre, humorous statements (such as Ecks contemplating, at Freya's suggestion, designing a helmet for a genetically reconstituted Tyrannosaurus so that it can bounce around in low gravity without damaging its cranium on unforgiving bulkheads) place the robotic doctor in the company of other mad scientists, such as Dr. Brainard of *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961). This transformative act would be an unmitigated disaster, as almost all of the robots are hard-coded to bow to human authority. The

more ambitious robots believe that by possessing and controlling a human then true, unquestioned hegemony across the solar system could be established, but this belief is misguided. At best, the aristocratic robots would restore slavery in its worst form, and at worst the aristos themselves would be enslaved. Freya's picaresque journey takes her through a solar system full of free yet unchained slaves foolishly inviting, in a bid for power, the return of the master.

### The Corrupt Cleric

While SF's attitude towards the quack doctor has certainly evolved as science itself has evolved, SF's treatment of the religious figures isn't very different from the critical and rather debased figures found in early picaresques - if anything, SF is more acerbic and blatant, as almost no SF authors are particularly religious and traditional religious institutions come (always) already pre-demythologized. Miller suggests that “[t]he motif of the *corrupt cleric* exposes still another force that should contribute to order but does not” (97), speaking primarily about representatives of the Catholic church found in early picaresque narratives. A church, be it Catholic or Pentecostal, is typically viewed as a bastion of authority and absolutism for practitioners. To foreground the fraud inherent in a religious institution, whether in the parsimony of supposedly non-materially focused priests in *Lazarillo de Tormes* or the criminal nature of Bone's rasta-teacher in Banks's *Rule of the Bone*, undermines all faith in the governing logic of the picaro's world, leaving the picaro proclaiming, like Othello, "But I do love thee, and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (3.3.92-93). This is hardly the suicide-inducing event of *Othello*, fortunately; picaros tend to regard collapsing worldviews as learning opportunities.

Being materialist in nature, SF tends not to focus on religion quite as much as mainstream literature, but when it does the treatment tends to be critical. As such, an SF reader rarely finds preexisting, cherished religious worldviews intended by the author to be regarded as true until a picaro comes along to poke holes in the illusion: readers of SF tend to be too savvy to suspend religious disbelief. Thus, much SF begins with the assumption that religion is, at best, harmless fantasy, or, at worst, malicious cult phenomena. In a rather beautiful twist, it is *absolutism* of religion (placed in contrast to the flexibility of scientific "truth") that serves to foreground chaos and uncertainty in most Movement picaresques, rather than the traditional undermining of figures widely considered holy. While critiques of religious absolutism can be found in many Movement picaresque narratives, *Transmet* arguably provides the reader with more corrupt clerics per page than any other SF work in the form of the "New Religious Movement Convention," an event Jerusalem, dressed in tin-foil halo, flowing robes, messianic beard, and (Air) Jesus creepers, decides to cover. Each "cleric" at the convention - and they are legion - is a parody of one or another contemporary cult phenomenon, ranging from alien abductees to good old-fashioned Wotan worshippers. For instance, the "Church of Christ Breathairian" and its members who "only need air to survive" (2.64) parodies Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and no doubt many other religious entities that, for one reason or another, reject modern medicine and science (including actual Breathairians, who do exist). Every cleric presented clearly possesses ulterior motives for faith, be they economic or otherwise; the smallish, geeky Wotan worshipper's testimonial, "I always thought people hated me. And then I discovered the priesthood of Odin, and I learned it was okay to hate" (2.64) screams of venal self-servitude and juvenile power fantasy. The anonymous author of *Lazarillo*

*de Tormes* would be proud of this fearless critique of religion, and, like Lazarillo, Jerusalem exposes the fraud of several clerics as he rages through the "temple."

For example, Jerusalem encounters "The Church of Release" which practices "sacred trepanation": "See, your skull is too dense for these terrible ideas to evaporate out. . . . What this is, see, is conceptual ventilation. And God reaches into you through the hole, see?" (2.65). Jerusalem, horrified at the representative of the Church of Release's attempt to prey upon a depressed, weak-willed person who claims that he "just can't get through [his] life without some help" (2.65), intervenes, paying homage to Penn and Teller and calling the representative's faith "bullshit" (2.65). During the violent melee that ensues, Jerusalem thoroughly debunks the historical validity of Christianity, just as he had, moments before, excoriated the logic of the church of the "Alien Love Gardeners," a faith founded upon the revelations of aliens who had travelled the stars to probe and teach<sup>18</sup> (2.62-63). Jerusalem even ends his convention coverage with a "cleansing of the temple" moment, overturning tables and denouncing the entire affair with righteous anger: "Thieves, the goddamn lot of you! Thieves and leeches! Fucking vampires sucking the will from people whose only goddamn crimes . . . were to be frightened and tired! And you don't help them! You don't listen to them! They get no truth from you! All you do is scare them with stories of something that doesn't exist!" (2.68-69). Not to be outdone, Jerusalem does Jesus one better, hurling the tables he overturns into the crown and laying multiple savage beatings on the attendees and various religions' representatives. *Transmetropolitan's* corrupt clerics manage to serve both the traditional and contemporary role, foregrounding the chaotic

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<sup>18</sup> Many abduction narratives, such as the Betty and Barney Hill abduction, are based around some revelation framework, most likely as a personal validation for the abducted. Much like biblical abductees such as Enoch, modern abductees are made to feel special by being made repositories of meaningful, absolute truths by a greater power. Debunking this modern mythology is the contemporary, SF equivalent of Lazarillo's exposure of Catholic fraud.



nature of society by embodying the absolutism of religion so frightening to materialists (and SF authors) devoted to the flexibility of science while still being no less fraudulent and worldly than religious institutions lampooned in traditional picaresque narrative.

### Visions of Paradise

"Once out of heaven, to an angel's eye / Where is the bush or cloud without a flaw? / What bird  
but feeds upon mortality, / Flies to its young with carrion in its claw?"

- Adrienne Rich, "Lucifer in the Train" (1952)

In Adrienne Rich's poem "Lucifer in the Train," she makes use of the proto-picaro (or, perhaps, ur-picaro) Lucifer<sup>19</sup> to capture the painful observation that, once one has experienced paradise and been cast back to reality, one can't but help to view reality as a flawed, chaotic mess. The picaresque, in a slightly less poetic way, makes a very similar point about reality through the use of a similar device that Miller terms the "vision of a paradise": "almost every picaresque novel has a *vision of paradise* in it . . . These scenes and visions contrast with the otherwise universal chaos, pointing up the lack of order in the picaresque world" (97). It would be a mistake to assume that visions of paradise are unique to the picaresque, as they are a common device in all forms of literature, SF no less than any other, and serve basically the same function wherever found. I am immediately reminded of the story of Tony Amsterdam, told by Donna to a D-ravaged Bob Arctor in Dick's *A Scanner, Darkly*. Amsterdam, through some fortuitous combination of LSD and vitamins saw what he took to be a vision of God: "Sparks. Showers of colored sparks, like when something goes wrong with your TV set. . . . And the whole world was a living creature . . . And there were no accidents: everything fitted together

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<sup>19</sup> Most depictions of Lucifer, both contemporary and classical, tend to envision the mythical figure as both wanderer and trickster.

and happened on purpose, to achieve some goal in the future" (240). Accompanying this vision was a door, hovering in air, that opened onto a peaceful, nighttime vista of ancient Greece - a door Amsterdam never thought to go through. Ultimately, this vision of paradise destroyed Amsterdam. He would "be on the freeway driving along, with all the trucks, and he'd get madder than hell. He said he couldn't stand all the motion and noise, everything going this way and that, all the clanking and banging" (241), unable to reconcile the unfulfilling chaos of his present with the paradise he had envisioned. Donna sums up Amsterdam's dilemma rather succinctly: "After he saw God he felt really good, for around a year. And then he felt really bad. Worse than he ever had before in his life. Because one day it came over him, he began to realize . . . he was going to have to live on and on like he was, seeing nothing. Without any purpose. Just a lump of flesh grinding along, eating, drinking, sleeping, working crapping" (240). Arctor, heavily into withdrawal, croaks out "Like the rest of us" (240), and the meaning of the Amsterdam episode is laid bare: a vision of paradise simply strips away the comforting illusions with which we armor ourselves, showing our world to be a meaningless, grinding chaos. *A Scanner, Darkly* is not at all picaresque, but Donna's discussion of a paradise vision does capture the soul of the picaresque's vision of paradise, at least as identified by Miller.

Jerusalem's paradise was less a vision than a memory: his version of Thompson's Woody Creek, called the Mountain, is depicted as a paradise from whence Jerusalem has been ejected, much like that other, less-embraced infernal picaro Christian mythology has inadvertently created and made into the hero of such beach reads as *The Club Dumas*. Jerusalem, like all good exiles (and murderous robots from the future), swears "I'll be back; I worked for too long to buy five years of peace" (1.7) - a perfect description of paradise, really: unattainable peace. Again we see shades of Othello's simple, binary worldview: Desdemona's love and the stability and order it

provides create a space of peace, and when that love is removed only chaos remains. Rich's envisioning of Lucifer's ejection mirrors the experience of picaros such as Jerusalem. As Lucifer watches through the window, the "countryside, / Vernal and crystalline" (2-3) and its idyllic beauty slowly change and wither: "now in paler air / Tree, hill and rock stood out resigned, severe, / Beside the strangled field, the stream run dry" (10-12). Once paradise has been seen, can anything ever be viewed on its own terms? *Transmetropolitan*, a graphic novel series usually sunk in an insane, dystopian future, begins with some genuinely beautiful and peaceful panels showing the snowy, natural vistas of Jerusalem's analog of Woody Creek (well, until Jerusalem begins blowing thing up, but could The Mountain be a true representation of Woody Creek without high explosives?). This peace is contrasted sharply with the chaos and noise of the City; once Jerusalem passes into the City's "communication sphere" nary a natural image is seen for many, many issues. The structural message is clear: the picaro is adrift in a chaotic world, peace but a memory.

Oddly, *Transmetropolitan* deploys several more paradisiacal visions throughout the course of the series, rather than relying upon the impact of a single, unattainable paradise existing only in memory or fantasy. Within the world of *Transmet* are cultural reservations, places that "preserve cultures without imposing judgment on them" (2.116), so described by the cultural reservation systems director during an interview with Jerusalem. Jerusalem has decided to do a story on the reservations, primarily due to the outrage he feels that people simply don't pay attention to the reservation system and what can be learned from it. Jerusalem, on his tour of the reservations, visits the Tikal Reservation, a recreation of the Mayan culture. The Tikal Reservation he is touring is the fifth of a series; they tend to die out due to the water supply becoming riddled with pathogens from the sacrifice victims who tend to end up there. Jerusalem,

recognizing the social function served by keeping the past alive and the bravery of the people who would willingly live there, observes that "[p]eople die to teach us lessons about religion and environment. We keep history close, to make damned sure we learn from it" (2.131).

Whether or not one would desire to live in a reservation is moot (clearly ending up a sacrifice atop a Mayan temple isn't most people's idea of paradise); the reservations do represent islands of peace and calm at the heart of the chaotic maelstrom of the future, and as such constitute a further vision of paradise. Jerusalem's reaction upon entering the reservation system foregrounds this meaning, as he instantly draws a parallel between the reservation and his own personal paradise: "It's like the Mountain . . . Christ, I didn't think I was going to see anything like this for years, if ever again" (2.126). The reservations serve as visions of paradise and like any other picaresque vision highlight the chaos underlying existence. Much like Jerusalem's mountain retreat, the reservations create a clear reminder of break-neck speed of technological change, not to mention the general public's total obliviousness to history: "The story, you incredible asshole, is that the city's full of reservations and nobody bothers going to them!" (2.126)<sup>20</sup>. In this sense, the reservations are almost ironic in intent, impossible little bubbles of static, stable history in a world utterly lacking any hope of stability and stasis. While Jerusalem finds the reservations enlightening, the reader knows such things don't and can't exist, both in our own reality and in the City proper, and thus has the chaos and ignorance of the present foregrounded dramatically.

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<sup>20</sup> The train image used by Rich is more appropriate to the current predicament of the picaro than one might imagine. The train was once a convenient metaphor of flight, of the utopian potential to escape one's circumstances. Now, however, the train, associated more with subways than continental railroads, serves as a metaphor for stasis, entrapment, and a sort of cyclical, history-free eternal present. This connection will be explored in more detail in the third chapter.

*Transmetropolitan* does reward (punish?) the reader with the vision of paradise's illusion-shattering effect, but it is worth observing that the shape visions of paradise take in Movement picaresques is often subtle. Ellis's version of Woody Creek is a paradise, but in general the "paradises" presented function in more nuanced ways. Many visions of paradise, for instance, operate in an ironic manner, offering not paradise proper but rather enforced, obligatory order, implying that order itself is a form of disorder. While certainly not picaresque, William F. Nolan's novel *Logan's Run*, along with the 1976 film of the same name, offer an example of this variation in the form of a critical utopia/dystopia masquerading as a paradise. While the citizens of the domed, computer-controlled city live Edenic, Eloi-esque lives, they are nevertheless required at the age of thirty to "carrousel," a faux-reincarnation ritual that obviously kills the participants, lest they be hunted down and executed by the Sandmen. Hence, initial order is revealed to be disorder, bought through misery and autocratic (automatacratic?) rule.

Sterling's *Schismatrix* offers similar preserves, which, in his posthuman future, demonstrate futile attempts to preserve stability and tradition. The traditional, Mechanist-controlled Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic, the habitat in which Abelard Lindsay begins his journey, later becomes the Neotenic Cultural Republic, reborn as a kind of cultural preserve for humanity, rejecting posthuman change until the basic human lifespan runs its course. This habitat, however, is destined for a short life, just like every other habitat in Sterling's posthuman solar system, as the underlying theme of the novel is radical change. If the visions of paradise found in such non-picaresque texts as *Logan's Run* demonstrate the very picaresque observation that order is disorder, then decidedly picaresque texts such as *Schismatrix* offer refine this idea, positing that stability is chaos.

Such "paradises" provide clear temptations for the weary picaros desirous of stability and rest, but these tempting paradises themselves imply chaos by threatening the clear extinction of the self. In Western culture it is difficult for an image of paradise to be deployed without at least some minor connection to the Judeo-Christian idea of heaven. For instance, the late Iain M. Banks's occasionally picaresque Culture novels incorporate the phenomenon of "subliming," which involves entire civilizations ascending into a higher dimensional state. Subliming is clearly a rapture-for-nerds analogue of traditional assumption-into-heaven imagery, and is rightly regarded by the Culture itself as a somewhat self-indulgent act, as the sublimed give up interest in the material universe. One could see this as giving oneself to fantasy, or one could see it as the willing extinction of the self - in fact, Banks indicates that the experience of the sublimed is so radically different from the experience of those in the material universe that communication is virtually impossible, which suggests that a person flown off to paradise really isn't the same person. *Transmetropolitan's* cultural preserves incorporate a similar idea, in that the participants (regardless of whether or not the preserve is paradisiacal or, like the Maoist Chinese preserve, probably a bit unpleasant) must give up all memory of their identities in order to live authentically in the preserve. You can attain paradise, in other words, if you simply abandon the pesky habit of being you. Exceptions, such as Jerusalem's Mountain, seem to prove this rule, because even though a paradise with no string attached does, in fact, exist, the protagonist is denied entry, much like Adam and Eve, ejected from Eden, eyeing the cherubic bouncer's flaming sword. The typical vision of paradise found in picaresque narratives is a fantasy, like Amsterdam's vision of God (whether he or Dick realized it) - there is no door into summer. Though Jerusalem's Mountain is a very real place - he just can't go back (at least, not until the end of the series and via a very impressive act of deception).

It is important to note that paradises are often seen ironically in SF, usually proving to be at the least critical utopias and at the worst dystopian nightmares - this is nothing unique to the picaresque. Gibson's "Gernsback Continuum" is a non-picaresque example of this in action; the protagonist receives a vision of an unrealized future city based upon the covers of SF pulps such as *Amazing Stories* and finds himself disturbed by the Fourth Reich (maybe Fifth Reich, by then) overtones. The crucial distinction a reader must make regards narrative function. For example, the occasionally picaresque *X-Men 2099* comic series offered several visions of paradise, the most relevant of which is once concerning a character called the Driver. The Driver was something of a mythical figure for displaced and desperate mutants of the comic's dystopian future; he was believed to run an underground railroad that shuttled the oppressed flotsam and jetsam to some safe end - in short, the comforting fantasy any picaro or weary child of the road might share. The reality was that he simply stored digital copies of the mutants in his vehicle's memory (and later in a large server system) - not the act of a villain, exactly, but certainly an act that shows the truth of the picaresque axiom that one can find no comfort and succor from within society, but that there are no paradises laying outside it either. The mutants' last home is fitting as well, for what better metaphor for marginality could one find than being permanently stored in a motorcycle? Similar to Banks's subliming and Ellis's cultural preserves, the Driver provides a false hope, a temptation of paradise that proves functionally fatal, but in doing so foregrounds the homelessness of the picaros, forever destined to inhabit the margins of society. The false paradise embodied in the domed city of *Logan's Run*, by contrast, prevents the citizens from living in a real paradise, that of the Edenic land lying outside the dome, described by Adilifu Nama as the "symbolic cradle of American democracy" (26).

The Madness Scene

Finally, Miller identifies a "madness scene" motif, "in which all pretense at personality structure in the picaro cracks" (97). Unlike the stalwart characters of romance, whose personalities tended to be stable and arranged around grandiose principles, picares begin far more random, salad-bar assemblages of personality, capable of drastic change at a moment's notice. While this contrast already calls into question certain assumptions about the unity of the self, picaresque narratives often drove the point home with said madness scene. This is no doubt intended to be the height of the dissolution of order, as that ancient bastion of stability, the mind/soul, is revealed to be a kludge system easily torn down, but in the postmodern era only the truly medieval amongst us would believe that the "self" is an untouchable monolith erected by God. Rather, most now know the conditional nature of the human mind, so the once surprising collapse of a unified personality structure found in the traditional picaresque is now found nearly everywhere. As such, scenes of "madness" proper are less common in literature. Instead, Miller's more straightforward madness scenes have been replaced with what could be termed a "fragmentation scene" during which the picaro suffers a certain degree of confusion due to the number of identities he or she possesses. Identity itself thus becomes a chaotic question, for, while the picaro is not at all mad, he or she is also anything but whole. The specifics of the fragmentation scene are discussed later along with other new features of the picaresque, so little more needs to be said here.

#### Distinguishing Features of the Mode

Even when operating from the far less rigidly boundaried analytical position of the mode, some basic criteria are required for identification purposes. In order to assist in identification, Wicks incorporates a structural component into his definition of the picaresque mode incorporating eight characteristics that "give us what we might call the 'total picaresque fictional



situation" (243), though, as the picaresque mode is a protean one, not all of these characteristics need be active in a single work. Wicks's characteristics are as follows: (1) dominance of the picaresque fictional mode, (2) the panoramic structure and the Sisyphus rhythm, (3) the first-person point of view, (4) the protagonist as a picaro, (5) the picaro-landscape relationship, (6) a vast gallery of human types, (7) implied parody of other fictional types (romance) and of the picaresque itself, (8) certain basic themes and motifs common to the picaresque ("Nature" 243-46). This list of characteristics will form the basis of the following chapter's interrogation of Movement fiction's participation in the SF mode, though the order of presentation here is slightly different and a number of themes and motifs identified by other authors have been added to the discussion.

#### Autobiographic Asphyxiation: The Picaresque Point of View

The first of the defining characteristics of the picaresque genre identified by Wicks is the "dominance of the picaresque fictional mode" (243), an obvious if logically necessary observation, while the second is "the Sisyphus Rhythm" or episodic structure, a particular narrative strategy which many see as the genre's main defining feature. Third, however, is the genre's *other* main defining feature, the "first-person point of view" (244) delivered in autobiographical form by an unreliable narrator. Claudio Guillén, in "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," also gives the autobiographical point of view important placement, namely second, in his own list of defining characteristics, directly after what he terms the picaresque's unique "dynamic psycho-sociological situation" (79), itself a list of tropes and motifs specific to the picaro - something that Wicks places eighth in his own list. Despite the fact that most commentators consider the autobiographical narrative crucial to the genre's identity, the

immediately recognizable feature is one of the genre's most useless and is one that has been forced to evolve as the picaresque has fused with different genres and mediums.

The pseudo-autobiographical strategy is intended to accomplish several very specific purposes without which the genre wouldn't function in quite the same manner. First, the pseudo-autobiographical form serves to emphasize the limited and highly subjective status of the narrator. Guillén flatly states that the “picaresque novel is a pseudoautobiography. This use of the first-person tense is more than a formal frame . . . everything else in the story is colored with the sensibility, or filtered through the mind, of the picaro-narrator” (81). Guillén, in fact, makes his third defining characteristic “[t]he narrator’s view [which] is also partial and prejudiced” (82), finding it necessary to emphasize this limited view by separating it from the autobiographical form. Wicks agrees, commenting that the “narrative is itself a 'trick,' the fictional analogy of the tricks of which his [the picaro's] life and the world are composed” (244). The picaresque is dependent on the unreliability of the narrator: this is, after all, the literature of rogues, but, more to the point, a literature that foregrounds chaos cannot present itself through the eyes of a trustworthy moral paragon. The picaresque narrative's emphasis on disorder and chaos is dependent on the tension inherent in the narrator's falsifiable recounting of events (or, at the very least, the interpretation of said events); without this Heisenbergian uncertainty, the random, chaotic nature of the picaro's world is undermined by the surety of the narrative itself.

A second, related function of the autobiographical frame is to serve as a microcosm of the macrocosmic goal of the picaresque: to understand, if not to actually integrate, a fragmented society's pieces. A picaro's life, like all lives if one is honest, is a random assemblage of largely unrelated events, far removed from the terrible tyranny of *purpose* and *destiny* that overshadow many - most - other genres. The world we inhabit isn't much different: clockwork,

mathematically predictable models of society only exist in SF works such as Asimov's *Foundation* series. Critics such as Rowland Sherrill speak of the "social work" of the picaresque, referring to the genre's ultimate goal of stripping bare the illusions societies maintain and engaging honestly with the reality beneath, thus offering a more functional understanding of the world. The autobiographical frame serves as a small-scale demonstration of this ambitious task. Guillén observes that the autobiographical style takes the "welter of paradoxically continuous disintegrations" that form the picaro's life and attempts "to integrate and make aesthetic, psychological, and moral sense of the dismembered past" (58), insistent that the autobiographical form is necessary for providing the proper narrative distance to allow this reconstructive act. Huck Finn lives in an America defined by hypocrisy and brutality, but through his narrative, his recollection of disparate events, he manages to pull some meaning out of the mess. However, it is important to note that, despite Guillén's insistence, it is the interplay between unrelated (or, more to the point, chaotic and unpredictable) episodes and the conscious being reflecting upon said episodes that creates the effect of integration, not the first-person autobiographical form itself, which is really little more than a convenient structure.

While picaresque narratives attempt to integrate both picaro and society (not with each other, of course), the truth is that the protagonist must remain as much of an enigma as any other human, whatever success the narrative may have integrating the dislocated pieces of society. The third major function of the autobiographic structure is building a proper critical distance between audience and protagonist. The reader knows what he or she is told by the picaro (however unreliable this might be), but is nevertheless told only fragments of the character's life, unlike other narrative forms that seek to provide totalizing pictures of characters and psychologies, such as much vaunted realism, which pretends knowledge of the inner psychology of people,

something governed far less by discernible cause and effect than we might like to believe. Anxiety disorders provide a good example of this, as the disorder itself does not follow external stimuli; post-traumatic disorders are another, as the free-floating memories appear unbidden, independent of immediate cause. The non-picaresque short story "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson offers good example of postmodern fragmentation that is not dissimilar from the decidedly pre-modern fragmentation of the picaresque. The story of the protagonist, Parker, is told through a series of vignettes (the first time he saw an ASP deck, escaping indentured servitude at a Japanese corporation, etc.), and this fragmentary picture of his identity is mirrored in his recollections of his ex-girlfriend. Parker finds an old ASP tape, mostly wiped, that allows him to experience a few seconds of a vacation she had taken to Athens before meeting him, prompting Parker to think "We're each other's fragments, and was it always this way?" (Gibson 44), foregrounding postmodern concerns over authenticity and vanishing history. Like a picaro revealing slices of himself or herself to the reader, Parker's ex, Angela, is to him only a series of slices, like tissue samples on slides. "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" ends on a note anticipating the function of picaresque: As Parker is edging towards artificially induced sleep, thinking about how people are to each other like the fragments of a holographic postcard he earlier destroyed, he realizes that "each fragment reveals the rose from a different angle . . . but delta swept over him before he could ask himself what that might mean" (44). Parker's realization that the fragments, while incomplete, still provide unique angles of the broken image hints at the narrative act of reconstruction that the reader of a picaresque narrative participates in - trying to put together a subjective, flawed image of an unknowable, potentially nonexistent, whole. Guillén insists that "[n]arrative distance . . . .accounts for the temporal, spatial, psychological, moral, and aesthetic dimensions operating in the picaro's narrative act. And it

accounts for the reader's distance from the picaro along those same planes, a distance that varies from very close to very far and implies an ethical distance within the reader" (58) and believes that by "paying attention to all the dimensions of narrative distance [the reader navigates] through the narrative hypocrisy that is part of the picaresque point of view" (58). Thus, the autobiographic narrative ensures that readers can never truly know the picaro, separated as we are from both his or her inner world and real-world decisions, and leaves the reader with a perpetual outsider, a marginal figure stitched together from a patchwork of scraps.

To be sure, picaresque novels throughout the years that consciously emulated the mode - including modern variants - were also written from this first-person, pseudo-autobiographic perspective, as one might expect. Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Jennings's *Aztec* (1980), and Banks's *Rule of the Bone* (1995) might share different genres - *Aztec* is historical fiction - but all participate in the picaresque mode and share the presence of a first-person narrator. *Aztec* even begins with a narrative device similar to that of *Lazarillo de Tormes*: the Aztec man Mixtli narrates his life to a bishop for the entertainment of King Carlos of Spain (although *Lazarillo* isn't burned at the stake for his troubles). The various "hobo novel" incarnations, including Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958) all participate in the picaresque mode and share the same limited, first-person point of view. Jack Black's 1920s novel *You Can't Win*, for example, is an autobiographical chronicling of Black's underworld journey, involving such traditional picaresque activities as thievery, deception, rail riding, and being, in general, a hobo. Wicks explains why this autobiographical form is seen as something of a necessity, arguing that the "narrative distance reflects one of the larger themes of the picaresque: alienation, separation (from past, from reader, from self), and aloneness. First-person narration, the most intimate form of storytelling, is used in the service of

alienation; even the narrative act does not integrate the excluded picaro into a stable order of things” (*Picaresque* 59). Indeed, without Huck telling his own story it is unlikely that the alienation upon which *Huck Finn* rests would be so real to the reader, nor would the reader have perspective enough to savor the delicious discontinuity between Huck's morality and the moral hypocrisy of the society from which he is excluded. Doubtless, the autobiographical form's use has valid reasons and a rich history.

Claudio Guillén even goes so far as to argue that a picaresque novel that fails to possess the first-person perspective cannot truly be considered a picaresque novel. “The absence of the first-person form prevents a story, I think, from being picaresque in the full sense” (93), says Guillén when discussing his second circle, or “*sensu lato*” grouping of picaresque novels, something that almost but not quite matches with Wicks’s preferred idea of the picaresque mode. At any rate, this statement is far too rigid, considering that Guillén himself establishes that it is the *purpose* behind the form that is important. While correct in spirit, Guillén's position creates a rigid category useless in the analysis of inherently flexible and eternally evolving genres - and the picaresque, as a mode, is infinitely flexible, leaping easily from genre to genre and medium to medium. Consider the graphic novel. A graphic novel that dispenses with the narrator’s voice yet follows exclusively the pícaro would be disqualified for genre inclusion on these grounds, regardless of the content. Such an exclusion makes little sense. Or, consider the more familiar medium of film, which handles first-person narrative relatively poorly compared to its print cousin. At best, film offers a tasteful voiceover narration from the protagonist, establishing that events are occurring or being recounted via the subjective position of the lead. Even so, the experience is still one of a third-person spectator: that of the camera's gaze and, thus, that of the audience. At worst, the narrative unfolds via POV shots from the protagonist's perspective,

which usually proves to be a wildly disconcerting, irritating experience for many viewers<sup>21</sup>, and is therefore rarely employed for sustained periods. In fact, since the rise of 3D gaming, POV shots are increasingly impossible to present seriously, since the audience instantly associates the perspective with that of first-person shooter games such as *Doom*, *Halo*, *Call of Duty*, etc. The medium of film is primarily a third-person narrative experience, meaning that, according to Guillén's position, film (or television) can't be wholly picaresque.

Nevertheless, some brilliant examples of postmodern picaresque occur in film. Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970) and Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975) are at the very least mildly picaresque, and there are offbeat and easily overlooked postmodern examples that are even more interesting, such as Dennie Gordon's *Joe Dirt* (2001), Larry Charles's *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2008), and Tim Burton's venerable *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985), described by Melynda Huskey as " 'Childe Harold' and 'Don Juan' both; a Byronic double-header for the big screen--a picaresque vision of the poet-lover as outcast filmed through a screwy postmodern lens" (par. 8). Burton makes no pretense of autobiography, and yet the film still manages to achieve its own "picaresque sublime [as] Pee-Wee travels from East to West Coast, from self-satisfied isolation to integration, from wealth to poverty (and back), and from obscurity to celebrity. He is by turns a cowboy, a Hell's Angel, a dishwasher, a hitchhiker, a hobo . . . he turns his back on self-aggrandizement with the words, 'I don't need to see it, Dottie. I lived it'" (9). These films, especially *Joe Dirt*, *Borat*, and *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, are strongly situated in the picaresque mode and yet are third-person narratives; these films maintain the integrity of the protagonist's perspective and capture the filtering

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<sup>21</sup> Films that attempt a fully first-person visual experience, such as *The Blair Witch Project* or *Cloverfield* or any of the pseudo-documentary/*Cinéma vérité* experiments that preceded them (including the legendary Arkansas docudrama *The Legend of Boggy Creek*), often induce nausea on the part of the filmgoer. Imagine *Joe Dirt* filmed through Spade's eyes . . . the horror!

mechanism of the picaresque's consciousness without requiring a constant autobiographical approach. Contemporary video games make use of a camera angle called the over-the-shoulder third-person perspective, an ingenious angle that blends first- and third-person elements. Instead of forcing players into the cranium of the player-character, the developers hang the camera slightly behind the actor and over the right shoulder. The player still experiences the events of the narrative from the perspective of the player-character, but the exterior, third-person perspective allows for a useful distance (for instance, dramatic irony isn't really possible while experiencing events from a first-person perspective<sup>22</sup>). This over-the-shoulder perspective isn't fundamentally dissimilar from the type of perspective found in films such as *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* or *Joe Dirt*: the vast majority of the film centers around Pee-Wee's experience, giving the viewer Pee-Wee's perspective without requiring the pretense of an autobiographic oration. This technique can be accomplished in prose just as easily; in a text, an author can make use of a third-person narrator that never leaves the protagonist and gives privileged access to the protagonist's conscious mind but rarely, if ever, delves into other characters' minds or independent plotlines, save through the protagonist's own speculations. Such an approach maintains the essentials of the autobiographic form, such as the narrative distance and the sense of fragmentation, without choking itself with a slavish dedication to the "auto" part of the biography.

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<sup>22</sup>A small observation might be necessary here. Traditional dramatic irony is dependent upon the distance between a viewer and a character: the viewer/reader can appreciate the fact that, unbeknownst to a protagonist, the spies have already intercepted the papers, a demon has taken possession of a recently purchased shoe, etc. A game might seem to complicate this distance, because, regardless of camera angle, the person playing the game is, in a sense, the player character. Nevertheless, players can simultaneously identify with a player character and yet maintain a separate sense of the character's own "awareness" - survival horror games depend, to some extent, on this dual awareness. Yes, you may have guided your character into a darkened room to perform some crucial, if poorly-considered, narrative device (say, priming the generator in *Jurassic Park*), but you, as gamer, are still aware that the player character, now committed to this task, is unaware of the velociraptor you have just now spotted lurking behind the piping. The fact that you control the player character does nothing to undermine this effect.



An observation about the structure of nationalist novels made by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* might help to drive home the point. Anderson, while contrasting Francisco Balagtas's *Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Cahariang Albania* with other, more genuinely native and nationalist texts that more successfully create a sense of (imagined) community, observes that though "we learn of Florante's and Aladin's 'simultaneous' pasts, they are connected by their conversing voices [flashbacks, for instance], not by the structure of the epic. . . . In effect, it never occurs to Balagtas to 'situate' his protagonists in 'society'"(29). The implication is obvious: had several narrative threads been allowed to run simultaneously, the independent reality of the community itself would have been better foregrounded. While Anderson never makes this point explicit, it does seem obvious that several characters operating within a single society, interacting with the society's citizenry and familiar landscapes and landmarks, would certainly create the feeling of a nation or community being an independent and very real thing. The very *raison d'être* of the picaresque genre, however, lies in the need to survey and interrogate a crumbling and changing community, so it simply wouldn't do to structure a novel in such a way as to reinforce something supposedly disparate. As long as the picaresque narrative structure (including both point of view and narrative arrangement) avoids creating this sense of community (through multiple narrative threads and characters, through conspicuous references to the unity and solidity of a national identity, etc.), the autobiographical status of the picaro is largely irrelevant<sup>23</sup>. A picaresque narrative can easily achieve this goal via first-person narratives, third-person narratives following single characters, or even third-person narratives that occasionally branch - provided all branched narratives follow

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<sup>23</sup> Scott Lynch's *The Lies of Locke Lamora* is an excellent example of this. *The Lies of Locke Lamora* is a fantasy picaresque told in a third-person voice, but the narrative is told in a very disjointed fashion: a single event, such as the robbery of a noble, will unfold in a broken fashion, with events that occur later chronologically occurring earlier.

similar picaresque figures. Strict reliance on the autobiographic framing device seems hardly necessary.

Movement picaresque narratives, much like picaresque film, dispense with the limitations of true first-person narrative yet maintain the spirit of the pseudoautobiographical form. There are, of course, first person entries into the Movement picaresque canon; Stross's *Saturn's Children* is written in a first-person pseudoautobiographic style, foregrounding in the traditional manner the alienation of the narrator through her bitter, longing tone. The novel's first two lines make clear perspective and tone: "Today is the two hundredth anniversary of the final extinction of my One True Love, as close as I can date it. I am drunk on battery acid and wearing my best party frock, sitting on a balcony beneath a pleasure palace afloat in the stratosphere of Venus" (Stross 3). Marginality and alienation are established early, if somewhat hyperbolically - extinction of species and emo-level theatrics aren't exactly subtle cues. *Saturn's Children* even does traditional first person narratives one better, attempting to emulate a realtime narrative: "And now for some more shit. (I'm unhappy, which means I have every intention of sharing it with you. Enjoy!)" (213), speaking in the present tense of an unhappiness caused by cramped accommodations on a spaceship, located three meters above one of the main reactors. Examples of first-person picaresques are numerous, if not predominant: Richard Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs series is arguably borderline picaresque, as the series takes place on different planets (thus forming a series-level episodic narrative) and features a homeless protagonist (Kovacs) bouncing from master to master(read: employer) and (re)creating his own value system.

While there are first-person entries, most Movement picaresques take a more inventive (and arguably less gimmicky) approach, making use of the third-person over-the-shoulder narrative style. Sterling's *Schismatrix* is a textbook example of this narrative style. The first line,

"Painted aircraft flew through the core of the world. Lindsay stood in knee-high grass, staring upward to follow their flight" (3), itself a wonderful example of SF's defamiliarizing language, establishes the perspective: the "camera," right next to Lindsay as he and the audience view the same aircraft, never leaves his side, even during his madness, relating only his understandings and experiences (aside from the occasional voice of god describing aspects of the changing social fabric, of course). Though not first-person, alienation is foregrounded in much the same way. The narrative follows Lindsay alone; other characters pop in and out of Lindsay's life, but they have no independent trajectories save through interaction with Lindsay himself. Lindsay develops, for instance, a deep connection with Nora Mavrides, marries, then loses her when forced to sundog it (tramp it) when circumstances dictate. Though seemingly an integral part of Lindsay's identity, Nora proves as discardable and temporary as anything else in the life of a picaresque. Lindsay is the stable center in a whirl of temporary characters. However, Lindsay isn't really that stable, being, like all picaresques, constructed of a whirl of fragmentary and temporary identities and personality traits. Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, the fleeting nature of the different versions of Lindsay gain a greater emphasis in a third-person narrative than would otherwise be possible in a first-person autobiographic narrative. The autobiographic form requires a narrator to be locked into one identity at the time of the telling, filtering the past through the lens of whatever present self exists. Third-person narrative structure avoids this trap, letting the picaresque be radically different individuals with radically different motivations, unmitigated by any single version's perspective. Lindsay, by turns, is a revolutionary, a theatre impresario, a professor, and a mad scientist, and the only real thread connecting his various selves is the propensity for picaresque "sundogging." Jumps between his various incarnations are abrupt, and the transitional time in between episodes is not covered; for instance, he spends five

years seriously brain-damaged after using an alien virtual reality device as an arena for a final showdown with an enemy. When he "wakes" up, he is for all intents and purposes a different version of Lindsay yet again.

Walter Jon Williams's *Angel Station* seems to violate both the letter and the spirit of the pseudoautobiographical form, using a third-person style containing multiple narrative threads. The novel's first line, "When their father killed himself he recorded the event, just as he recorded everything else of importance in his sad, ill-organized life" (1), might begin the laying out of a very picaresque history for the novel's protagonists, it hardly fits the expected style. Even so, the novel maintains the same third-person over-the-shoulder style of *Schismatrix*, and, though the narrative does split between multiple characters, nearly all are over-the-shoulder views of picaros and picaras. Ubu and Beautiful Maria, the two protagonists, are both strongly picaresque, being ejected orphans existing in the fringe of society, and each receives his or her own narrative thread, however Williams adds a third and unexpected thread partway through the novel<sup>24</sup>. General Volitional Twelve is a member of an insectile race, subservient and disposable to the hive mother/central consciousness known as Beloved, an unknown alien being with whom Ubu and Maria seek to secure the scam of a lifetime. The volitionals are churned out like worker bees, sentient and autonomous yet remorselessly liquidated when they fulfill their purpose. At first blush Twelve might seem an odd choice to receive a perspective, however Twelve's easy interactions with Ubu and Maria make the volitional indispensable to Beloved and thus

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<sup>24</sup> To be fair, the character Kit de Suarez is given the briefest of narrative threads during the first hundred pages or so of the novel, plus a revisit later when Maria reconnects with him. However, it is clear that Kit is a picaro himself - all independent shooters are - though perhaps not as pure of stripe as Ubu and Maria. In fact, Kit's difficulties seem to stem from the fact that, though picaro, he is inextricably bound to his family, making him closer akin to travelling gypsy families than orphaned picaros. In the moments during which a picaro would simply "sundog it" Kit hesitates, dooming him when a clean break might have proven redemptive.

somewhat unique - marginal, in other words. Twelve's perspective expands beyond its own societal and perhaps even biological limits due to its interaction with humans, coming to see, for example, Ubu and Maria's pet cat Maxim with fondness rather than horror. As Twelve comes to see its own life as valuable and distinct from Beloved's purpose, it thus becomes a kind of proto-picaresque character (albeit one that doesn't survive), so the inclusion of such a narrative thread makes perfect sense: the picaresque experience is universal. The vast majority of Movement picaresques seem to follow some version of the third-person over-the-shoulder perspective. Iain M. Banks's *Against a Dark Background* follows this approach, as does Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age*, the latter being most strongly in the picaresque mode.

And then there are the graphic novel picaresques, such as Warren Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* and to some extent Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg!*, neither of which would normally be considered a true picaresque due to the lack of a pseudoautobiographical frame, something that a graphic novel cannot easily offer. Nevertheless, Movement picaresques produced in this medium can show functional and successful bridges between points of view acceptable to the mode. *Transmetropolitan*, for example, is not truly first-person in any traditional sense, but it is, nevertheless, framed as a gonzo journalism narrative, which by definition places the reporter, in this case Spider Jerusalem, at the heart of the story/narrative. Admittedly, quality categorical definitions of gonzo journalism don't really exist, as Hunter S. Thompson is really the only major working talent in the journalism sub-genre (the rest, such as Wolfe, being more distinctly new journalists), but one of the major themes of Thompson's writing was that the reporter was firmly situated in the thick of events, and his or her narration filtered through his or her (probably pharmaceutically-enhanced) consciousness formed the story. As such, gonzo has two main features: a first person narrative and the abandonment of

objectivity in favor of an authentic engagement with the subject - a very picaresque style of journalism.<sup>25</sup> *Transmetropolitan's* narrative begins in a distant third-person, joining Jerusalem at his mountain retreat as he receives the unhelpful call reminding him he is contractually obligated to write a few more books and must therefore return to the City. As Jerusalem drives into the City, however, a first-person autobiographical thread joins with the standard third-person of the graphic novel. Jerusalem begins dictating notes to a micro-recorder, planning his future work: "Notes towards . . . well, towards something. Towards an essay, maybe. A memoir from a cold place. No. Sounds crap. Notes from the asshole of the world . . ." (1.9). Jerusalem's notes serve as the first of a series of devices that ensure the narrative contains a first-person autobiographical voice; subsequent versions of this device are Jerusalem's various news columns and his own direct voiceover, and, being gonzo one and all, the heart of the picaresque experience is inbuilt: Jerusalem remains the alienated outsider looking in, for such a reflective position is demanded by gonzo, and Jerusalem remains a decentralized, fragmentary presence, if only because a gonzo journalist plays many roles in order to honestly engage a story. Wicks argued that the picaresque's unique point-of-view is used for a purpose, therefore it follows that as long as this purpose is achieved the method itself shouldn't matter. Movement picaresques run the spectrum of possible POV approaches, from the traditional (first-person pseudoautobiographic) to the modern (video game third-person over-the-shoulder to whatever a graphic novel is), each approach maintaining the alienation and variability of the protagonist.

#### Practicing the Sisyphean Rhythm Method: Picaresque Episodic Narratives

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<sup>25</sup> If this connection is doubted, one need only read Thompson's gonzo Ur-text, "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," for proof. Thompson, through various lies and cons, manages to tease out of the drunken patrons of Churchill Downs something far closer to the existential truth of the Derby than any objective, fly-on-the-wall journalist could ever manage.

"And [emphasis added] plot. Picaresque plot in which this happens, *and* then that happens, *and* then something else happens, *and* it all adds up to nothing in particular."

-Bruce Sterling, "A Workshop Lexicon"

While the pseudo-autobiographical frame is given undue importance as a central characteristic of the picaresque, far more important among the mode's distinguishing features is its use of an episodic narrative structure, what Wicks terms "the Sisyphus rhythm" (*Picaresque* 55). Picaresque narratives, from *Lazarillo de Tormes* to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, tend to be constructed from discrete episodes that do not, necessarily, work towards any specific conclusion. Rather, each event tends to exist in isolation, having very little impact on the larger stage. Lazarillo might escape one brutal master, but the next chapter might well offer another, equally brutal master for Lazarillo to contend with. Wicks sees in this repetitive structure something of the Sisyphus myth, noting that the picaro's path, "to climb Sisyphus's mountain, demands an eternal 'falling afresh' to the task of survival in the landscape of the discontinuous, paralleled narratively by a continuously dis-continuous (episodic) form" (55). In this regard the picaresque episodic structure shares much in common with a television sitcom's episodic structure: while Ralph Kramden (or, for that matter, Homer Simpson) might end an episode having won some minor financial or personal victory, said victory does not carry over or assist with next week's obstacle.

While picaros and picaras hardly push boulders up and down hills (and never have a Camus-style moment of self-awareness at the apex of the hill), this Sisyphus rhythm does tend to produce somewhat standardized encounter structures. Wicks observes that the individual episodes tend to follow "this pattern: (1) a confrontation (self-willed or forced by 'fortune' or

adversity, the picaro's cosmic scapegoat) out of need, (2) some scheme to satisfy that need (if only for revenge), (3) a complication that endangers the picaro's existence, and (4) the extrication (or entanglement if he is caught)" (55). Wicks goes on to explain that these individual episodes might be "tightly organized, with cause-and-effect relationships and a plotted beginning, middle, and end, but it is only within the episode that the picaresque has such organized plots. The narrative as a whole is a succession of such episodic rhythms" (55). Again, Wicks's description could apply to any given sitcom, but whereas episodic structures in sitcoms tend to emphasize stasis and the status-quo, Wicks insists that the episodic rhythm found in picaresque narratives emphasizes the exact opposite: "The episodes individually and collectively illustrate the perpetual rhythm of the picaresque, which is continuous dis-integration" (55). Rather than feeling the joy of plans coming together and reaching completion (offering the protagonists and the viewers similar payoffs), picaresque narratives offer the sense of things eternally falling apart.

*Schismatrix*, for instance, builds its "plot" around massive time jumps between sections that render each of the sections of the novel into what amount to isolated episodes with few threads remaining to connect one to another. One section might cover two weeks or fifty years, but the sections are presented not as overviews but rather as isolated events, "strung together like a freight train and *apparently* with no other common link than the hero" (Guillén 85). Among the four representative texts, *Schismatrix* is thus the closest to the original picaresque formula; each section follows the general formula provided by Wicks (confrontation, scheme, and extrication) with little connecting one encounter to another. Chapter one, for example, features a confrontation both self-willed and accidental: Lindsay finds himself exiled to the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu, lacking any funds or prospects and still potentially



hunted by political enemies, and in order to survive he decides to play several powerful political groups, including the Nephrite Black Medicals, the Geisha Bank, and a group of space pirates, against each other to satisfy his need. This develops into a scheme: specifically, he plans to use his diplomatic charm to manipulate each group into funding a slightly fraudulent play and, after driving up the stock price of his fraudulent company - Kabuki Intrasolar - sell out and skip town. The episode concludes in a double extrication: Lindsay realizes that his fraud has become a very real thing when it becomes clear to him that the involved parties are proud of their work.

Ryumin, Lindsay's conspirator, explains that "[f]or once they're [the Black Medicals] more than pocket terrorists. Even the whores [Geisha Bank, who uses hours of sexual service as a very stable form of currency] are more than sex toys. They're real actors, with a real script and a real audience. It doesn't matter that . . . it's a fraud. . . . A symbol has meaning if someone gives it meaning" (42). Lindsay solves the situation by putting on a very real play that allows all involved to profit, extricating himself from his own trap. In addition, he also extricates himself from an assassination attempt, as his successful, real play draws attention from his political enemies. *Schismatrix's* nine chapters each offer isolated episodes following roughly this pattern.

Few Movement picaresques follow this traditional pattern, however. Of the remaining three examples, only *Transmetropolitan* falls into the Sisyphean rhythm described by Wicks, Miller, and others: *Transmetropolitan* is a graphic novel published initially as a monthly serial (when Ellis hit his deadlines, anyway), most of which were conceived of as small story arcs of two or three issues. Each story arc did, in a loose sense, follow the confrontation/scheme/extrication formula (the initial story arc featuring the Transient movement and the Angels 8 riot described elsewhere could be considered one such episode), but, unlike *Schismatrix*, *Transmetropolitan* did develop a larger plot arc over time. While individual,

disconnected episodes do continue, *Transmetropolitan* develops into a long-running political struggle in which Jerusalem attempts to use his powers of journalism to take down a sitting president. Such a singular plot might seem to violate the picaresque's genre identity, but the sad fact is that for the picaresque to exist as a marketable force outside of the novel, it must loosen its episodic format. Film, for instance, does not lend itself well to truly episodic formats, if only for the simple fact that episodic narratives are the stuff of television, a medium from which film goes to great lengths to distinguish itself. Thus, picaresque film narratives must have an overarching narrative that *ties together* the still-present episodic incidents. Tarantino's *Django Unchained* is a prime example of such a loosely-episodic narrative tied together by Django's search for his wife, Broomhilda. For the picaresque to survive a medium jump, some changes to the *presentation* of the Sisyphean rhythm must be made.

In fact, changes to the presentation of the Sisyphean rhythm are to be expected in even picaresque novels, as episodic narratives lacking the familiar three-act structure (the old Hollywood incantation: get your hero up a tree in act one, throw rocks at him in act two, and get him down in act three) that has been hammered into consumers' heads for a century don't sell particularly well. Guillén anticipates the need for alternative structuring techniques, pointing out that alternatives to the Sisyphus pattern are possible: "Since *Lazarillo*, however, other narrative devices have been superimposed on this basic structure. The use of recurrent motifs, circular patterns, and incremental processes is particularly frequent in the picaresque" (Guillén 85). Guillén's observation that the picaresque has a long history of using diverse connective strategies is crucial, for it demonstrates that there is really no reason to think that full causal plots couldn't be grafted on, provided that the Sisyphean elements remained, in some form, intact. Both *Angel Station* and *Saturn's Children* fall into this category, with *Saturn's Children* possessing the

closest to a three-act structure in the form of an espionage narrative. Freya gets herself up a tree by running afoul of scheming robot aristocrats, has rocks tossed at her as she attempts to save herself by joining an espionage group and thwarting the aristo scheming, and gets down from the tree by derailing (in a sense) the aristo scheme and heading out of the solar system. Of course, one should immediately notice that the picaresque confrontation/scheme/extrication formula isn't much different from the popular Hollywood tree adage - the picaresque just features a few more trees per story. *Angel Station's* larger plot easily fits both categories. Confrontation/boarding the tree: Ubu and Maria get into deep debt and must run from creditors to the fringes of known space in order to hunt rare but lucrative singularities. Scheme/rock pummeling: Ubu and Maria, through pure chance, find an alien race with whom they can trade profitably and suffer a series of ups and downs while attempting to maintain sole control of their windfall.

Extrication/disembarking the tree: Ubu and Maria defeat both the scheming of Marco, their competitor, and Beloved, the alien intelligence, in order to maintain control. One could easily regard the overarching plot structure of several Movement picaresques as single-tree Sisyphean episodes, although such a position does run the risk of suggesting that any plot is picaresque. Regardless, picaresque novels do what they must to survive, and it is ultimately the conflux of multiple features that define a novel as picaresque.

One such feature, for example, is the chaotic world undergirding the picaresque. The constant "dis-integration" (55) created by episodes themselves, whether in the form of a series of traditional Sisyphean episodes or a single-tree scenario that incorporates smaller Sisyphean episodes, serves quite well in foregrounding the sense of chaos so crucial to the picaresque mode. Miller, speaking of the episodic structure, argues that "[t]he discrete fragments into which its events are broken expresses anything but order. The infinite possibilities of the picaresque

plot express total openness. Since there are no limitations of probability, the door is left open to the fantastic, the improbable, and even the weird. The picaresque plot expresses an intuition that the world is without order, is chaotic” (10). Indeed, such a chaotic, improbable aura invites genre approaches: the unauthorized 1555 "sequel" to *Lazarillo de Tormes* was closer to fantasy or Rudy Rucker's transrealist fiction than anything else, with *Lazarillo*, in a move anticipating *The Incredible Mr. Limpet*, becoming a tuna fish. In this playful feature, the picaresque finds something of a spiritual brother in Movement SF, which, as the previous chapter demonstrates, takes as one of its defining traits a concern with the rapidly changing, chaotic nature of (post)modern society. In the genre's native form, the disconnected episodes subvert the notion of meaningful resolutions by creating a chaotic and occasionally illogical environment where events in one episode show no causal relationship to events in a subsequent episode.

Even a single Sisyphean episode expanded into a full plot can function to foreground chaos, providing a sense of "dis-integration," as long as it violates, in some sense, the idea of resolution. In addition to an episodic structure that implies destruction rather than construction, the back and forth of Sisyphus's struggle implies a certain pointlessness to the actions of a protagonist whose "whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing" (Camus 89). While much occurs during a picaro's travels, the narrative itself tends not to have an ending culminating in the kind of monomythic resolutions regularly found in romance plots. It is a very rare thing to find a picaro willing to toss evil jewelry into volcanoes or quest for and return holy grails and other Campbellian boons to frustratingly powerless and unmotivated populations (though it does, occasionally, come to pass, usually for very complex reasons). Miller offers a brief summary of the picaresque plot that highlights the lack of any kind of resolution:

In the picaresque, we start with life's chaos assaulting the picaresque hero in one event after another and we watch it continue to do so. Characters appear and disappear to no effect, forever forgotten. Usually the protagonist does not seek any stable relation between himself and another, as in the romance. If he does, he is usually frustrated. No mysterious order emerges to bind events together and to bring them to some end. In the picaresque plot viewed as a whole, nothing strictly speaking *happens*. (12)

Or, rather, a great many things happen – they simply don't add up to anything. Picaresque events are like Sissy Hankshaw's freakishly large thumbs: her parents, who have found Jesus, want to view the thumbs as a punishment for some moral failing, desperately needing the mutation to add up to something, but the reality is that the thumbs are just big thumbs, useful for hitchhiking (or the occasional phallic fashion modeling exercise). Thus, it stands to reason that things, even vast, intricately-plotted things, can occur as long as no mysterious order emerges to add it all up to something (or, at least, no order that the picaro didn't jury-rig into existence). Random, meaningless events and coincidences can coexist with world-changing events, just as long as no metaphysical order is reinforced.

*Saturn's Children* provides an excellent example of this principle of Movement picaresque, because in a very real sense nothing ultimately happens, save for Freya extricating herself from a bind. The novel features what appears to be a standard dastardly plot: a consortium of robot aristocrats are secretly planning to acquire a cloned human from a clandestine genetics research facility at the edge of the solar system. As all robots (with the exception of certain deep-space worker models) are hard-coded to worship and obey when in the presence of humanity, the acquisition of a pet human would be quite a coup for a properly motivated aristocrat, much like the acquisition of a pet Pope was good news for Medieval lords with aspirations to higher political offices. Despite all of the effort spent by various parties on acquiring said human and/or preventing anyone else from acquiring it, the entire effort is

pointless because the genetics lab does not, in fact, have a human at all, being able only to create a passable lemur. Humanity is not revived, robotkind is not (re)enslaved, and, despite the presence of a three-act-plot, the events of the novel add up to nothing at all. Ultimately, *Saturn's Children* manages the same ending as *Schismatrix*: all of the component events seem very important and momentous, but without an ultimate payoff, that mysterious order Miller speaks of that binds events together, that series of events that *seemed* so connected appears in retrospect to be little but a cluster of loosely related episodes. At the conclusions of both *Schismatrix* and *Saturn's Children*, the protagonists simply drop everything and depart for distant shores, Freya abandoning the now-moot higher purpose of her espionage activities and Lindsay abandoning his terraforming project that neither he nor the audience will ever see completed. Movement picaresques demonstrate what should be regarded as strong and weak forms of the Sisyphus rhythm. Strong rhythms follow the traditional episodic structure and produce works more easily identifiable as picaresque such as *Schismatrix*. The weak form of the rhythm offers a single-slice episode catering to our diminished cultural attention span that nevertheless ends in the same indeterminate state.

SF novels, regardless of whether they feature a strong or weak form of the Sisyphus rhythm, must overcome an additional problem unique to a genre mixed with the public's often faulty understanding of science itself: faith in the order of science. Miller explains that the “realistic novel in its very plot structure expresses a world-view close to that of modern science and of modern everyday thought based on science . . . The reader’s response to such a ‘model’ realistic plot is an ordered response to an image of order” (10). Since the SF novel is by its very nature realist and materialist, an ordered reality is almost presupposed. Therefore, Movement picaresque narratives must develop additional strategies to highlight the chaotic nature of reality.

This is hardly a great leap, since the idea of a teleological clockwork universe set in motion by a benevolent deity went out of fashion in scientific circles over a century ago, but the average SF reader tends to put great stock in a form of rationality that isn't much different from deism – modernist faith in progress often goes slightly further than it should, requiring additional strategies to deflate this belief and highlight the inherently chaotic nature of reality. These strategies are too numerous to explore, being largely unique to individual works, but both *Angel Station* and *Schismatrix* make use of the same trope to highlight the unpredictable nature of reality: the alien encounter. In both texts the alien encounter is entirely random, with the Investors arriving without warning while Lindsay and his pirate friends are locked in mortal combat and Beloved's hive running across Ubu and Maria by chance, as both ships were scanning the same solar system (in a galaxy of three hundred billion stars). These random events are given no mythical meaning; the novels make no suggestion that these encounters were destined to occur. They just happen, unpredictably, and as such represent science's fundamental rejection of absolutes, including the predictability of certain events.

Despite the gloom and doom that the meaninglessness and chaos of the Sisyphean rhythm might seem to imply, picaresque narratives tend to foreground what most commentators regard as optimism, if only for the simple fact that picaresque narratives don't *really* end. The picaros and picaras bounce from one horrible event to another, but, as the narrative structure implies, the last event described is simply that, and more may occur in the future. In this sense, the picaresque is also marked by a sense of things always beginning anew, a trait which supports the chaotic worldview more than one might imagine. Ordered belief structures incorporate beginnings *and* endings; the order provided the cosmos by God's machinations means that, ultimately, that act of creation will be undone. The picaresque embraces chaos, in the sense that

nothing ever really ends; the most downtrodden tramp will have yet more unpredictable adventures in the future. Movement picaresques are, if anything, even more infused with this optimistic outlook. All four representative texts end with the wheel still in spin; even *Transmetropolitan's* ending implies future adventures when it is revealed that the presumably brain-damaged Jerusalem has, in fact, pulled a trick on his editors (and creditors) to escape nasty political reprisals and is not, in fact, a neurologically impaired cripple at all. *Transmetropolitan* highlights this optimistic outlook regularly, with the most notable example being the special issue "Next Winters" which is devoted to Jerusalem's attempt to remind the reader that "[t]he future is inherently a good thing" (n. pag.). During the short issue, he recalls a time not so long ago when snow used to burn, when there wasn't enough power (before Mercury was converted into a power plant, solving the energy crisis), when people used to go hungry, etc, before pointing out that these hardships are all things of the past. This is SF optimism, a recognition of the positive changes brought by science, and it is a brother to picaresque optimism.

#### Social Lubrication: The Picaro's Panoramic View

If the picaresque is driven by episodic narrative set against a chaotic backdrop, it stands to reason that the narrative would grant the reader a comprehensive view of the backdrop in question. Indeed, the picaresque does just this, providing the reader with "a vicarious journey through chaos and depravity. . . . [and the opportunity to] participate in the tricks essential to survival in chaos and become victims of the world's tricks" (Wicks, *Picaresque* 54). But, "an infinite foray into a world that is forever falling apart, disintegrating" (54) is, in a more positive light, a foray into a world that is forever changing and evolving, one that must always have new and unlooked for variation at the ready. The picaresque does provide readers with a kind of vicarious walk on the wild side, but only in a manner of speaking: one of the primary functions



of this genre is to provide readers with an assessment of the new variation the "disintegrating" environment generates. Wicks calls this the panoramic view of the picaresque, pointing out that the "fictional macrostructure of the picaresque implies a narrative macrostructure, the panoramic, which is commensurate with the kind of world the picaresque mode renders" (55), referring to the "macrostructure" of the episodic nature of the genre. Sherrill updates this concept for contemporary picaresques, which tend to deal with social panoramas vastly more complex than those found four centuries ago. Sherrill explains that "as the picaro explores the terrain of American life in its hugeness, variety, and pluralism, the picaresque narrative becomes a means for taking inventory, recovering resources, making new maps of all that 'otherness'" (6). Thus, through the use of a protagonist who "moves horizontally through space and vertically through society" (Guillén 84), the picaresque is able to offer up to readers samples of the evolving social and even ecological environments, much like slides under a microscope. The picaro, in his or her role as scientist, can take on two distinct and interchangeable roles: passive voyeur and active penetrator.

*Transmetropolitan* features a picaro, Jerusalem, who regularly operates as a largely passive voyeur, though, as a gonzo journalist, he is, even at his most passive, a part of the stories he relates. Regardless, a picaro's version of passive voyeurism is vastly different from a scientist's or even a journalist's objectivity: picaros must engage with their subjects in order to observe. The difference lies in the method of engagement; picaros occasionally don masks and assume new identities to infiltrate various social strata, and, in doing so, penetrate the fragile and largely illusory class and culture distinctions our modern tribal structures require. Jerusalem certainly does this, being a fan of fraudulent clergy ID badges, but when Jerusalem is not playing masquerade he offers a constant commentary on the pieces of the social puzzle he observes.

Consider the following passage describing the city, which was originally accompanied by one of Darick Robertson's incredibly complex panels full of hidden detail:

A troupe of Tuvan throat-singers stopping to make steppes music, just because they feel like it. Feedsite listeners milling around, recording them, saving a few unique minutes for everybody. Dissenting lovers on the run from a Chinese culture reservation, kissing their way to a new revolution. Cop moves the whores along, a squad of Russian security werewolves realize they're not getting any this afternoon after all. This city never allowed itself to decay or degrade. It's wildly, intensely growing. It's a loud bright stinking mess. (1.16)

Jerusalem's City is a single, limitless location, reflective of every facet of the human experience, a place where the entirety of a picaresque grand tour can be played out. This manner of space, "capable of accommodating so many incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds" (44) is termed by Brian McHale a "zone," also called by Foucault a heterotopia. McHale explains that one of the strategies that allows zones to exist in postmodern fiction is "superimposition," a technique in which "two familiar spaces are placed one on top of the other, as in a photographic double-exposure, creating though their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space identifiable with neither of the original two - a zone" (46). *Transmetropolitan's* City, however, is much more than a double-exposure; thousands of bizarre and seemingly irreconcilable protocultures, economic conditions, and even environmental conditions all exist within the borders of a single space, allowing Jerusalem to encounter anachronisms such as ancient Aztecs alongside posthumans built from nanotechnology. The wealth of diversity the zone can offer up to Jerusalem's gaze thus allows for commentary on contemporary issues, lightly defamiliarized by the SF medium. Even Jerusalem's preferred method of interacting with the media emphasizes his role as inventory-taker: "TV: random channel change every twenty seconds. Computer: random feed switch every twenty-five" (1.24).

Through Jerusalem's walkabout style of journalism, *Transmetropolitan* provides a veritable tour of current issues both social and political. To use but a single example, Ellis presents through Jerusalem a story (constituting one issue of the series) about the plight of cryogenically preserved people who are revived in *Transmetropolitan's* future, using it to comment on the plight of the elderly in the Western world. The story, featured in "Another Cold Morning," focuses on one particular "Revival," a former photojournalist named Mary who had lived through the defining moments of the 20th century and, at 65, had signed up for cryogenic preservation along with her husband. When she died of heart disease, her head was preserved; eventually, someone working for the cryogenic company in the unspecified year(s) in which *Transmetropolitan* occurs (nobody in the City seems to actually know what year it is, further emphasizing the City's status as a zone) gets around to reviving her using nanotechnology and other future miracles. She is dumped into the future in a rather undignified way, dirty and naked, only to learn that her husband had died too far from the United States to be preserved with her. She is handed over to a thoroughly uninterested and compassionless Revival Counselor, who treats her less like a person and more like a box in need of ticking before calling her a cab and shooing her off to a Revival Hostel, a kind of dormitory designed to house those brought back. The Hostel, like the revival technicians, treats her with similar disregard: "Everyone was at dinner when she got there. No one thought to feed her" (6.109). Already the parallel with our own nursing home and retirement community system can be seen, for when one attempts to make a business out of compassion, compassion becomes very, very *efficient*.

The lack of compassion for the elderly (even though they are in young new bodies) is particularly disturbing because the standard disconnection from the present many elderly people feel (having been born in radically different eras and having had trouble keeping up in their later,

more socially isolated years) is defamiliarized in such a way as to hyperbolize the phenomenon. Mary, like "[e]veryone else in the Hostel had been damaged in the same way . . . Sooner or later, they took an unfiltered look at the outside world, and it burned out something important in them" (6.110). Mary suffers from an acute form of future shock as described by Toffler; so intense is her sense of dislocation that she falls into the fetal position when pushed out the door of the cryogenics facility. Her sense of dislocation is emphasized by the art such that the reader can at least partially empathize: the first four pages of the issue are drawn firmly in the past, but the fifth page is a full panel depicting a city street in incredibly complex detail. The litter of bizarre ads, unfamiliar technologies, and people types surely mirrors a Revival's own experience of the sharp juxtaposition of past and present. It seems criminal that such hopelessly lost individuals would be treated with bureaucratic disdain, but that is Mary's reality, one that echoes not only the experience of the elderly but also of immigrants as well, if in a somewhat weaker form.

It doesn't take Mary very long to realize that "[s]he wasn't wanted here. She was Revived out of a sense of begrudged duty" (6.109), a realization that clearly establishes Revivals as a metaphor for the elderly, who are put in retirement homes to be "cared for" out of a similar sense of begrudged duty on the part of their children and, occasionally, the community itself. Her knowledge, though hardly obsolete, is considered so nevertheless, and her voice is effectively silenced. Jerusalem observes ruefully that Mary "could have told the future what it'd been like to meet Che Guevara in that old Cuban schoolhouse . . . But the future didn't want to know" (6.110), further extending the connection, for so pervasive is our culture's attitude that the elderly have nothing to offer that it can be a running joke on such television comedy series as *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and *The Simpsons*, in which the younger characters regularly ignore the statements of elderly characters such as Frank Reynolds (Danny DeVito) and Abraham Simpson.

The abandonment of the revived elderly, itself a symptom of the cold legacy of a 1980s materialism in which it is "not death that people are afraid of any longer . . . [but rather] impoverished appearance, old age, and ugliness" (Dendle 53), leads to any number of abuses as the Revivals are left in a marginal position tantamount to homelessness. Even though most of them have had their preexisting assets readjusted and returned to them, their future shock means that they cannot in any sense join society - most spend their days wandering the streets.

Jerusalem apparently finds Mary as she sits, catatonic, behind a garbage can in an alley she prefers because it helps to drown out the noise of the City, where she will talk to anyone who will listen - though it isn't clear that Jerusalem takes a very active part in the discussions. Although the depiction of Mary changes later in the series, here she seems to be suffering from deep psychological trauma, a PTSD victim talking without really connecting, again quite reminiscent of the elderly in nursing homes. Jerusalem's only real gonzo intervention is to kiss her forehead after she talks, again reinforcing the elderly metaphor. Jerusalem is not, however, objective about the matter, willing to report on the story and leave her to her fate: like many of the people Jerusalem covers, she is later revealed to have become one of his projects. Several issues later it is revealed that he has been helping her adjust to the present by buying her cameras and setting photojournalism tasks for her, helping her bridge the gap between her old experiences and her new. Jerusalem ends his story with a didactic, chiding statement: "Mary will live for maybe another century. But her story's over. Because you wouldn't have it any other way" (6.112), offering one final reinforcement for this metaphorical rendering of Western society's treatment of the elderly. Those placed in retirement communities and nursing homes do not, on average, survive another century, but they do survive. Depending upon the study, the sad life expectancy of an elderly person placed in a nursing home is less than two years, and those are

two years during which the individual is as isolated and forgotten as Mary the Revival. Jerusalem devotes many stories to similar social failings such as poor care for those with mental disorders, abuse and neglect in orphanages, and cult exploitation, and the solution is always consistent: intimate knowledge and direct personal intervention - solutions that Jerusalem himself embraces, once the seemingly voyeuristic stance he takes in his stories has run its course.

*Schismatrix*, by contrast, tends to skip over the voyeuristic stage and cuts directly to the level of personal involvement, offering up a more penetrative picaresque experience: Lindsay must inject himself into different groups, assuming their aspects, in order to pursue his stock-taking of the central theme of the novel, the rise of posthumanism. The titular schismatrix is the inhabitants' term for the posthuman solar system, which is peopled with all manner of variations of the basic human plan, though the two dominant factions are the Shapers, who favor biotechnology, and the Mechanists, who favor cybernetics. These two factions vie, somewhat futilely, for the future of the solar system, unaware that, like everything else, they too are subject to the laws of evolution and must eventually evolve into strange and new posthuman iterations. Lindsay himself is a reflection of this inevitability; a posthuman himself, Lindsay slowly evolves from a biotechnology-enhanced Shaper diplomat lacking any cybernetic enhancements to a thoroughly cybered creature, sporting his own mechanical cuirass to assist his breathing. Throughout his life, he travels across this volatile backdrop, engaging with various groups, and giving the reader a very clear picture of the schismatrix itself. Scott Bukatman observes that "Sterling is engaged in the production of a unique textual matrix that emerges from a web (or 'net') of discourses; economics, politics, history, technology, and narrative all intersect to produce an idiolect that, at times, is hardly *narrative* at all. Instead, the effect is of a carefully developed semiotics of the future" (275). However, what Bukatman considers a "unique"

combination isn't really that unique, for what he is unknowingly describing is the picaresque structuring of the novel: Bukatman's "semiotics of the future" is an apt description of the social panorama the narrative explores.

N. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, makes the argument that "[t]he best possible time to contest for what the posthuman means is now, before the trains of thought it embodies have been laid down so firmly that it would take dynamite to change them" (291), recalling in her description of trenchant ideas about human nature (such as conservative opposition to the issue of gay marriage) the schism that drives much of *Schismatrix*. Static and restrictive definitions of what defines the "human" are always very toxic, often used as a justification for oppression and cruelty, as any individual unfortunate enough to be labeled a savage during Europe's colonial years (or those now labeled gay in many former colonies, such as homophobic Africa). "Witches," after all, are, even at this late date in history, regularly beheaded in benighted countries like Saudi Arabia, dehumanized as they are for being "apostates." Hayles is right to argue that the double-edged category of "human" needs prompt deconstruction, and Lindsay's panoramic movement works to do just this by allowing both him and the audience to realize that there are truly no fixed definitions.

Bukatman, speaking of *Schismatrix* and the accompanying short stories "Swarm," "Spider Rose," "Cicada Queen," "Sunken Gardens," and "Twenty Evocations," states that "[i]f there ever was an 'essential' human nature, then surely there is no longer. . . . the series offers a consistent acknowledgement of the conditional status of human definition" (278). This is a fair assessment, as Sterling demonstrates, via the various clades Lindsay encounters, that there is no standard issue human model, and that there is very little distance between the Self of one clade and the

Other of another. Lindsay's solar system is teeming with evolving groups of humans that have "discarded humanity like a caul" (202), expanding to fit into every conceivable or creatable niche. Sterling lists, among the inhabitants, "antihuman clades like the Spectral Intelligents, the Lobsters, and the Blood Bathers" (195) - tantalizingly strange SF nova hinting at the extent of evolutionary divergence. Lobsters in particular are defined as "creatures of the vacuum" who have had "their eyes and ears wired to sensors woven through the suits" that sustain their bodies (220). Lindsay encounters many such strange versions of baseline humanity, but one theme remains constant: none are demonized. Lindsay marries a Shaper, breaks the interdict and counts coup on primitive Earth beside a Lobster, and even creates a race of aquatic posthumans intended to live in Europa's oceans, and not one of them becomes truly Other, beyond an honest effort at comprehension. Constantine describes Lindsay's aquatic posthumans as "community with anarchy" (232), and this is an apt description of posthumanity proper: infinite, chaotic diversity that, even so, has no internal lines of division, like an organism of interacting parts rather than planets light years apart.

*Schismatrix* emphasizes this interconnectedness in other ways as well. The principle that holds that characters appear, serve a function, and disappear forever in picaresque narratives doesn't entirely hold in Sterling's fiction: even more so than in other picaresques, relationships between individuals in *Schismatrix* always move towards convergence, regardless of how far ideology or body plan separate characters. For example, Kitsune, the exiled Shaper secretly controlling the Geisha Bank, is encountered by Lindsay in the first chapter. He feels a connection with her, seeing in her isolation a reflection of his own, but after a brief affair Lindsay is forced to flee the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu and leave her and all his work there behind. In a picaresque narrative emphasizing a different theme, Kitsune would vanish



from the narrative forever, having served her purpose. In *Schismatrix*, however, Kitsune reappears in Chapter 10, having become, literally, Dembowska Cartel. Kitsune, known as the Wallmother, now masses "four hundred thousand, eight hundred and twelve tons" (204), having undergone extensive genetic tweaking to become the biological infrastructure of her own nation state. Once isolated and alone, Kitsune has become "intimacy on an industrial scale" (204), mother of many clone children and never alone. Kitsune hardly fits the traditional definition of humanity, but, in another sense, she is far more human than many others, interconnected at such a vast scale with all of the members of her society. Lindsay's reconnection with a character that in another novel might never be seen again serves to illustrate that, like Kitsune, people are not self-sufficient little individual islands, no more than they are inhabitants of inviolate bodies.

Lindsay even has a reconciliation with his greatest enemy, Philip Constantine, the very same who hounded his journey until Lindsay managed to defeat him in an alien virtual reality arena. Constantine, very old, is preparing to self-euthanize, and wants to make amends with his old frenemy, even offering to commit suicide together: "We could walk out to the impact site together, you and I. And drink the poison. . . . It would be good to have company" (234). This may seem like a rather backhanded form of convergence, but Lindsay and Constantine do, after all, live in a solar system dominated by Japanese cultural relics (zaibatsus, etc.) and a shared death is a way to cement a bond. Moreover, the crash site Constantine references is the site where Vera, Lindsay's lover, performed her protest suicide and the site where Lindsay tried, and failed, to follow, thus beginning his long career as an exile and picaro. Lindsay doesn't join him, of course, but Constantine nevertheless apologizes and Lindsay forgives him, again emphasizing that the distances between people aren't at all insurmountable. *Schismatrix's* atypical focus on

convergence helps to reinforce the erosion of distance between Self and Other and thus helps to undermine belief in barriers between individuals and between groups, nations, etc.

Regardless of the voyeuristic or penetrative nature of the picaresque's journey, the end result is the same: annotated maps of the cultural terrain. The postcyberpunk picaresque, which makes of this social stocktaking a mission, has repurposed the old cliché of cyberpunk's mirrorshades. According to Sterling, the mirrored sunglasses, prevented "the forces of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous" (xi), providing a stylish metaphorical barrier that signified outlaw status while keeping the wearer safely separated behind an impenetrable barrier. Cyberpunk mirrorshades scream disconnection. Movement picaresques offer a easily mistakable version of this motif that does away entirely with the separation, instead screaming interconnectedness: live shades. Jerusalem wears a set of multicolored eyewear that function like 10th generation Google Glass: "Give me a pair of live shades for still photography. Say two gig onboard, keyed to my optic nerves" (1.22). These glasses allow Jerusalem to record images, audio, etc. - in short, making him, to borrow a phrase from Sterling, an island in the net, connected to everything. This is no idle analogy; quite a few postcyberpunk picaresques do in fact feature riffs of this very idea, offering eyewear that features connectivity and comprehension rather than isolation and insularity. Sterling's *Islands in the Net*, the source of the borrowed phrase and a picaresque work not featured here, features a slick set of eyewear worn by protagonist Laura Webster that allows her to remain in constant contact with the Net and for her colleagues at Rizome to see and hear everything she does. Laura is far from isolated while wearing her shades; rather, she is converted into a global witness, allowing others to participate in her social stock-taking. Postcyberpunk picaresques are not quite the "sun-staring visionaries"

Sterling once spoke of, blinding themselves on the future; rather, they are engaged in the no less blinding task of envisioning the shape of the present.

#### Picaro Peep Shows: (Peanut) Galleries of Human Types

The Smiler, the President of *Transmetropolitan's* version of the United States and Jerusalem's mortal foe, in a typical exercise of that politician's friend, guilt by association, explains Jerusalem's political influence as follows: "Spider Jerusalem speaks to a vast audience of losers, wannabes, white trash, hate addicts, children, and nerve damage cases. All of whom have votes. They are the new scum . . . the biggest voting block in this city" (3.45). The new scum are Jerusalem's people . . . and, they also serve as the embodiment of another of the picaresque's cornerstones: the gallery of human types. Claudio Guillén observes that "[t]he pícaro (though not always a servant of many masters) observes a number of collective conditions: social classes, professions, *caractères*, cities, and nations. This rogue's gallery has been a standing invitation to satire" (83), and Ulrich Wicks makes a near identical observation, echoing that the rogue's gallery "appear[s] as human inhabitants of the landscape and often represent[s] a cross-section of society both vertically and horizontally. As representatives of social orders or institutions, they are frequently satiric object" (*Picaresque* 61). A hand-me-down from *Lazarillo de Tormes* and Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the episodic encounters of the picaro offer up cross-sections for the microscope in the form of priests and paupers, noblemen and prostitute, for the purpose of critique (demythologization, in the case of *Lazarillo*, and religious sermonizing in the case of *Guzmán* - the picaresque mode can be adapted to any purpose). This is not to say that any work containing a cross-section of society is picaresque; were that the case, any narrative set in New York that covered more than three blocks would be a potential candidate - and Jerry Seinfeld is no picaro (Kramer, maybe). No, also important is the

role of picaresque as observer, for “the gallery is important for the way it is observed by the picaresque, not for the portrait itself as such” (62). Without the defamiliarizing effect that the picaresque's perspective offers, the places and people are just that, places and people, and this serves to distinguish the picaresque from satire proper, as the “focus is always on the observer in picaresque: in full satire it is on the satiric object” (62). Wicks even goes so far as to suggest that the picaresque's unique social observer characteristic might hide a utopian impulse, noting that the picaresque's gaze results in “perhaps even a kind of leveling of social class distinctions into one level of the human condition” (62), though this might overstate the intention of the gallery of human types. Regardless, the picaresque, classic or contemporary, must feed the picaresque with a stream of specimens, all representative of the culture or society at large, for the purpose of social criticism. The success of this social work, however, is dependent upon a characteristic of the picaresque often undervalued and even overlooked by the genre's scholars: empathy.

#### Copping A Cognitive Feel: Picaresque and Empath(eor)y of Mind

*Rule of the Bone*, Russell Banks's picaresque love letter to Twain, contains any number of encounters between the picaresque and “human types” inhabiting the Western world, but one seemingly throwaway encounter, lasting less than a page, holds a key to understanding the contemporary picaresque attitude towards the classic rogue's gallery. The picaresque and narrator of the story, Bone, is riding a bus and finds himself sitting next to a soldier who, drinking heavily, won't shut up. Bone rather quickly ascertains that the soldier to whom he is speaking is something of a racist who “really wanted to . . . fucking kick some fucking Arab ass” (113), a sentiment Bone found quite objectionable. Instead of simply shutting the guy out, which would be the response of most people, Bone decided to engage the guy in conversation. Bone tells the soldier he himself is from Israel, but belongs to “an ancient type of wandering Jew called the

Levitites," a tribe Bone explains "settled in Canada and upstate New York back before the Vikings" (113). Bone continues to explain that his people intermarried into various Native American tribes and were now slowly travelling to "Israel where certain skills . . . learned from hundreds of years living alongside the Indians in Canada were highly desirable" (114). The soldier is incredibly impressed by this obviously bogus story (the soldier doesn't appear very bright), and amidst praise points out that Bone will have "plenty of Arabs to fuck with there, man. All that PLO and shit" (113). The scene is quite funny and certainly contains a criticism of anti-Arab sentiment amongst soldiers, but for our purposes the important observation lies with why Bone chose to engage the unpleasant soldier at all.

Rowland Sherrill explains in his analysis of contemporary American incarnations of the picaresque that "[t]he fuller inventory of the American picaresque depends upon skills of empathizing" (165), meaning in practice that contemporary picaros must have "the suppleness of feeling and imagination to be able to walk a mile in the other person's moccasins" (164), as it were. This importance of empathy does not, necessarily, mean that contemporary picaros must be moved emotionally in some transformative way by the people whom they encounter; rather, the empathy Sherrill speaks of has more in common with the philosophical concept of theory of mind than anything entirely emotional. Theory of Mind refers to an individual's cognitive ability to recognize another person's intentionality and deduce the motivations that drive it (Daniel Dennett has referred to this stage in an individual's development as the 'intentional stance'). Sherrill would seem to concur, though his focus is more on the picaro's own motivations: Sherrill considers empathy "a key attribute of the picaro's nature, his heightened capability for sensory attunement to what or whom stands outside of him, to play the human scene as the scene presents itself, instead of surrendering to egotism or succumbing to a preformulated script" (164).

Lazarillo himself even overcame his own hunger long enough to beg food for his impoverished Noble master . . . though he did abandon the poor aristocrat shortly after. Lazarillo's abandonment was not, however, a violation of his empathy, for "this empathy must be 'structured' by firm holds on self-possession and critical senses of limits--the object is not, after all, to 'go native'" such that the picaresque can keep "his own identity intact" (164). Empathy, at least in the common usage, would almost demand some level of going native: while empathy, strictly speaking, is simply the (potentially) mirror neuron driven recognition of emotions in other thinking beings, most people only demand that someone "empathize" with them when they want the other to accept their position (consider PETA's Animal Empathy Test). In Sherrill's estimation, the picaresque does not lose himself or herself in the storm of mirror neuron activity, but instead the picaresque uses this facility to manipulate situations and draw out the subject, gaining a much more authentic engagement while learning more than a "scripted" encounter would allow. This is exactly what Bone manages in the example above: Bone correctly perceives the mind of the soldier and feeds him a story that strikes precisely all of the admittedly limited chords forming the soldier's soul. The soldier is clearly of an authoritarian personality, conservative to the extreme, and thus Bone creates an Israeli Indian narrative that appeals to the anti-Arab prejudice and juvenile need for empowerment fantasies held by the soldier. Bone, through his story, manages to draw the soldier out a little bit more, giving the audience a full view of the specimen. This, ultimately, is the reason picaresque narratives present galleries of human types: for study. The galleries are worthless if the picaresque can't provide an adequate view of the peoples that make up a culture, and in order to accomplish this the picaresque must possess the capacity for a very penetrating empath(eor)y of mind.

While this particular brand of empathy is hardly absent from classic incarnations of the genre, it is present and incredibly prominent in Movement picaresque; in fact, one might argue that picaresque empathy has evolved somewhat, as the imaginative possibilities of the genre allow empathy/theory of mind to take on far more novel forms. Bruce Sterling, in a rather brilliant execution of SF literalization, turns this basic attribute of the picaro into a technique of posthuman engineering in *Schismatrix*. Lindsay had undergone extensive psychological and genetic training provided by the Shaper faction, granting him great facility with something called kinesthetics, the ability to both read body language at a deep and intuitive level and to understand a subject's mind deeply enough to feed the appropriate body language signals in return. Lines like "Lindsay had grasped her kinesics" (16), meaning that Lindsay had, through a very deep and intuitive reading of body language, managed to grasp a subject's mind, are common. Lindsay is able to use this as another picaro might use conversation, manipulating subjects and drawing them out. Aboard the pirate ship Red Consensus, for example, Lindsay makes use of this talent to subtly ease tension and open the pirates up to his proposals: "Lindsay shrugged. It was an excellent shrug: he had captured the feel of the President's own kinesics, and the subliminal mimicry defused the situation for the crucial instant it took him to start talking" (49). Charles Stross uses an identical technique, showing that, though these writers might lack genre awareness in the full sense Mancing intended, they nevertheless seem to be drawing from the same well. Sexbot Freya possesses a mimetic reflex designed to make her resemble humanity as closely as possible, a reflex so strong that it causes her to "try to breathe a sigh of relief" (103), despite being in hard vacuum at the time. Moreover, Freya's own sexuality is based upon the arousal of another, rather than her own desires: "In our default state (unless we're unconditionally imprinted on our One True Love), when someone becomes aroused over one of

us, *we* become aroused over *them*" (21) - something that might seem like a horrible abridgment of one's agency, but it is nevertheless part of a larger package of customization that makes Freya a very empathetic creature, in the fullest theory-of-mind sense of the term. In fact, Granita, an aristo robot to whom Freya briefly becomes enslaved, accuses Freya of having "too much empathy for this age" (96), speaking volumes about the state of what passes for society in the process.

### Conversations Apropos of Nothing

To determine if an encounter presented in the text is dedicated to exploring the social panorama, one must ask a simple question of the text: does the character being encountered exist for the purposes of narrative economy or not? Traditional picaresques, being based around a clear episodic structure, rarely had any overarching plots to speak of and, as such, had little need to worry about narrative economy. A poor employee encountered by the picaro in the first act need not reappear in the third act after having been fired for incompetence, to use a modified instance of Chekov's Gun. Rather, the traditional picaresque could easily form narratives that presented every conceivable walk of life for the picaro's assessment. Sadly, such random, meandering, disconnected episodic narratives have largely vanished due to market fickleness, leaving contemporary picaresques reliant on far more unified narratives that problematize the recognition of fine distinctions between authentic picaresque examinations of the human gallery and mere coincidence deriving from a far-travelling plotline (a space opera might cover vast territory and describe all manner of human society, but that does not necessarily translate to a dissection of the human condition). Even so, one can still see the vestigial tail of encounter for encounter's sake in contemporary picaresques, and these kinds of encounters are easily recognizable for two reasons: first, they are extraneous to the plot, and, second, they demonstrate



picaresque empathy, allowing the picaro to serve as an interested listener and conversationalist, drawing out the other through guile or sincerity (such as Bone's discussion with the Air Force bus traveler discussed above).

*Saturn's Children*, for example, provides certain characters, such as Freya's piano player friend (a robotic playing piano, actually), that clearly serve plot economy. While Freya exchanges banter with Victor, his purpose is primarily to provide Freya with a way to get out of the Venusian gravity well - a Casablanca-style letters of transit plot device, in other words. However, the two characters with whom Freya converses on her way out of the gravity well are different matters entirely. These two encounters - one with the intelligence running the pod taking her up the well and the other with the ship that sails her to Mars - are apropos of nothing. They do not advance the plot, but nevertheless these encounters do serve to both make the world that has been built more detailed while at the same time foregrounding concerns that a so-called "tightly plotted yarn" would miss entirely. Lindy, we learn, is a "disposable pod" (30); her life cycle consists of wrapping Freya inside her "body," making love (how Lindy regards it, anyway) to Telemus, a kind of docking boom arm designed to fling the pods into orbit, docking with the High Wire, the ship upon which she has booked passage, then delivering Freya to Mercury via a maglev track landing. After touchdown, Lindy, for all intents and purposes, "dies" - she is, after all, a disposable pod. This interesting encounter requires very little on Freya's part, it being made clear that Lindy isn't exactly the fastest processor on the motherboard, but even so the encounter fleshes out a chaotic solar system in which sentience is cheap. Moreover, Lindy offers some commentary on the disposability of labor in late-capitalist economies, in which flexible, temporary workers occupy roughly equivalent disposable status.

More indicative of a conversation apropos of nothing (except maybe some mild foreshadowing and a weak instance of utopian desire) is Freya's conversation with the High Wire itself. Freya spends three days in conversation with the High Wire, sharing life stories and providing a bit of exposition; the conversation ultimately evolves into a discussion about obsolescence, following a discussion of why Freya had left Earth to sundog it. Freya's reason: she wanted to "segment [herself] from [her] sibs" (27), partially because of the high suicide rate, itself a function of her sisters' obsolescence. Freya seemed to think that she might be able to escape that "yawning hole in the center of our badly designed lives" (27) by tramping the margins of the solar system. Wondering what the High Wire would do in her place, Freya asks the ship what he would do if a technological advance suddenly rendered him as obsolete as herself. He replies, "Without a job, I think I would head for the stars, to see what's out there" (27), indicating his own utopian impulse to light out for the territories, prompting Freya to conclude that "[h]e's obviously been thinking about that question a lot" (27). Freya began her wandering due to a lack of purpose; the spaceship, not yet obsolete, is nevertheless thinking along similar lines. Lack of purpose is a primary picaresque motivation, but what of the ship? His dissatisfaction and desire for something beyond what amounts to assembly line work stands, like the disposable pod Lindy, as a representation of the frustrations and secret desires of all late-capital workers preparing to be made forever unemployable.

An even better encounter, far more true to the genre heritage (and, for what it is worth, another example of genre awareness), involves Freya's interlude with a company of high-tech hobos. After surviving an assassination attempt and being kicked off of a train, Freya is rescued by a rag-tag group of robots: "a heavy lifter, his short, stubby body sprouting from a tracked plinth, with arms as thick as my torso and multijointed elbows. A pair of munchkins who have

clearly seen better times warm themselves beneath the glimmer of an axle heater. They're hobos or runaways, independents in a world-mill that grinds the spaces of freedom into increasingly fine fragments" (192). One of the hobos is even named Bilbo: Stross, like many British SF writers (such as Iain M. Banks), has a certain fondness for Tolkien, and has here named his tramping, wanderlusting robot after one of fantasy's most beloved aristocrats-turned-tramp - although, this incarnation is "a rust-streaked iron centipede with a low-gee sensor head" (194) rather than an effete hole-dweller. The connection is certainly not an idle one; the hobo-bots describe themselves as "Rail riders three" (192), although, due to certain speech deficiencies, Freya questions whether Bilbo might have actually said "free" instead (192). The fantasy Bilbo preceded trainhopping by a few centuries (though, perhaps, not *trainspotting*, considering the clear narcotic properties of pipe-weed), but the longing for freedom was a component of his character, just as it is with Stross's robotic tramps.

The encounter with the hobos is potentially the most significant in the book, for it is the scene in which truly genuine acts of kindness occurs, free of any kind of ulterior motives or economic considerations. The hobos give her an insulating blanket, company and warmth while sitting around heaters standing in for traditional campfires (they are, after all, on the unterraformed surface of Mars), food in the form of a pirated power supply, and a free ride to Marsport. Freya even comments on it: "This unasked-for kindness is baffling and touching" (193). Here readers are presented with an example of the traditional "brotherhood amongst rogues" scene found in mainstream picaresques, and, as the plot clearly doesn't require this interlude, the reader must conclude that the scene's purpose is to show that relict utopian sentiments do, in some sense, exist at the margins of an otherwise thoroughly commodified solar system. Characteristic of the picaresque genre, Freya's conversation with Bilbo - they "swap

heartbreaks and laugh at each other's tragedies" (195) serves no larger purpose than itself. She spends her time learning all about him: he was a mining robot owned by a larger corporation (robot-owned, of course) who, when the asteroid he and his companions were mining was thoroughly hollowed out, was simply abandoned by his owners, it being far cheaper to build another robot miner elsewhere than to ship his obsolete model off the rock he was stranded on. He tells a fascinating story of how he and his fellow miners scraped together the parts to make a "raft" and drifted seven years, bathed in brain-frying radiation, to a neighboring asteroid, where he sold his story to a news station and bought a ticket to Mars. Bilbo's story highlights the utopian energies in the scene and offers a defamiliarized critique of current attitudes towards worker's rights. Ultimately, Freya spends several days "camping on the roof of a cargo container with Bilbo" (195) and, like any good picaro, she takes something valuable away from her encounter, something just shy of enlightenment: "There's not a vindictive strut in his fuselage, I'll swear. Even now, thinking about him brings a tear to my eye" (197).

*Transmetropolitan* and the Picaresque Haibun

"Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? . . . It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits - a false doorway to the backside of life"

-Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, reflects on the importance of the newspaper to the nationalism project, serving to create the shared sense of culture and unity that bind nations together. Considering the disconnected stories about far-flung places and events that comprise each individual paper, Anderson asks, "Why are these events so juxtaposed? What connects them to each other? . . . The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition . . . shows

that the linkage between them is imagined" (Anderson 33). Anderson concludes that it is both the "novelistic format of the newspaper" (33) and the community's shared ceremony of reading "incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals" (35) not unlike prayer that allows the newspaper to create "that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (35). Clearly understanding the role of the newspaper in building social unity, Hunter S. Thompson uses the newspaper for precisely the opposite purpose in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, integrating news stories for the express purpose of highlighting the disunity and disintegration of America itself. In doing so, Thompson accomplished the rare feat of repurposing of the haibun, the innovative Japanese fusion of travel narrative and haiku, into a postmodern haibun appropriate to our media-saturated lives.

The haibun, of which the most recognizable example in the West is *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* describing Matsuo Bashō's 1500 mile journey across Japan, combines prose and poetry for the purpose of conveying deeper emotional meanings than prose alone is capable. Bashō, for example, travels, in one section, to Ryushaku-ji, a mountain temple which he describes in terms of stark, severe beauty. His prose description is accompanied by the following haiku: "In this hush profound / Into the very rocks it seeps - / The cicada sound" (62), which attempts to capture the emotional weight of the experience through evocative imagery and the special structural features of the haiku itself, such as the cutting word (kireji) or the reflective function sometimes provided by the end verse.

Thompson does not, of course, use much poetry in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (aside from the occasional Bob Dylan lyrics); Thompson's integration of newspaper items serves the same purpose as the haibun's poetry by offering an alternative way of understanding a section of the novel. Moreover, Thompson's news items, unlike Bashō's haiku, serve additionally as an

equivalent of the picaresque's conversations apropos of nothing, requiring only empathetic responses rather than active participation. Chapter 9 of Part 1, entitled "Sympathy for the Devil . . . Newsmen Tortured? . . . Flight into Madness," is a good representative example of Thompson's picaresque haibun in action. The short chapter follows Raoul Duke, Thompson's alter-ego, as he flees the Mint Hotel in order to skip out on a ludicrous room service bill, all the while wondering, tongue-in-cheek, how Horatio Alger would behave in Duke's place. Very little happens in this chapter aside from Duke worrying about arrest while waiting for the hotel to deliver his car to him. Rather than action, the chapter offers up a number of details ranging from the bizarre amount of Neutrogena soap Duke and Dr. Gonzo seem to have stolen from the hotel to Duke's fevered fantasies about how he will handle the situation if he gets pulled over and the arresting officer happens to find the .357 magnum his attorney left in the car. Duke's thoughts are scattered and paranoid, his behavior anything but admirable. While he waits for the carboy, he attempts to calm his nerves by reading a newspaper. At this point, Thompson drops three headlines into the novel,

"TRIO RE-ARRESTED IN BEAUTY'S DEATH"

"GI DRUG DEATHS CLAIMED"

"TORTURE TALES TOLD IN WAR HEARINGS"

accompanied by representative paragraphs from the news stories, much like a haiku interrupts prose in the haibun style. The text following the first headline is as follows:

An overdose of heroin was listed as the official cause of death for pretty Diane Hamby, 19, whose body was found stuffed in a refrigerator last week, according to Clark County Coroner's office. Investigators of the sheriff's homicide team who went to arrest the suspects said that one, a 24-year-old woman, attempted to fling herself through the glass doors of her trailer before being stopped by

deputies. Officers said she was apparently hysterical and shouted, "You'll never take me alive." But officers handcuffed the woman and she apparently was not injured. (72-73)

Hardly calming fare. If these headlines seem grim, consider another headline from a different chapter: "SURGERY UNCERTAIN AFTER EYES REMOVED," which was accompanied by a story about a young man tearing his own eyes out while on PCP. These grim news items offer commentary and perspective on Duke's own egregious behavior, which now seems perfectly in the national character, provided one recognizes that the nation's character has completely disintegrated.

Of course, Thompson's stated objective in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was "to find the American Dream" (6), something Thompson had long regarded as dead. The final lines of the novel, "I took another big hit off the amyl, and by the time I got to the bar my heart was full of joy. I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger... a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident" (204), is, in fact, something of a farewell kiss to the Dream, offering a final repetition of the Horatio Alger motif that dominated the novel. Here, Duke, in all his debased glory, has become (or, perhaps, succumbed to) Horatio Alger, whose young adult novels featuring self-made protagonists were the fantasy essence of the American Dream - a dream that never quite competed with the brutal, exploitative reality. Each of Thompson's news item "haiku" offer commentary on the reality of the Dream, for, whenever Duke looks to the one piece of media that should reinforce the unity of the American identity, he finds only injustice, irrationality, and chaos. The beauty queen is a drug victim, consumed by the culture; the figures of authority and security are corrupt racketeers and bloodthirsty animals. The chapter concludes with Thompson, still awaiting his car, reflecting on "a small item about Muhammad Ali" who received five years in prison "for refusing to kill 'slopes'" (74), further underscoring the utter lack

of justice, reason, and compassion dominating the American character of the time and further butchering the fantasy of the American Dream.

*Transmetropolitan*, heavily infused as it is with the DNA of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, makes extensive use of this technique, only slightly modified due to the graphic medium. The narrative is peppered with little news items, typically without immediate context, such as the following morbid tale: "Children's feedsite author Joan Kettle found murdered by 'My Little Junky' plastic syringe - applause from parents' groups" (1.44). Joan Kettle's death is presented as a background news item, but, as with Thompson's pseudo-haibun approach, the point of view of *Transmetropolitan* often breaks to incorporate random news stories, such as a feedsite report about a man who lost his legs preventing a domestic terrorist from using his Maker to breed nano-scale disassemblers that would consume a small part of the City. The homeless, legless veteran complains, "I saved thousands of lives and they turned me out with two weeks' pay and a bad reference" (4.72), a sentiment which, I think, tends to sum up the modern corporate attitude towards employee welfare, if the bickering by such entities as Papa John's over "Obamacare" and the need to provide health insurance for employees is any indication. As *Transmetropolitan's* larger meditation concerns the abrogation of human rights by conservative politicians interested in power for power's sake, such news haiku help to offer multiple perspectives on the matter.

*Transmetropolitan* also deploys news items as a way to demonstrate the general lack of that empath(eor)y of mind that many critics say is vanishing in our overly-saturated society. Issue four, "New Streets," of "The New Scum" collection, introduces a mother who is selling her daughter's favorite toy in order to buy the child a genetic modification, a "trait" designed to eliminate appetite, so that she wouldn't be hungry. Nothing is said about whether or not the child would be nourished, mind; presumably the appetite suppressant is a stop-gap measure to help the



mother (who apparently also hocked her liver) get by a little longer. The irony isn't lost on the reader, as this is a society with functional nanotechnology: hunger simply has no reason to exist. The people walking past on the sidewalk, oblivious to the plight of the homeless, drive the point home. Jerusalem, up until this point absent from the encounter, intervenes when the lost girl asks for help; after reuniting her with the mother, he buys back her doll. This was but one of several acts of kindness and love either performed or witnessed by Jerusalem during his meanderings through the City, and it is juxtaposed against images of authoritarian brutality, such as the page entitled "shift change at the Richard P. Daley Precinct House," which features police officers showering and attempting to scrub copious amounts of blood off their riot shields and unfriendly-looking truncheons (riot batons having presumably been deemed too non-lethal). In this case, the haiku foreground the inability of the public to imagine the suffering of others; only the marginal figure of the picaro, such as Jerusalem himself, seems to possess the cognitive tools to imagine the inner state of others and properly react.

All SF, to some extent, has made use of a similar technique as part of both SF's unique world-building process and also SF's role in social criticism. In fact, the liberal peppering of a text with fake news stories is quite common: Sterling, Gibson, Morgan, and a host of others in the cyberpunk sub-genre alone make regular use of this technique. However, most instances of this technique tend to be designed to provide background color or plot exposition. Gibson famously used an educational program aimed at children to explain cyberspace to the audience, while films like Verhoeven's 1987 classic *Robocop* incorporate background TV commercials such as the one for "Nukem," a family tabletop game based around realpolitik. The game, with the tag line "Get them before they get you," apparently always ends in collapsed political relations and mutually *ensured* nuclear destruction, as the commercial ends with a huge

mushroom cloud looming up from the board. Nukem, like Gibson's cyberspace instructional video, provides a clever riff on the political attitudes of *Robocop's* futuristic 80s dystopia, but little else besides. *Transmetropolitan*, along with ancestors such as *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, take this technique a step further, repurposed it into a worthy addition to the picaresque toolkit.

#### Preferring Rough Trade: Picaros and the Underworld

Stuart Miller discusses an interesting aspect of the picaresque's theme of empathy: picaros tend to have a kind of unspoken kinship with other roguish types. Like all of the features discussed, this brotherhood amongst rogues does serve the larger theme of chaos; Miller notes that the roguish underworld encountered by the picaro anticipates "the dark overworld the character discover[s], anticipate[s] the darkness of the character-to-be, and help[s] determine the character by assuring that he will encounter more of life's irregularity than most of us" (50). True enough, all picaresques, past and present, share the presence of hosts of unsavory characters. Lazarillo joins (and leaves) the company of many such unsavory sorts during the course of his tale, ranging from blind confidence artists to Catholic fakirs selling indulgences to eager-to-be-duped audiences, and each hints at further deceptions and brutalities, both potential and real, that wait to be visited upon the picaro. Pablos of *El Buscón*, at the novel's conclusion, has thrown in with a band of thieves and gone West, as it were, to the Indies, where, according to Pablos, things were even worse, while all of the prior instances of deception and criminality seem to have foreshadowed this fate. The postcyberpunk picaresque follows closely in this tradition; already mentioned is Lindsay's tenure with the pirates of the Red Consensus, and Jerusalem tends to only leave the underworld by mistake, it being his milieu.

In fact, Movement picaresques regularly make use of the literal underworld, or spaces defined by their anti-establishment orientation. *Angel Station's* "Fringe" operates as a kind of underworld, at least insofar as the shooters operate as a cross between space-based truckers and shysters - another version of Whedon's *Firefly*, in other words. As Williams presents upper-class characters who go slumming in the Fringe for fun, it is safe to consider it an underworld. *Saturn's Children* presents a similar fringe area known as "Junktown" (141), a low-income area of Mars where Freya finds Ferd, one of the requisite "quack doctor" figures who, in this case, actually is something of a quack, doing a quick and dirty disguise for Freya that involves inflating her breasts and loaning her wigs and merkins, etc. (If someone offers you a *loaner* merkin, you know you are in the underworld.) Each of these areas, filled with commonplace and expected instances of exploitation, serves as a mirror for the unexpected yet all-too-real exploitation of the overworld itself.

It should be noted that the picaros are rarely hardened criminals, nor are those they associate with, most of whom operate in the gray areas of the law or, at the very least, have semi-understandable motivations for their anti-social behavior. The true reprobates, such as Huckleberry Finn's father or even the con artists calling themselves the Duke and Dauphin, tend to be either abandoned by the picaros or disposed of by circumstance. Regardless, the crucial realization lies not so much in the presence of such roguish character types (or their degree of roguery thereof) but rather with the bonds that develop or already exist between picaros and rogues<sup>26</sup>. The significance is twofold. First, Miller observes that the underworld motif "not only reflects the roguery of the overworld . . . but it criticizes the overworld by exhibiting an order within disorder, a stability within instability, that the overworld can never attain" (65). This type

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<sup>26</sup> A redundant phrasing, as *picaro* typically translates from the Spanish as *rogue*.

of commentary is hardly unique to the picaresque; nearly any genre choosing to incorporate a thieves' guild motif (games like *Morrowind* or *Arcanum* and literature such as the *Arabian Nights* or *The Lies of Locke Lamora* spring immediately to mind) tends to set the rigid codes of honor and harsh, immediate (arguably ultra-conservative) methods of internal justice against the decadence and liberality of whatever culture the guild inhabits. As Miller observes, the "tricksters or beggars he [the picaro] joins are bound by law and order. *They* never trick their fellow tricksters or infringe on their rights" (65). The second and more important point is really a subtle one hidden in the first: the rogues, who are very sensitive to the wants and needs of others of their own kind/profession, seem capable of levels of empathy unknown in chaotic mainstream, which is typically dominated by greed, commodification, and exploitation without concern for the human costs (again, Lazarillo's indulgence-seller comes to mind - while a clear con artist, he is a *mainstream* con artist). Miller outlines a typical picaro's reasoning process: "Since society is a chaos, a better life may be led outside society in embracing *pure* chaos . . . The world of beggary is revealed as a kind of pastoral Utopia: more efficient, natural, and satisfying than the overworld" (65). The underworld motif, then, delivers a space where society is, ironically, more orderly and more empathetic, dictated by more authentic human relationships.

Movement picaresques foreground this quality of the underworld motif heavily. Brotherhood amongst rogues can be seen even in the first issue of *Transmetropolitan*; as the Angels 8 riot unfolds in a cordoned off section of the City and a media blackout has been enforced, Jerusalem sits atop a strip club, surrounded by exotic dancers, observing and reporting on the heavy-handed actions of the police. Jerusalem develops an immediate rapport with his less-sleazy (compared to himself) companions: one panel shows the girls feeding him cigarettes (1.61) as he writes his live report, assisting and participating in a communal response to the

tragedy. Moreover, Jerusalem's group is profoundly moved by the horror of the spectacle, while the overworld is either blind to the event or, in the form of state authority, actually committing the event, which is by definition empathy-free. One of the strippers is moved enough to become Jerusalem's assistant, in fact, further underscoring the underworld unity such brutal expressions of overworld power enjoin.

*Schismatrix* and *Angel Station* even incorporate into their plots ambitions to create underworld societies, or at the very least to ensure that these societies don't vanish. Lindsay, through a picaresque trick (in this case, an act of blackmail), co-opts an alien Investor queen and creates Czarina-Kluster People's Corporate Republic, "a city-state independent of faction" (169). Lindsay envisions the city as "a circumsolar free port, the ultimate sundog zone" (169), hoping to create avenues by which picaresque experiences and authenticity can be explored. After all, his wife Nora had been a victim of Shaper ideology before being "freed" by picaresque attitudes. This idea seems to be core to the "underworlds" of Movement picaresques at least: they exist to provide avenues for picaresque engagement, and if they do not exist then the protagonists are engaged in bringing them into being. *Angel Station* features a similar act of creation, necessary because the unity and brotherhood of the shooter underworld was in the process of being destroyed by the economic policy of Consolidation (described in detail elsewhere). Beautiful Maria observes that "[o]nce, before Consolidation had taken hold, shooters were something like a huge, promiscuous family" (24), highlighting that rogues understand rogues and that, whatever their other moral failings might be, their societies feature freedom and empathy lacking in the instrumental overworld cultures. Consolidation, by contrast, forced shooters at each other's throats in order to compete for artificially scarce contracts (with the losers having to become wage-slaves to stultifying corporate shipping concerns), killing in the process the beauty of the

Fringe underworld. *Angel Station* concludes with Ubu and Maria using the chokehold they have on alien trade not to profit via their own version of consolidation but rather to ensure that only the free shooter families, the underworld, can deal with the alien clans, thus (re)creating avenues of possibility for picaresque experience. While the underworld motif is just as prevalent as ever, heavy authorial focus on the *creation* of underworlds for the express purpose of redemptive picaresque experience (and, one might argue, utopian alternatives) is somewhat new in the picaresque mode yet is well-represented in SF.

#### Pulling Out Early: The Picaro-Landscape Relationship

"I do believe / if you don't like things you leave / for someplace you've never gone before"

- The Velvet Underground, "I Found a Reason" (1970)

Picaros are marked by a peculiar relationship with the landscape(s) in which they are placed. Specifically, picaros are not, in any real sense, tied to their environments, tending to regularly abandon one environment for another. Wicks, speaking of "the protagonist's interaction with society," notes that the picaro's trajectory features "movement from exclusion to attempted inclusion and back to exclusion: outside, inside, outside, resolved finally by a kind of self-exclusion through spiritual, moral, or psychological conversion, which in effect turns the tables on the world by renouncing it, as it had always rejected the picaro" (61). Obviously this rhythm is partially the product of the picaro's abandonment and desire to seek replacement father figures in the form of "masters," but the effect is more interesting than the cause: picaros' personalities are far less the product of one specific environment (at least insofar as that environment features in their sense of self) and, as such, picaros are far more likely to abandon environments with little to no thought.

This tendency of the picaro is often presented as a source of comedy, for picaros constantly disrupt presumably inviolable social landscapes by violating their invisible barriers (mocking upward mobility), only to retreat after doing so. Fueling this is a certain conflict of viewpoints. A picaro would see himself or herself as simply "looking for a home. But from society's point of view, he is an upstart, and this is true of all levels of society, none of which make room for him. He is truly outside" (Wicks 61). While this misunderstanding allows for a satire of class and the invisible barriers preventing upward mobility, the deeper function lies in the mobility itself, both geographic and social, for it is only through this inclusion/exclusion relationship that the full gallery of human types "who appear as representatives of the landscape" (Wicks, "Nature" 245) can be encountered. Referring to both environmental and protocultural diversity, Sherrill points out that through "these travels, the picaros and picaras, en masse, naturally become narrative agents for the reader's vicariously covering vast, almost unimaginable reaches of American ground and thus amplifying his or her senses of the 'size' of the American place" (177). The picaro's unique relationship with the landscape not only provides readers with a way to imagine an almost unimaginably vast landscape but also provides "the picaro's views into ignored or neglected or at least less-travelled territories" (177) due to the picaro's marginal observer status, whether that territory is an upper-class dinner party or the seldom-visited ruins of a factory. Through the picaro's various disruptions, a kind of "cultural inventory" can occur, one that is not limited to any particular and biased perspective.

To return to the original point, it is the picaro's disconnection from the landscape and ability to leave at the drop of a hat that makes any kind of cultural stocktaking possible, and as such the tendency can be seen in picaros from any era. The proto-picaro (proto, as the genre hadn't yet been named) Lazarillo is well-known for his penchant for abandoning situations for

little, if any, reason. His abandonment of the blind beggar was due to abuse, but his abandonment of the first priest is due to a simple desire to get a bit more to eat. Regardless, being without family, father, and potentially religion, Lazarillo's various landscapes had little to do with his sense of self, unlike, for example, Tolkien's hobbits, who, despite going on vaguely picaresque jaunts, possess identities and even bodies that are innately tied to the Shire. Unlike Bilbo and Frodo, who are romance characters operating in a picaresque mode, Lazarillo feels no deep spiritual pull to some mystical homeland. Sylvie, the temporarily furloughed picara of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, also has little trouble dropping her domestic life when a custody hearing she couldn't successfully fight becomes inevitable; she and Ruth simply walk across the bridge, out of Fingerbone, disappearing onto the roads of America as drifters.

Movement picaros, inherently mobile as all Movement fiction protagonists tend to be, are also just as tenuously connected to the landscape and just as likely to vanish at any time. By page 31 of the *Schismatrix*, Lindsay has been a diplomat, a revolutionary, a homeless sundog, a theatre impresario, and the "Secretary of State" of the Fortuna Miners' Democracy, a pirate nation-state existing on a single ship. Each transition displays his willingness to cut and run and how little his environment defines him; for instance, despite having made quite a name for himself (and a large sum of money) at the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu by organizing a successful stage production and defeating an assassin sent to recruit or kill him, Lindsay decides to drop everything and move on. The place and the identity that went along with it were not important enough to fight to keep. Similarly, Ubu and Maria blow Angel Station when their scams backfire and the bank threatens foreclosure on their ship. Their goal is to hunt singularities in deep space that can be sold for inclusion in starship drives, but the manner of their exit, which involves stealing their own ship and eluding military patrols, means the



effective destruction of their reputations and identities, unless of course they manage to strike it rich, something in no way guaranteed. Freya blows Venus under similar circumstances: after offending a powerful robot aristocrat by tearing the head off of one of her dwarf robot servants, Freya accepts a status as fugitive and *persona non grata* by quitting Venus without finding it necessary to deal with the consequences. Jerusalem makes an identical choice when the government whose foibles he has exposed strong-arms his firing from his newspaper (including the cancelling of his journalist's insurance and the revocation of his credit cards and apartment, both provided through the paper). Jerusalem simply walks out, deciding to become a homeless journalist, writing for underground feedsites: "No job, no place, no friends, no hope - what now? . . . I haven't felt this good in years!" (6.142). In fact, Jerusalem's decision to leave behind a trap for the officers tasked with evicting him, one designed to infect them with an embarrassing Martian STD, is entirely consistent with the picaro's willingness to burn bridges. Like Lindsay, Freya, Ubu, and Maria, Jerusalem's readiness to go rogue - Jerusalem had, in fact, planned the move long before, maxing out the company credit cards and stripping the apartment in preparation - demonstrates that his identity is unconnected to any particular social landscape and, free from such ties, he can withdraw from one location and explore others at will.

Such freedom does allow for a greater interaction with the social panorama, but it also underscores the prevalence of chaos in the picaro's larger environment. The readiness of the picaro to abandon the sense of place most cherish demonstrates that identity is not the product of environment, and in doing so the picaro's mobility flies in the face of a long tradition of nationalism aimed at tying a person's sense of self to a larger sense of shared identity built on what amounts to shared environment (shared geography, shared social and cultural traditions, etc.). How stable can the world be if there are people who regularly and readily toss to the wind

that sense of self others are taught is so crucial and takes so long to understand (consider the huge self-help business built around helping individuals "find themselves"). Moreover, the circumstances that lead to a picaresque's decision to abandon a place work to decenter the human, as unexpected or uncontrollable forces tend to drive the picaresques to flee. Lindsay is regularly forced to move onward because the political ambitions of Constantine find his existence inconvenient; Jerusalem's movements are often forced by the same political inconvenience. Jerusalem might actively draw ire from the government, but Lindsay does no such thing; in either case, that standby trope of the shadowy government agency that exists beyond any individual's hope of control, beyond even an individual's hope of comprehension, has long operated as a stand-in for incomprehensible, uncontrollable natural forces; the tornado that sucks Dorothy off of her dirt farm is no more graspable or guidable by Dorothy herself than is the clandestine and regularly retconned conspiracy at the heart of the *X-Files*. Interestingly, a rarely discussed aspect of the picaresque, the natural landscape itself, also works to compliment the decentering the human subject begun by the picaresque's inside/outside movement pattern.

#### The Picaresque and the Environmental Sublime

The picaresque has roots in travel narratives and, as such, some (but not all) picaresque texts incorporate an aesthetic appreciation of the natural landscape separate from the more familiar explorations of the social landscape. This appreciation goes beyond simple beauty, however; the environmental descriptions found in picaresque texts tend to be characterized by the presence of the sublime. Emily Brady describes the environmental sublime as the condition of "natural objects or phenomena having qualities of great height or vastness or tremendous power which cause an intense emotional response characterized by feelings of being overwhelmed and somewhat anxious, though ultimately an experience that feels both exciting

and pleasurable" (6). Much like the sense of wonder and awe cornerstone to SF narrative, the sublime is dependent upon an individual's feeling dwarfed by something greater and arguably alien; the natural vistas and formations that tend to be associated with the sublime, things such as canyons, volcanoes, and monsoons, are not directed by any kind of intentionality and yet are active phenomenon, and as such can be seen as an incomprehensible, alien force. Moreover, sublime phenomena are not simply passages descriptive of beauty. Beauty tends to be rendered by most authors in terms of order and tends to provide (or at least is intended to provide) pleasure; the sublime, by contrast, tends to be disordered, random, uncontrolled, moving far beyond pleasure into awe.

Consider three passages indicative of the sublime in picaresque fiction. The first is taken from the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and is Huck's description of a thunderstorm on the Mississippi.

We spread the blankets inside for a carpet, and eat our dinner in there. We put all the other things handy at the back of the cavern. Pretty soon it darkened up, and begun to thunder and lighten; so the birds was right about it. Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest--FST! it was as bright as glory, and you'd have a little glimpse of tree-tops a-plunging about away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could see before; dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder let go with an awful crash, and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling, down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs--where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know. (32)

The dominant feeling of Huck's description is one of insignificance as Huck describes in rather poetic terms a phenomenon far more vast than he, one unconcerned and uninfluenced by Huck or

humanity in general. The second illustration, taken from Russell Banks's *Rule of the Bone*, is a mirror of Twain's passage and describes a similar light show, this one provided by fireworks rather than thunderstorms.

Check it out, I-Man said then using another one of my trademark expressions and meaning for us to view the fireworks. They were really filling the sky now and it looked like Star Wars or something, more like the birth of the planet than the nation with these huge blasts like supernovas going off and spreading out in circular waves of red and orange and purple and then boom-ba-booms in long spine-rattling chains. Great draping clouds of smoke hung down like gray rags and you could see the bright roofs of the whole town spread out below and the trees of the lakeside park all lit from above like from flares and out on the lake you could see the fireworks reflected off of the water where way beyond in the darkness was the city of Burlington, Vermont. And if you squinted you could see the Vermonters' fireworks going up into their darkness too. Further down along the shore on the far side of the lake you could see the fireworks from the smaller towns and harbors and boatyards and on the near shore to the south along the New York side of the lake there were fireworks going off at Willsboro and the people of Westport were shooting rockets into their version of the same darkness as we had over us. (179)

The same sense of awe at such an overwhelming phenomenon is just as present as it is in Huck's narration, and although these fireworks are of human origin, Bone describes them using terms borrowed from both nature and science fiction. By comparing the fireworks - themselves products of complex chemistries Bone doesn't understand - to supernovas and *Star Wars* space battles, this passage takes on the same sublime character as Huck's description of the Mississippi thunderstorm. Both are beyond the viewers' comprehension, and both render the viewer small and meaningless through awe. The last is a smaller example taken from *Transmetropolitan*, but it serves the same purpose.

And when the sun falls down on this City, it's transformed; it blooms again, in impossible blazes of a million colors you'd forgotten even existed, winter's been here so long. It wakes me, shakes me from the grey I'd been living in, reminds me why I'm alive, why I'm here, why I do what I do. (5.36)

Ellis's descriptive passage is not as complex as the passages found in Twain and Banks, but the graphic novel medium really doesn't lend itself as well to passages of long narrative exposition. The role of wonder and awe generated by the environment is the same, however, as description and accompanying art present readers with a complex and overwhelming natural phenomenon made all the more potent for occurring inside the City itself. Strictly speaking, the blooming of spring occurs not in but rather on or over the City, demonstrating that even the complex and futuristic technological heterotopia that is the City is still subject to nature. Jerusalem isn't rendered inconsequential by this experience; one could, however, regard his being shaken "from the grey" as a kind of insignificance, in the sense he is gaining perspective on his own importance. As such, this instance of the sublime provides a positive transformative experience while continuing to foreground awe and unpredictability.

By reminding the individual of their quite inconsequential place relative to the landscapes they inhabit, the sublime can assist in undermining colloquial and religious ideas of order, meaning, and purpose (though it is true that the opposite can occur, if the one apprehending the sublime associates it with divine authority and feels as if they are powerless to resist); the environmental sublime, regardless of arguments attempting to pull religious experience out of the imagery, ultimately operates by decentering the human subject and confronting him or her with a vast and random experience, such as Huck's thunderstorm or even Jerusalem's unlooked-for blooming of spring. This experience is inherently meaningless and purposeless, at least insofar as those terms have meaning; no human intelligence directed the sublime experience, and any attempt to overlay it with theological significance is no more than a weak effort to combat the sense of insignificance sublimity inspires. While not quite picaresque, McCarthy's travel narrative *The Road* ends with such an image: brook trout, unfathomable in their extinction. Even

the sublime experiences that originate with human actions can reflect a kind of meaninglessness, simply because the viewer (Bone, for example) isn't really capable of understanding them, lacking the shared history and experiences that might make such controlled understanding possible. Bone, for instance, ends the novel staring up at the stars from a boat he has taken work on. He is dwarfed by the experience, reflective as it is of his own rudderless life, and, not knowing any of the constellations, he can't locate any comforting patterns. Instead, he simply decides upon his own constellations, making the overwhelming experience a transformative one, as did Jerusalem, but only because Bone provided the meaning himself.

Ultimately, sublime imagery in the picaresque tends to undermine any belief in the possibility of control by demonstrating that the world is more vast and overwhelming than any small creature can ever hope to encompass. *Angel Station's* lyrical descriptions of shooters riding singularities always emphasize that they are ultimately powerless; eventually the quantum computers running the simulations that allow the shooters some bare control over their jumps can't keep up with the information streaming out of the singularities and the shooters must surrender control and let the jump, called a whitehole, happen. That the primary mode of transportation in *Angel Station* is an object that literally consumes the travelers whole before spitting them out (hopefully) closer to their destination, the black hole - arguably the most awe-inspiring of nature's wonders and, being rarely accused of beauty but always an object of reverence and fear, something of an ideal sublime image - says much about the protagonists' singular lack of control.

Like the black holes of *Angel Station*, the sublime swallows egotism and orderly control of life along with history and teleological understandings of meaning. Robinson's *Housekeeping* features a central motif that is a more earthly version of Williams's black hole, rendered as a

mountain lake swallowing a train: "The disaster took place midway through a moonless night. The train, which was black and sleek and elegant, and was called the Fireball, had pulled more than halfway across the bridge when the engine nosed over toward the lake and then the rest of the train slid after it into the water like a weasel sliding off a rock" (6). Narrator Ruth's grandfather and Sylvie's father died in this disaster, and the incident continues to haunt the minds of both characters. Sylvie confesses to being unable to sleep on trains, having spent years wondering about the tramps who were sleeping in the boxcars when her father's train plunged into the lake. Ruth, a generation separated from this bit of family lore, even dreams about it: "I dreamed that the bridge was a chute into the lake and that, one after another, handsome trains slid into the water without even troubling the surface" (174). Ruth's dream reinforces the subject decentering function of the sublime; the lake functions no differently than the black hole, gobbling up the train without any of the comforting closure people need. Sylvie's father, and the train itself, were never found, and despite extensive searching a "suitcase, a seat cushion, and a lettuce were all they retrieved" (6). *Housekeeping's* central image of the train disaster challenges humanity's centrality by denying the community the kind of apocalyptic closure that allows people to make sense of an event and to feel that they are still relevant.

By decentering the subject and foregrounding the inherent chaos of the natural world, the sublime provides a perfect aesthetic complement to both SF and the picaresque. Picaros, unburdened by pretensions of control and lacking any sense of place, are surprisingly well-suited to experiencing the sublime, which requires something akin to a naked soul. A creationist, burdened with certainty and tautological explanations, is armored by scripted (scriptured?) responses against experiencing the raw sublime of, for example, the Grand Canyon, its awe having been neutered by explanations that deny it its own history and magnitude. All that

remains for them is the religious sublime, a very different animal. Picaros, however, can authentically engage the environmental sublime, letting both the wonder and the chaos color the text.

#### Parodic Prophylaxis: Picaresque Social Criticism

The central argument of Rowland Sherrill's *Road-Book America* is that the new picaresque provides a cartographic function for the rapidly changing social terrain of contemporary Americana; he states quite plainly that the "objective of the New American picaresque is . . . the new Columbian expedition, the rediscovery of America" (66). We should not, however, make the mistake of assuming that this is a passive process, that the picaro and the accompanying narrative tries to achieve, like the classic alien observer of SF, some sort of objective distance. Claudio Guillén very pointedly lists social criticism as the fourth of his standard features of the genre, stating that "[t]he total view of the *pícaro* is reflective, philosophical, critical on religious or moral grounds . . . the *pícaro* is an ongoing philosopher, as a constant discoverer and rediscoverer, experimenter and doubter where every value or norm is concerned" (82). No passive observer is the picaro; in both classical and contemporary picaresques, the picaro is a figure who critiques, seeing through the holograms that constitute culture and, like all satire, hopefully inoculating the reader against mind viruses. Jerusalem sums up the picaro's job quite effectively: "If you're going to be a real journalist, you're going to need to learn how to look" (2.10), for, just like Lazarillo seeing the through the cheap theatrics of the indulgence-seller, picaros must be able to see deeply if they have any hope of protecting the public from irrational and dangerous thinking.



Movement picaresque, like all SF, comes with its own investment in social criticism, seeking to map the social and intellectual terrain, not simply to allow the reader a better understanding of the culture, but rather to take each and every topographical feature of this terrain to task, leveling many in the process. Consider *Saturn's Children's* treatment of Creationism, that odd movement that seeks to undermine a century and a half of solid science. Stross, in an effort to defamiliarize the issue, makes the vast majority of the robots inhabiting his post-humanity solar system Creationists in the strictest sense - they were, after all, (semi)intelligently designed. While travelling, Freya meets and engages in conversation a pair of twin aristos, one of whom is a staunch Creationist, spouting a standard line of reasoning employed by intelligent-design advocates: "Nonsense! The religious doctrine of evolution relies on the transubstantiation of the holy design by the miracle of mutation. We do not mutate, we are manufactured. So I refute it" (80)<sup>27</sup>. As McLuhan said, the medium is indeed the message: the robots, being intentionally designed, are clearly biased in their interpretation of biological processes, about which, being silicon-based, space-dwelling robots, they tend to know next-to-nothing about. This quite effectively satirizes the position of most Creationists, who tend to be unconcernedly ignorant of the actual science and, being intentional beings themselves, are cognitively biased to seek intention in everything else. Stross sets up this parodic critique of Creationism quite early, and the payoff at the end of the novel is too precious to exclude. One of the bio-engineers working on humanity's resurrection attempts to explain their decision to also include a fully-functional Tyrannosaurus Rex in the human habitat as follows: "There are some

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<sup>27</sup> Using robots to point out the irrationality of the intelligent design movement is not unique: *Futurama*, in the season six episode "A Clockwork Origin," sees Professor Farnsworth, after fleeing earth in disgust when a hyper-evolved orangutan academic rejects evolution, accidentally creating a fast-evolving race of robotic life that refuses to accept that it was originally created by Farnsworth.

surviving texts that depict Tyrannosaurs in close proximity with our Creators. . . . They depict humans hunting Tyrannosaurs and insist that they existed at the same time, during a period they refer to as antediluvian. It's a little controversial, but who are we to argue. The Creators presumably knew their own operating parameters" (272). The general reference is to the many Creationist apologetics that attempt to reconcile clearly irreconcilable paleontology with theology; the specific reference is most likely to the Kentucky Creation Museum, which features Hollywood-quality animatronics exhibits featuring none other than humans and dinosaurs co-existing. The joke, as if it needs to be spelled out, is that these humans clearly don't know "their own operating parameters" in any way.

*Saturn's Children* is hardly alone in its efforts to combat the spread of questionable belief; *Transmetropolitan* aims its critical cannon at nearly every aspect of modern life imaginable, but, like the picaresque progenitor *Lazarillo de Tormes* and latecomer *Saturn's Children*, it reserves special attention for religion. Jerusalem observes without hyperbole that "a new church is invested every six hours in the City" (1.24), and one of these churches becomes the target of much of Jerusalem's critical ire. "Transience is all about the right to change your species. With a change in species comes a change in perspective, and a change in needs" (1.25): Fred Christ offers this very insincere explanation for his movement which aims to transform parishioners into aliens (the little grey kind) at a biological level. On the surface this isn't that bad an idea: many people would benefit from the ability to become Other. However, like many theological movements, the good intentions fade the deeper one delves. Fred Christ, who is clearly a parody of popular televangelists and other not-so-religious leaders, has very specific spiritual requirements: "I've told you people, it's vital to the cause that I get uninterrupted sex at least every six hours" (1.35). Admittedly, embracing humanity is a worthy goal for any religious

institution, but Christ takes loving humanity a bit too far: his church is ultimately exposed as a scam to score sex, and a particularly loathsome variant at that. After a police action against his movement, he is "found huddling in a bar with a thirteen year-old girl with no clothes on" (1.67), paralleling countless incidents of sexual abuse common to cult movements such as David Koresh's Branch Davidians and to mainstream institutions like the Catholic Church. The materialism of religion is further underscored throughout the series with jokes concerning the irreverent commercialism of such products as the "Air Jesus," an "all-terrain sports shoe" that lets you walk on many non-traditional surfaces, as a commercial set upon the sea of Galilee proves (2.32). Stross attacks the flawed reasoning of Creationism, but Ellis, not unlike that wisely anonymous author who penned *Lazarillo de Tormes*, goes for the throat: the self-serving materialism of a self-professed selfless, anti-materialist worldview.

*Saturn's Children* and *Transmetropolitan* also take aim at that other religion of the modern world: corporate capitalism. Perhaps the most high-profile act of faith embodying America's unquestioned faith in corporate efficiency and sovereignty is the curious decision to grant personhood status to corporate entities - an idea that many, many SF authors such as Cory Doctorow and Stross himself have railed against. The movement leading to corporate personhood had been building in the courts since at least 1819, but it was with the 1886 Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad case that corporations were granted personhood status by the US Supreme Court, at least insofar as taxation was concerned. The most recent and by far most controversial (and alarming) incident in the evolution of corporate ontological status was the Supreme Court's decision in 2010's *Citizen's United v. Federal Election Commission*, which put forth the ruling that corporate entities had the right of free speech in the political arena, meaning that corporations could practice free speech by using unlimited corporate funds to finance

political candidates. This decision has been condemned by many, irrespective of party lines, and yet still stands. Stross thoroughly lambasts this idea through classic SF defamiliarization: since humanity has gone extinct, the solar system in *Saturn's Children* is completely free of traditional persons, leaving only robots who, being considered property under the relict human legal system, can only be recognized as persons by . . . incorporating.

Freya explains the bizarre consequences of this situation as follows: "if my company ever falls into liquidation, I--as my own principle asset--am vulnerable to receivership. The threat of the arbeiter [sic] auction block is a very real one, for there is no such thing as unconditional freedom" (139). This is in fact what happens; one of Freya's enemies launches a hostile takeover of her person/company, filing numerous lawsuits with the aim of bankrupting her using the standard court-of-law-as-weapon method that corporate raiders often use. Unable to fight back financially (she is, after all, an itinerant), she lapses into "*Bankruptcy*. . . . [leaving her] legal personhood . . . suspended" (150). Personhood suspended, Freya is free to be bought and sold by anyone with capital and the desire to own a slave. The criticism is clear: by divorcing the idea of personhood from actual persons and monetizing it, personhood can be stripped of any and all of the once-inalienable rights humanism fought to imbue it with. Stross furthers his criticism by suggesting that corporate assaults on the integrity of personhood are regularly combated by another distinctly picaresque motif, the brotherhood of rogues: Freya's sister models do regularly pool resources to prevent this type of hostile takeover, ensuring that no one's personhood can be bought out from under them. The irony lies in the fact that this is exactly the kind of empowering that the 2010 Citizen's United v. Federal Election Commission decision undercut, as private citizens' political contributions suddenly became meaningless against the vast resources of multinational corporations, no matter how many private individuals pooled funds.

While *Transmetropolitan* does not critique the idea of corporate personhood, it does regularly examine the exploitation corporatized economies experience. *Transmetropolitan's* world does, in fact, feature actual outer-space aliens - little grey Whitley Strieber-style grey guys, actually - but these artifacts of genuine alien Otherness, rather than being celebrated and studied, have been consumed, spit out, and left as invisible third-world citizens<sup>28</sup>, lower even than *Alien Nation's* Newcomers. *Transmetropolitan's* religious huckster figure, Fred Christ, who has based his religion upon the practice of surgically becoming alien, points out that the "aliens don't have much to trade. World culture used up their initial fashion innovation within two years" (1.37). The very fact that a literal alien artifact could be assimilated and disregarded in two years serves as a very powerful hyperbolic statement: consumer culture is so pervasive and stultifying that something as inherently novel as an alien culture could be stripped of novelty in a few years. Ultimately the aliens are forced "to peddle their own genetic structure to body-perverts in order to survive" (1.38), reducing them to a level of economic desperation regularly seen in third-world countries. Ellis makes it clear that expanding markets and consumerist obsolescence have no provisions for rationally-motivated value selection. In fact, the aliens are hardly the only third-world figures in *Transmetropolitan*: the City, the heart of the first-world, is filled to bursting with third-world poverty, providing a clear indictment of American economic policies that allow upwards of 20% of American children to live below the poverty line, according to the 2012 Census. Jerusalem, in one of his regular news feeds, reports on a flesh-eating disease "called the Grazer. This disease used to be limited to what were called 'third world' countries - the undeveloped nations, the ultimate poverty zones. Now it exists only in America" (3.86). Jerusalem interviews a child suffering from the disease; half of the child's face is rotted away,

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<sup>28</sup> Similar to the premise of Gwyneth Jones's Aleutian Trilogy.

leaving visible bone and muscle. The child, responding to the idiot mainstream reporter accompanying Jerusalem who had asked what the kid wished to be when he grew up, replies "nothing." This section highlights growing concerns about the class and wealth gap in America, such as those raised by writers like Joe Bageant, author of *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War*.

Didacticism is inherent in the picaresque, at least as far as the theme of social criticism is concerned; the goal of the genre is very much to inoculate reader against whatever harmful or sloppy thinking or practices the pizaro manages to expose. Lazarillo exposed the greedy, parsimonious nature of a Catholic priest for the purpose of demythologizing the authority figure and ensuring that readers would not fall for the same tricks; *Saturn's Children* and *Transmetropolitan* expose religious and economic exploitation for the same reason. Sherrill believes that when pizaros travel, taking in the social panorama, they "familiarize 'the alien' and defamiliarize 'the ordinary' stuff of American existence, becoming in the process "a special form of cultural criticism" (207) intended to offer a corrective function to problematic cultural baggage. Sherrill considers this the social work of the genre: "If smug egotisms, suspicious provincialisms or stereotyping hatreds, and indeed unaccountable xenophobic frights reside in Americans scattered about the country, . . . the pizaros and pizaras and the picaresque diagnose those social ills" (136), and indeed, this is the precise function *Transmetropolitan* seeks to provide.

Arguably the most didactic issue of *Transmetropolitan*, "My Boyfriend is a Virus," is devoted to the exploration of the "foglet" community and, via the defamiliarizing narrative device of Channon's boyfriend choosing to transcend into a cloud of nanomachines, the subsequent exploration of the social benefits of diversity and the accompanying dangers

prejudice. Channon, Jerusalem's assistant, is depressed because of her boyfriend's upcoming transformation and is only able to see his decision as an act of self-destruction. She states that "[h]e's dumped me so that he can go kill himself" (2.73), revealing the feelings of rejection and abandonment informing her disapproval. The foglets (and Jerusalem himself) regard the act as something far removed from suicide, however: Tico Cortez, Jerusalem's nanohuman friend, explains that "[w]e [foglets] have no physical needs. All we have to do is amuse ourselves. Being regular humans can get in the way of that. Ziang wants to work miracles and play forever in the fields of the city" (2.85). The dilemma is that Channon's perspective doesn't allow for her boyfriend's perspective to exist (primarily due to personal reasons, as is usually the case); her limited view of humanity prevents her from accepting and even benefiting from her boyfriend's decision.

Jerusalem, in full didactic mode, uses a very picaresque technique to attempt to widen the perspective of both Channon and the audience: "I'm going to have them strip off my byline and lay yours in, and you'll get the fee . . . and you're going to write about your boyfriend's downloading" (2.75). By forcing Channon into the role of gonzo reporter, Jerusalem effectively provides her with the opportunity to experience, even temporarily, the open position of the picaro, someone whom Sherrill describes as "the perfect student" (145), a position that should hopefully afford her the distance to understand her boyfriend on his own terms. In order to help her along by providing a bit of historical context, Jerusalem delivers a lecture, clearly taking on the role of teacher (and illustrating the open-mindedness of picaros in the process). During the lecture, Jerusalem gives Morevac's argument (not to mention Katherine Hayles's similar argument) that one's status as human is entirely flexible: "if a guy has a prosthetic leg, is he still human?" (2.80) in the hopes of helping Channon to understand that "human" is something of a

loaded term. Sadly, Channon can't yet overcome her prejudice, even after witnessing her boyfriend's uploading, and leaves Jerusalem's employment to become a bride of Christ - not a nun, mind, but a servant of the crackpot religious leader mentioned previously. Despite her failure, the audience, seeing the issue through Jerusalem's eyes, is able to learn that the term *human* is problematic and needs to be given serious thought.

While lessons about tolerance and understanding might seem somewhat juvenile, more appropriate to children's and young adult programming rather than serious SF, one should consider that demonizing one's enemy based on that slippery category of "human" is alive and well, playing a role in the background of US/Middle East affairs. Chris Kyle, the late Marine sniper, demonstrates the dehumanization present in US attitudes towards the Middle East in his book *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History*. Kyle regularly refers to the enemy combatants using various epithets, the most common of which is *savage*; Kyle confesses that "I hated the damn savages I'd been fighting" (n. pag.) and that he "only wish[ed] I had killed more. Not for bragging rights, but because I believe the world is a better place without savages out there taking American lives"(n. pag.) Kyle justifies his hatred by labeling his enemy "evil.": "That's what we were fighting in Iraq. That's why a lot of people, myself included, called the enemy 'savages.'" (n pag.). In all fairness, Kyle's targets were anything but the world's most upstanding, benevolent citizens, but to label them "savage" and "evil" serves to rob them of any humanity.

Describing a grenade-wielding woman he had shot and killed, Kyle states that "[m]y shots saved several Americans, whose lives were clearly worth more than that woman's twisted soul" (n. pag.), very unintentionally echoing a line from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall": "I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child. "Phillip Cole, in *The Myth of Evil*, discusses the



dehumanizing effect of the concept of evil; his work is "an exploration of the borderlands of humanity, a study of what it is to be a human being, but also of what it is not to be" (9). Cole argues that once a person commits an act deemed evil by a community, they lose the status of being human and can thus be treated in any way the community sees fit, all in the name of protecting whatever thin definition of humanity a culture uses to justify its own worldview and mythology. This act punishes diversity, prevents understanding, and this is the very trap that Kyle falls into, as do many Americans. The picaresque, through its familiarizing of the unfamiliar and continual social critique, seeks to provide a corrective for this cognitive trap.

#### Self-Love: Parody and Picaresque Self-Referentiality

Most critics have strongly suggested that the picaresque is defined by a self-referential nature. Wicks makes plain that "Generic self-reference" (*Picaresque* 62) is one of the genre's defining characteristics, stating that "self-consciousness is coded into the" (62) literary DNA of the picaresque. There is certainly truth to this: Wicks notes that "self-reference enters the picaresque narrative tradition with *Justina*" (62), and indeed, *Justina*, by the end of her story, "is about to contract another marriage with Guzmán himself" (Sieber 26-27), linking her with the hero of Alemán's picaresque classic, *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Most early picaresques demonstrated an extreme degree of interplay between each other, making the genre something of an ongoing dialogue (with critics such as Cervantes occasionally getting in a few words). Howard Mancing, however, considers genre self-consciousness to be far more important to the picaresque's identity than do critics such as Wicks; Mancing takes the very inflexible position that generic self-awareness is the single defining feature of the picaresque genre.

Mancing puts forth the argument that "the picaresque novel has been characterized by nothing so much as its own self-awareness: a picaresque novel is essentially a work presented as such" (196), reasoning that all other features are "protean" and unstable; one picaresque work may feature a serious, moralizing tone while another might be critical of morality itself, etc. Mancing is very insistent that generic self-referentiality be the only defining criteria of the picaresque; he goes so far as to say that there is no "return to the picaresque novel" (196) in any perceptible sense in such works as Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Kerouac's *On the Road*, Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, and other novels largely seen as picaresque, despite the overlap of numerous other features common to the genre. According to Mancing's logic, "the only major novelist of the century who displayed a consciousness of writing a picaresque novel is Mark Twain, in his *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" (193), primarily because Twain had indicated in early letters that one of his novel's ancestors would be *Gil Blas*. By acknowledging Huck's ancestry, the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* becomes picaresque . . . despite the main defining feature Twain takes from the *Gil Blas* model is the first-person autobiographical form rather than any particular plot elements.

Mancing's rigid position leads him to conclude that "[a]fter the eighteenth century, the conscious writing of a picaresque novel is at best an occasional event. The absence of the immediate tradition necessarily weakens the connection with the genre" (197), but does not this statement reveal the weakness of this line of reasoning? Most critics recognize Petronius's wonderful *Satyricon*, composed sometime around the end of the first century AD, as a precursor of the picaresque, if not the first picaresque work on record (and, when one views the wandering sexual hi-jinks and outright frauds perpetrated by Encolpius through Wicks's modal approach, it is nearly impossible to see the work as anything else). Mancing's reasoning would imply that for

*Lazarillo de Tormes* or *Gil Blas* to be fully picaresque, they must engage in some self-referential dialogue with their own genre predecessors, which would include the *Satyricon* (or, somewhat a-temporally, that the *Satyricon* needs to somehow reference the yet-to-be Spanish founding texts of the genre, if one takes the position that the picaresque narrative originated in Spain). The 18th Century, obviously, was too far removed in time to really show genre awareness with a Roman predecessor; the *Satyricon* was certainly circulated in various forms of completeness throughout the Middle Ages, but early picaresques devoted remarkably few pages to referencing such a clear ancestor. Mancing's point is similar to suggesting that contemporary American tragic plays need internal references to Aeschylus to preserve their genre identity.

Ultimately, it is unreasonable to expect a genre to interact with distant ancestors on an evolutionary tree; the only reasonable expectation is for the majority of interplay to be between a text and its immediate genre predecessors - exactly what happened with early picaresque novels. *Gil Blas*, published between 1715 and 1735 was very much an immediate genre predecessor to the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884. One hundred and twenty-nine years later and the line for immediacy has advanced significantly, especially considering the geometric increase in available knowledge. In *Rule of the Bone*, Russell Banks wrote what he considered a modern version of Huck Finn; as such, *Bone* is filled with examples of intertextual play between *Bone* and its most immediate generic precursor<sup>29</sup>. For example, Banks is asked in an interview about a scene in which Bone burns a spider with a candle. Banks confirms that the image "comes out of *Huckleberry Finn*—a scene where Huck burns a spider in a candle flame, very early, at his father's cabin" (Faggen n. pag.), one of countless examples of genre intertextuality found in *Rule*

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<sup>29</sup> Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* features a reference to its most immediate genre relative as well: Sissy Hankshaw apparently has a tryst in a field with none other than Jack Kerouac.

*of the Bone*. When one begins thinking in terms of a picaresque mode rather than a fixed genre, an individual work's closest genre relatives most likely won't be picaresque at all: the immediate genre predecessors of Movement picaresques are, quite obviously, other SF works, so it is only reasonable to expect that the majority of intertextual play must be within SF proper. *Saturn's Children's* most direct ancestors are Isaac Asimov's Robot series and Robert Heinlein's *Friday - Freya* once even goes by the pseudonym "Friday Baldwin," a clear nod to Heinlein. This isn't to say that there isn't some level of referentiality between Movement picaresque and its early modal predecessors, but what referentiality exists tends to be at the level of motif repetition rather than the name-dropping and intertextual dialogue Mancing requires.

Focusing slavishly on a feature so restrictive as genre self-awareness seems like a tautological trap that ultimately prevents any real picaresque works from occurring outside of a narrow temporal cone; texts communicate primarily with their contemporaries, and as a genre's ancestors recede into the past that communication must become less and less. If one intends to seriously think about the picaresque as a living and vibrant genre, one must adopt a more open view, one consistent with the genre's own open nature. Specifically, one must recognize that the traditional picaresque possessed an in-built parodic playfulness - a playfulness directed at other genres, not simply its own literary species. Wicks stresses that the parody feature of the picaresque is not always limited to the playful interaction with other representative texts of the genre. Speaking of the underworld motif found in many picaresques, Wicks states that the "parody of romance continues in such devices as the communities of rogues" (*Picaresque* 62), highlighting the picaresque's pastime of undercutting the romance genre's pompous assumptions, which in this case would be the unassailable moral characters of the romance's protagonists. The early picaresque's handling of romance demonstrates that the genre's parodic feature can operate

quite simply as parody proper. Many contemporary picaresques have followed this trend, focusing more on parodying things more immediate than the genre's history itself. Wicks fingers Ellison's "*Invisible Man* [as] a parodic reversal of the quintessentially American romance, the Horatio Alger myth" (62), and Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was a similar lampooning of the same mythic material, as is Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. Alger's archetype was a far more recent literary antecedent than *Guzmán* or *Gil Blas*.

Movement picaresque follows this evolution, offering parody of more immediate concerns and genre awareness of its most recent generic material. As mentioned previously, Stross's *Saturn's Children* is both homage and self-referential parody of Heinlein, Asimov, and a host of other immediate genre precursors. In one of numerous little parodic jabs, Stross has Freya visit the "Scalzi Endowment Museum" (Stross 121), the name of which references John Scalzi, whose military SF is, admittedly, a little "dated" (*Old Man's War* featured senior citizen draftees). Stross's version of Mars even has a city called Barsoom - a loving homage to Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Princess of Mars* series, not a swipe at the truly god-awful Disney film *John Carter* released in 2012. Some of Stross's genre references are a bit obscure: the line, "there are the nuclear rockets, but they're out of my price range; I'm not a millionaire" (151), which is discussing Freya's travel options, doesn't seem to have a clear origin, but the most immediate reference that springs to mind is the nuclear rockets employed in Vernor Vinge's *Marooned in Realtime*. Those "rockets," like Stross's, involve the novel propulsion method of setting off a nuclear explosion behind you every few seconds and riding the blast wave. (If this seems impossible and absurd, let us not forget that Dr. Jones safely rode a nuclear explosion via a lead-lined refrigerator during *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*.) Freya's little joke about her price range pokes fun at economic impracticality of the idea while reinforcing the

novel's genre pedigree. Stross even offers real-world science fiction-ish references. While reflecting on fossil exhibits at a Marsport museum that humans had, for some reason the robots can't really fathom, chosen to ship to mars from earth, Freya states, "All I can be sure of is that some of our Creators chose to do this thing" (122). The oddly stilted phrasing "chose to do this thing" seems to be a reference to JFK's moon speech. Kennedy stated that "we choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other thing" - a famously perplexing choice of phrasing that Stross seems to be riffing on here. Each of these jokes participates in an ongoing dialogue of sorts within the SF community, solidifying genre parody in much the same way as Justina's betrothal to Guzmán.

*Transmetropolitan* is also full of knowing references to the SF genre, but it directs its parodic gaze a bit further afield. *Transmetropolitan's* immediate genre precursor is Thompson's work, of course, but is more accurate to say that the series finds its true generic contemporary in the mass media industry itself, as Jerusalem and Thompson are both journalists. For example, *Transmetropolitan* regularly attacks the overly-sexualized nature of America's children's programming and contains a running joke centered around a television show that promises "[f]un and games for children of all ages . . . the Sex Puppets!" which is a parody of Disney and *Sesame Street* featuring educational activities along with top-notch hardcore action. Less shocking is "Harry's Sluts," a parody of *Charlie's Angels* concerning "Three beautiful heavily-armed survivalist vigilante nymphomaniac spree-killers in lacy g-strings and nipple-tassels . . . guided by the mysterious voice of 'Harry' to adventure, cheap meaningless sex, gratuitous violence, and the occasional lesbian scene" (2.43), a description that isn't too far removed from the original show, the movies, and certainly the 2011 reboot of the series. Like the majority of programming found in *Transmetropolitan*, these shows are both content-free and likely damaging to the minds

of viewers, and as the distance between *Transmetropolitan's* shows and the objects parodied isn't really very far, the indictment of the mass media comes through quite clearly. *Transmetropolitan* even devotes a full issue, titled "What Spider Watches on TV," to the task of parodying television; the two programs above come from this issue specifically. Even though the media is humorously depicted it is hard to see it as loving; these programs are not only depicted as meaning-free but also as actively hostile, regarding humans as no more than consumers - commercial breaks often contain ad-bombs, a kind of compressed subliminal advertising method that causes further commercials to unspool during sleep.

Of course, parody of this kind isn't unusual in postmodern works; in fact, the idea of the ad-bomb has been recycled many times, such as in *Futurama*. However, the picaresque's approach to parody seems to be slightly different, if only at the level of intention. Jameson discusses the idea of the pastiche, or blank parody, as a central symptom of postmodernity, arguing that pastiche "like parody, [is] the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (17), but that, due to the conditions of late capital, tends to be "a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists" (17). Jameson is speaking largely of style itself, but certain larger extrapolations can be made from the observation that postmodern parody tends to be for its own sake, lacking any stable ground from which to criticize. Quintessentially postmodernist Seth MacFarlane comedies like *Family Guy* and *American Dad* seem to embody this principle, adopting and mocking various styles and dishing out critiques of belief structures while having nothing of its own to undergird the criticism. The picaresque, including Movement picaresque, is

significantly different in its approach to parody, in that the parody it employs isn't quite so blank. Jerusalem has a distinct voice (built on Thompson's, admittedly, but as much Ellis's as Thompson's) and a clear moral perspective; when *Transmetropolitan* parodies, say, the basketball shoe industry (in the form of the Air Jesus sneaker), it is for a far greater purpose than cheap laughs. Purposeful parody clearly distinguishes the picaresque from its postmodern contemporaries while demonstrating the genre's parodic roots.

Going Rogue: Defining the Picaro

"Everybody's gotta learn, nobody's born knowin'"

-Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

Guillén , Wicks, and nearly every commentator on the picaresque identify a virtually identical collection of motifs and tropes that create the picaro or picara; Guillén , in fact, states that the picaresque's "first feature, then, is a dynamic psycho-sociological situation, or series of situations, which can only be described – however briefly – in narrative fashion" (79), that "narrative fashion" being the picaro or picara himself or herself. Wicks gives his own capsule summary of this particular "psycho-sociological situation" by providing something of a picaro's profile:

The picaro is a pragmatic, unprincipled, resilient, solitary figure who just manages to survive in his chaotic landscape, but who, in the ups and downs, can also put that world very much on the defensive. The picaro is a protean figure who can not only serve many masters but play different roles, and his essential character trait is his inconstancy (of life roles, of self-identity), his own personality flux in the face of an inconstant world. (*Picaresque* 60)

The picaro, then, can be thought of as less of a fixed character type than a collection of very specific motifs, all of which serve to highlight the uncertain nature the worldview of the



picaresque narrative. The following is a brief discussion of the appearance of these specific motifs in postcyberpunk picaros. While the discussion primarily focuses on Freya of Stross's *Saturn's Children*, the motifs apply almost universally to the protagonists of the four novels selected.

#### Handsome Orphans, Foundlings, and Outcasts

First and foremost, Guillén observes that the “*picaro* is . . . an orphan,” continuing to point out that in “the history of narrative forms, *Lazarillo de Tormes* represents the first significant appearance of the myth of the orphan” (79). The causes of orphanhood are numerous, of course, though parental abandonment tends to be more common than other reasons (Lazarillo, Huck, Joe Dirt, etc. are all the products of abusive, Rousseau-like parents prone to abandoning children). Regardless of the cause, the orphaned child “faces early dishonor or want and is led to break all ties with his native city” (79), thus implying, in classical variations of this theme, at any rate, “the *picaro*’s detachment from the historical past or the presence of God, from an ‘essential’ image of man” (85). Obviously such a strategy is intended to highlight the world’s unjust and chaotic nature, however the materialist, humanist SF genre has little use for such religious ideology. Rather, orphanhood emphasizes abandonment itself and the well-understood psychological trauma it brings, whether said abandonment originated with a *picaro*’s parents or community. *Saturn's Children* offers the reader the most complete form of abandonment possible, the same form of abandonment that drove Frankenstein’s monster to such horrific actions - complete abandonment by one’s creator. Freya is and, most importantly, self-identifies as “an artifact of an earlier age, out of place and time, isolated and alone” (Stross 7), having been built as an object of pleasure for extinct humanity. Like any child, Freya’s identity and sense of well-being is intricately tied to her “parents,” meaning that without a human to bond with she is

incapable of experiencing genuine fulfillment, Freya having been programmed that way. Consequently, the always present absence of her god-like creator (god being the universal mytheme for parent) causes Freya a great deal of emotional trauma. Freya, while contemplating a skeleton of homo sapiens sapiens (the proper term no doubt used by Stross for irony, since we somewhat arrogantly named ourselves doubly wise) and a lifelike reproduction accompanying it, cannot help but vent: "I want to throw myself at his feet and scream, Where are you? Why have you done this to me? Or not; part of me wants to punch his rugged, handsome face, to make him hurt, to punish him for what his kind have done to us. And part of me is ready to fall madly, desperately in love with him. But he and his kind are dead, all dead, and this sad statuary in a dusty museum is all that's left" (Stross 123).

#### Born, Sworn, Jealous Friends of Solitude

Once abandoned, the personality of the picaro, "obliged to fend for himself . . . in an environment *for which he is not prepared*" (Guillén 79), must, in order to survive, develop "an unusually precocious taste of solitude" (79). This taste is necessary, for circumstances have forced the picaro into being an "insular, isolated being" who "has not been adapted to ruling conventions or shaped into a social or a moral person" (79). Freya, as a thoroughly obsolete model of robot, is by design unprepared for life: human-height robots are not ideally adapted for life in space, focused as such a life must be on spatial efficiency. Freya thus manages to find various niches where she might ensconce herself, alone. For example, Freya spends time at the opening of the novel in an out-of-the-way niche between an elevator shaft and the outer hull of a Venusian stratosphere dirigible where she can go through the motions of life undisturbed: "I often come here off shift. I bring my pad and do my mail, view movies, browse wikis and strips, try to forget that I am the sole one of my kind on this world" (Stross 11). Is a forgotten

cubbyhole on a space station any different than Huck Finn's Jackson Island, itself an unvisited plot of land amidst a sea of civilization? The picaros always manage to find margins, and these margins help to emphasize disconnection.

#### Abnormal, Precocious Youth

The shock of the picaro's ejection and subsequent disconnection causes a need for premature, arguably abnormal development, at least when one compares the picaro's rate of development to that generally accepted by the picaro's society. As Guillén says, the "beginnings of knowledge are forced upon the young boy by the shock of premature experience" (79). While trauma, psychological or physical, is largely responsible for retarding the intellectual development of victimized children, the picaresque (exercising the slight modal distance from realism proper) uses trauma as an impetus for development, as said trauma deprives the picaro of any real mentors or faith in security and forces them to work out their own systems of knowledge. Consider the act of rape used to create submissive sexbots in Stross's *Saturn's Children*; the entire premise of *Saturn's Children* is Freya's attempt to work out, in the wake of her own unpleasant development, some sense of what is important when the convenient figure of both parent and god, in this case humanity, has exited, stage left. Freya's world, quite simply, has no stable fount from which to derive any values whatsoever, save that of the individual and reason itself, neither of which seem very valued by the aristocratic ruling class. The very first chapter of *Saturn's Children* is titled "Learning Not to Die," tragically a very rudimentary value rape victims have to struggle sometimes to work out for themselves, making very plain that the picaro's trajectory must involve a value system reset of sorts.

A hallmark of the picaresque experience, linked directly to the precocious nature of a picaro's youth, is the working out of values from scratch: Guillén states that “[a]ll values must be rediscovered by [the picaro] anew, as if by a godless Adam” (79). The inclusion of the phrase "godless Adam" is perfectly apt, since, when one removes God or any other presumed authority from the equation, all knowledge must be worked out from first principles. However, just as Eden was haunted by God, giving Adam very little choice in his ultimate decisions, all picaros initially inhabit environments with powerful external forces conspiring to shape their thoughts and behaviors. As a result, the usual road a picaro must follow in order to develop his or her own value system tends to be one that requires a radical break, either in material reality or in the picaro's own mind, with social values and the authorities promoting them. Typically, the shape this break tends to take is an embracing of criminality - not for base reasons, of course, but primarily as a result of an inversion of values inherent in the picaro's experience. Huck Finn, for instance, experiences an intense crisis of "conscience," causing him to briefly decide to turn Jim in to the authorities. The psychological relief he feels is not inconsiderable: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now" (169). However, the audience can't help but notice that his "relief" comes from a profoundly immoral decision - bringing misery upon Jim. The dichotomy is obvious: humanist values are considered criminal and immoral while Christian, slaveholding values are considered sacrosanct. Huck, of course, decides ultimately to embrace his inner "criminal," declaring, "All right, then, I'll GO to hell" (169), thus summarily rejecting an entire authority system. Tellingly, Sterling's *Schismatrix* includes a similar incident, in which Nora, Lindsay's future wife, decides that she can abandon her Shaper heritage and ideology: "In her own mind, Nora had become a criminal: sexual, ideological, professional. . . . She could become what he [Lindsay] was. It was

the first real alternative she had ever known" (96). Nora's conversion to picaro is a temporary one (by posthuman standards, anyway), but, significantly, the conversion comes when she abandons the stagnating social mores of her upbringing, letting the comfortingly simplistic ideologies fail and reality become the mess that it is.

However, once the ideological breaks are made, picaros are able to set their own agendas, agendas that typically offer slightly backhanded commentary on contemporary social mores (see Huck's decision). Lindsay, for example, moves from one grandiose, posthuman project to the next, the final project being an effort to redesign a version of humanity to live in Europa's oceans. Lindsay recognizes the importance of deciding upon one's own values: "The dream of terraforming still had a shine on it. . . . [Yet] it too would surely tarnish. But somehow, Lindsay thought, you had to dream or die" (Sterling 190), a sentiment that stresses the importance to the individual of such projects while still recognizing the transience and arbitrariness of such dreams in a picaresque world. Lindsay's plot arc is ultimately *only* about working out values anew: he must work new ways of thinking and behaving consistent with the evolving posthuman solar system. In this sense, all posthumans are picaros.

### Unwelcome Travelers

The trauma of exile and the progressive recognition of new value systems makes it progressively more difficult for picaros to integrate into society (as they no longer share willingly in the arbitrary sets of beliefs upon which societies are based), and, as such, when "[t]urning towards others, [the picaro] finds himself unwanted or uninvited" (Guillén 79). Seemingly a small point, Guillén's insistence that the picaro become an unwanted outcast serves a larger point: the unwelcome status of the picaro ensures that he or she "is wounded, hardened,

and never quite assimilated by an adult society” (80), and thus always possessed of the powerful outsider position. Stross takes a very literal approach to this narrative strategy: Freya, being of standard human design, tends to stand twice the height of most space-optimized robots, so "when big-headed munchkins with huge dark eyes point at [Freya] and shout 'Ogre!'" (Stross 10), she is quite effectively marked as outsider and Other in an hilarious reversal of the standard picaresque theme of precocious children lost amongst adults.

### Exiles Seeking Sanctuaries

Even so, Guillén notes that the picaro, who is “fatherless and homeless—self-exiled” (80), will, as a logical consequence to abandonment, tend to seek out “new cities, further replacements for the absent tutor, only to discover that the world can at best act like a cruel stepfather” (80). In fact, the much-lauded picaresque theme of hunger - Lazarillo was famously unable to keep himself well-fed enough to satisfy his grumbling, poverty-stricken belly - should properly be regarded as a subcategory of the picaro's larger *hunger* for surrogate families. Most contemporary picaros, high-culture or low, have disposed of the standard hunger theme, but the naked need for belonging is still quite evident: Joe Dirt's picaresque wanderings have the sole objective of providing him with a valuable and self-selected family to replace the horrible birth-family that abandoned him, and the borderline picaresque *Zombieland* (if one can really be a picaro in the absence of a society) follows partial-picaro and self-confessed shut-in and outsider Columbus as he slowly gathers about himself a self-selected family of his own. Both Columbus and Dirt long for family and the sense of place and belonging it provides as surely as Lazarillo longed for decent meals.

Freya, who states that she has "just floated from one dead-end job to another, empty-headed and lonely" (Stross 12), seeks "masters" only in the loosest sense: she seeks those "masters" of the modern world, with its attitudes towards flexible accumulation and flexible labor, willing to cut a paycheck for temporary labor. The job that gets her into the spy game is a temporary courier contract, initially conceived of as her ticket off of Venus (and away from a violent group of aristos she inadvertently offends). Beyond Freya's search for temporary work is a far deeper hunger, however; Freya seeks genuine father figures in the form of her naked need for her creator, designed as she is to only be fulfilled when serving a human. It is this variant of the picaresque's hunger that ultimately motivates her to pursue her espionage career: the cloak and dagger company is run by a series of Jeeves robots who, like Freya, were designed to look identical to humanity (but, unlike Freya, were conceived as right-hand manservant types rather than sex slaves). The Jeeves model with whom Freya abandons the solar system altogether at the novel's conclusion fulfills the role of both replacement father and family. While it is true that the vast majority of the masters contemporary picares, SF or otherwise, encounter are, as Guillén says, cruel stepfathers, the acquisition of authentic family marks something of a departure from the traditional formula.

#### Half-Outsider Enemies of the State

While contemporary picares may, in fact, find family, one should hardly construe that domestic bliss follows and they are reintegrated into society as productive members. Family or no, picares tend to be and remain antagonists of the societies that rejected them, shaped by the author's card-stacking "into an enemy of the social fabric" (Guillén 80). Of course, this is largely hyperbole: Lazarillo was hardly an "enemy of the social fabric" in anything but the most abstract sense of the phrase, and far fewer picares function as heartless criminals than genre

descriptions might suggest, especially when one considers the picaresque as a mode rather than a genre. Freya is, in fact, a literal enemy of the social fabric, as the plot of *Saturn's Children* has her and her group fighting against an aristo plot to resurrect extinct humanity and use the specimens to enslave all robotkind, including rival aristo clans. Freya, however, is anything but a criminal; her abnormality is possessing morality in an amoral world. Freya's threat to the social fabric isn't fundamentally dissimilar to the threats posed by Lazarillo, who (somewhat inadvertently) exposed religious fraud, Huck, who critiqued the irrationality of slaveholding, or Jerusalem, who actively worked to undermine abuses of power: they pose threats because they have opted out.

Opting out leads to a peculiar state for the picaro, who “learns that there is no material survival outside of society, and no real refuge—no pastoral paradise—beyond it” (80). Thus, unable to *fully* opt out, the picaro must “compromise and live on the razor’s edge between vagabondage and delinquency” (80), able to *neither join nor actually reject his fellow men*” (80). From this position at the edges of society, participating only when necessity demands, the picaro can assume the status “half-outsider” (80) hero. This might sound like a limbo-like position, and, in fact, many critics have both accused and defined the picaro as one incapable of evolution, a kind of stock character (Miguel de Cervantes being one easily counted amongst this number). However, this assessment could not be further from the truth: Guillén insists that “the hero of the mainstream picaresque novel *does* grow, learn, and change” (80), and, considering the centrality of self-grown belief structures to the genre, it would be difficult to imagine a picaro incapable of growth. Freya, who inhabits the margins of both her society and the economy is clearly an evolving character, slowly finding a reason to live in a solar system long since abandoned by hope.



*Schismatrix* even provides the reader with a SF equivalent term for picaro/picara: the sundog. According to Sterling, sundogs are "defectors, traitors, exiles, outlaws" (10), not unlike the picaro, that exiled, unwanted, unwelcomed undesirable. Lindsay, upon recognizing his own brotherhood with the sundogs of the schismatrix, reflects that "'We are all criminals" (11), echoing the both the necessary fact of criminality in the picaro's survival and the need to adopt "criminal" mentalities to break away from stagnating systems of thought. Indeed, Lindsay also incorporates the willing embrace of difference and the driving need to formulate one's own value systems from scratch into his sundog definition: speaking of Fyodor Ryumin, a Mechanist he meets during his exile, Lindsay observes that "[c]uriosity had made him a sundog" (22), foregrounding the role of mental flexibility. Lindsay even positions the sundog as a half-outsider hero with a horticultural analogy: "The weeds are like sundogs. They thrive on disaster. They move in anywhere where systems break down. After this disaster the plants that grow fastest on scorched earth will thrive . . ." (223). Sundogs flourish in the margins, adapting to survive, as do all picaros, finding their own identities outside of the operation of orderly systems. Guillén describes a very complex psychosocial situation that marks a picaro as picaro; interestingly, Sterling has captured the fullness of this situation in the figure of the sundog.

#### Motifs Old and Motifs New

What follows is a close examination of a collection of motifs generally recognized by critics as marking the picaro as picaro. These motifs tend to work in concert with the psychosocial situation described above and have proven ubiquitous enough in both traditional and Movement picaresques to deserve individual discussion. The first collection of motifs appear in both traditional variants of the picaresque as well as in Movement incarnations, though typically in evolved form. The second collection of motifs all seem to be largely unique to

Movement picaresque (or, to some extent, SF picaresque in general, though the study here focuses on Movement picaresques), being either entirely new or evolved enough from their original forms to be seen as independent.

#### Unusual Birth or Childhood

While most picaros are orphaned, many writers choose to emphasize the picaro's disconnection from society further (especially since being orphaned no longer necessarily carries the same alienation and stigma) by providing an unusual and hardly enviable background for the picaro in question. Wicks explains that “[t]he circumstances surrounding the picaro’s entrance into the world are often unusual. They parody the romance hero’s genealogy. But within the picaresque, they first establish the picaro’s singularity. Even his birth is a departure from normalcy. Second, they foreshadow his later ‘birth’ or rebirth into a chaotic picaresque world” (*Picaresque* 64). In the traditional picaresque, the singularity of the picaro was remarkable, as a person's bloodline held great significance. A person of no known heritage, while hardly an anomaly, was generally considered to be of questionable character and certainly the product of a lower class. Western society has (for the most part) long since moved past societal obsession with bloodlines, but the unusual birth/childhood motif persists in picaresque, being flexible enough to foreground "departure[s] from normalcy" other than orphanhood. While Sterling's *Schismatrix* doesn't cover Lindsay's actual birth, his childhood is nevertheless made quite abnormal (although, admittedly, he is a guy living in space, so the standards of normalcy are flexible). Lindsay's home, the "Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic, a two-hundred-year-old artificial habitat orbiting the Earth's Moon" (4), is one of many habitats caught between the political ambitions of the two superpowers - the Mechanists and the Shapers. In a move not unlike the hostage strategies employed by noble families in Feudal societies, Lindsay

is one of a number of children sent to be raised and trained by the Shapers. This maneuver proves ill-advised, for ultimately "the Mechanists had overwhelmed the Republic, and Lindsay and Constantine were disgraced, embarrassing reminders of a failure in foreign policy" (11), thus ensuring that Lindsay and the other children's Shaper training, genetics, and heritage marked them as abnormal outsiders from the beginning. Moreover, Lindsay's training leaves him with physical abilities that stand in contrast to the "Mechanist teflon kneecaps" (4) and other life-extension technologies of a population of "aging aristocrats" holding "power from within their governing hospitals" (4). Lindsay's diplomatic training, allowing him to control minute reactions such as widening "the dilation of his pupils" (4) and forcing a blush response, reads as very organic and life-affirming, standing in sharp relief against the inorganic and sad prosthetics of his contemporaries. Lindsay is not alone in having an unusual birth; most characters in *Schismatrix* have similar abnormal backgrounds, but not all of them follow a picaresque path. Kitsune, by contrast, received similar bizarre augmentation: "They took my womb out, and they put in brain tissue. Grafts from the pleasure centre . . . they left me bright, so that I would know what submission was" (34). However, Kitsune, unlike Lindsay, is far more interested in having a sense of place, ultimately gaining her desire when she, through elaborate biological engineering, becomes a living habitat. Abnormal backgrounds highlight difference, but this does not necessarily translate into a picaresque experience.

Some foregrounding of the marginal status of the abnormal child is required, and most picaresque narratives "reinforce the theme of solitude by making alienation or separation or outsiderdom part of the condition of the picaresque's birth rather than a psychologically or philosophically motivated act later in life" (Wicks, *Picaresque* 64). Kitsune above was built for a specific task; she was strange and no doubt felt alien, but she was anything but alienated by her

admittedly exploitative society. Lindsay, by contrast, was the legacy of a failed attempt to curry favor with a political power whose influence had declined, making him an object of suspicion. Stross encodes such alienation-by-default into the birth of sexbot Freya, who, according to her own count, "was assembled . . . nearly a year after the last of them [humans] died, and . . . spent [her] first six decades mothballed in a warehouse" (54). Freya was obsolete before ever being turned on; no decision was required on her part to retreat to society's hinterlands of usefulness and value. Such an unquestioned marginalization is a crucial motif in a picaro's formative years.

Furthermore, the abnormality and alienation common to a picaro's early years serve to foreground a psychology primed for social disengagement; Wicks argues that "[t]he incredible confusion surrounding his [the picaro's] origins stands as a metaphor for his future character. Surely, the reader feels, no stable character can come out of such eccentric origins" (*Picaresque* 48). Consider the origins of Ubu and Maria, the picaro pair in Williams's space opera. Ubu and Maria are orphaned at the novel's opening; in fact, the first sentence is of their father's suicide: "When their father killed himself he recorded the event, just as he recorded everything else of importance in his sad, ill-organized life" (1). While functionally adults, fastlearn cartridges and hormone treatments having granted them the bodies and minds of adults, Ubu and Maria are still only in their early teens, Ubu thirteen and Maria eleven, abandoned by their father and desperate. Moreover, the pair are not related by blood to Pasco, nor each other: Pasco grew them "out of frozen sperm and ova that he'd bought somewhere, stitched together in a secondhand splicer he'd bought as junk. . . . not a real brother and sister and father, just people living together" (7). While perhaps not violent like the fathers found in many early picaresque tales, Pasco still wasn't a very *good* father, and in his suicide and subsequent haunting of the ship's system (random recordings of him pop up constantly, much to the children's dismay) one can easily see an inadvertent level

of emotional abuse resulting from his selfishness. As if the abandonment and abuse at the hands of a ghost in the machine wasn't enough to ensure the pair's abnormality, Pasco's own desperation and self-loathing led him to engineer his children with strange combinations of traits. "In addition to high intelligence, Pasco gave Ubu a number of traits he felt that he, himself, personally lacked. . . . fast reflexes, a hard body, and the kind of eidetic memory associated with acute senses and synaesthesia" (25), along with an extra set of arms for good measure. Clearly, Pasco wasn't concerned with the psychological consequences of his tweaking, and this is made all the more apparent in Maria, into whom he "jammed every ESP-related gene . . . with the intention of producing a genuine witch" (25), having no idea if such a thing was even possible, and, when her uncanny talent to influence the subatomic world began to manifest, no longer harboring interest in the phenomenon. If common occurrences such as parental neglect or death and emotional trauma are considered childhood factors in the development of mental disorders, what might one expect of children who, in addition to these factors, also have a shake-and-bake genetic heritage? As Wicks argues, these factors combine to foreshadow the future character traits of the picaro, for the reader can't help but expect people with such unusual childhoods to be unstable.

### Ejection

"Can I by justice or by crooked ways of deceit ascend a loftier tower which may be a fortress to me all my days?"

- Plato, *The Republic*

Tied to the motif of the unusual birth or childhood is the abrupt and often violent ejection from whatever the nascent picaro had come to think of as home, thus completing the process of

exteriorization that the abnormality of the picaresque's early years began. Wicks explains that "Ejection is the picaresque's second 'birth' – it comes usually immediately before the world's first trick on him and is thus a kind of initiation shock" (*Picaresque* 66), forcing the picaresque out the door with nary a hat, walking stick, pipe, or handkerchief, to borrow a line from Tolkien's unpicaresque traveler, and ensuring that no safe harbor or lofty, secure fortress lies in the picaresque's cards. *Transmetropolitan*, for example, begins with Jerusalem's exile from "the Mountain," *Transmet*'s version of the real Hunter Thompson's Woody Creek retreat, the fortified "Owl Farm," and his subsequent forced relocation to "the City," an interesting geographic reversal of the traditional pattern of exile: it's hard to imagine Romeo screaming "I am fortune's fool!" because he was forced to *return* to fair Verona. Jerusalem receives a call from his editor reminding him that he is still contractually obligated to provide two books, and apparently not even his mountain retreat, well-stocked with automatic weapons and weaponized Ebola viruses as it is, is protection from the long tentacles of the city's legal apparatus. Jerusalem's assessment says it all: "I decided to be depressed for a while. I had to go back down the mountain. Into the city " (1.5). While *Transmetropolitan*'s ejection motif occurs far later in the protagonist's life than that of, say, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, in which Lazarillo is sold as a child to a blind beggar, or that of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in which Huck flees his drunken father's shack in fear for his life, Jerusalem's ejection (no doubt one in a long series) is clearly the result of "trickery" in the form of contractual strong-arm tactics and constitutes the character's rebirth into an unpleasant, chaotic environment at the cost of a place Jerusalem thought of as home.

The ejection motif also serves to foreshadow the series of ejections that make up the episodic tempo of ups and downs constituting picaresque narratives. The initial "[e]jection repeats itself in less radical ways forever after in the picaresque's life as he leaves or is left by one

master after another or has to flee circumstances” (Wicks, *Picaresque* 66) either in fear for his life or simply in search of better opportunities. It is this forced pace that “energizes the eternal rhythm, the Sisyphus rhythm, and supports the theme of solitude” (66). Sterling puts Lindsay through similar paces: after his failed "revolutionary" suicide attempt (and the subsequent death of Lindsay's uncle, his friend and soon-to-be nemesis having provided a failsafe unknown to Lindsay - a pheromone that triggered a fatal poison moth attack - which resulted in the old man's death), the Radical Old "shipped Lindsay into exile in the cheapest kind of Mechanist drogue. For two days he was blind and deaf, stunned with drugs, his body packed in a thick matrix of deceleration paste" (Sterling 9), a rather violent and traumatic literalization of the ejection motif, considering the clear overtones of the birth process. This pattern repeats itself over and over in Lindsay's story: an assassin sent by his rival Constantine forces him to flee the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu, his brief home after his first exile, and his burgeoning career as a theatre impresario; a bloody battle and the arrival of aliens forces (or enables) him to leave the asteroid Esairs 89-XII, etc. Thus, Lindsay's first ejection sets the tone, firmly establishing the Sisyphean rhythm that ensures Lindsay always leaves before roots can be grown or long-term plans brought to fruition. Movement picaresques remain heavily invested in this motif, and, though the circumstances of ejection have received a facelift and the contemporary picaro is rarely inclined to seek out surrogate father figures or masters, the core remains the same: ejection strips the protagonist of any stable space conceivable as a home and completes the exteriorization of the picaro.

### The Grotesque or Horrible Incident

While unusual childhoods and repetitive ejections mark the picaro as abnormal, authors often choose to sharply punctuate this state by employing a shocking and horrific incident, a

“grotesque” incident designed “to emphasize the unpredictable tendency of the apparently normal to shift suddenly into abnormalcy and horror” (Wicks, *Picaresque* 66). Wicks offers up numerous examples of such grotesque incidents in traditional picaresque narratives; for instance, *El Buscon* features the consumption of a meat pie “probably filled with the flesh of Pablos’s recently executed father” (64). Disturbing incidents, such as *El Buscon*’s inadvertent cannibalism, serve to highlight the picaresque narrative’s overall backdrop of chaos, as such incidents “compress the blackness and horror of the debased world into one specific and very particularized incident” (65), literalizing the basic principle of the picaro’s world. By “[arousing] a shocked response from” the reader, the author manages to condition “an awareness and reaction to the nightmare world of chaos, a decidedly blacker world than the worlds of history and comedy on the spectrum of fictional modes” (66). This motif is so universally useful that it is difficult to find a picaresque narrative failing to employ it, and Movement picaresques, with the genre’s pre-existing affinity for the grotesque<sup>30</sup>, are no exception. Lindsay’s uncle is killed four pages into *Schismatrix* by a swarm of poisonous moths meant for Lindsay himself. Fourteen pages into *Angel Station* finds Ubu dealing with his dead father’s now useless sexbot. The scene plays out like a murder, with Kitten, the robot, pleading for her life before Ubu takes a glitch rod to her, erasing her programming and personality, “killing” her with what amounts to a cattle prod. Even the description of the robot’s blanked form seems like the description of a crime scene: “Kitten lay crumpled on the rack, a scorch mark on her flank where the glitch rod had touched. Her eyes were open. There was a tremor in her thigh. Her fingers twitched randomly” (14). Both incidents see the soon-to-be picaros introduced to violent, quasi-criminal acts which strip away any illusions about the security and beneficence of the world at large. Stross’s *Saturn’s*

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<sup>30</sup> See “On the Grotesque in Science Fiction” and *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.



*Children* offers an even more horrific incident designed - intentionally, in this case - to introduce the young picaro to the "nightmare world of chaos." Stross describes the training process Freya's kind underwent; because *Saturn's Children* features no true artificial intelligences but rather AIs that have been based on snapshots of the human brain, the training process for a robot intended to operate as human involved moving the young mindstate through a succession of different bodies until "maturity." For a sexbot, intended to serve, this training has a certain twist: "at eleven, you give them their third body, the adolescent one. You've already taught them the basics, gained their trust, and taught them to love you, which is half the job. But it's not enough; and so, to socialize them good and proper, to teach them to *fear* you, you rape them" (288). The grotesque is typically employed in SF as a method of foregrounding various challenges to perceived normalcy; while Movement picaresques also use the grotesque to foreground similar social concerns, readers are also regularly confronted with grotesque images and incidents designed to illicit horror rather than heightened social consciousness, leaving readers with the impression of a hostile universe.

### The Trick

The theme of chaotic and amoral environments is further emphasized by the motif of the trick, played first on the picaro by the world and then later played by the picaro on everyone else. According to Wicks, the motif of the trick is intended "to serve as initiation rites to the world of chaos (the picaro is always tricked first by the landscape)" (64), and as such the world's first trick on the picaro, however loosely one defines "trick," functions as a kind of loss of innocence/beginning of knowledge. Wicks refers to the model incident, Lazarillo having his head rammed into a stone bull by his blind master and thus learning that he must give as good as he gets if he wishes to survive. Few picaresque narratives can be rightly considered picaresque

without at least something of this material in their DNA: just as Lazarillo must trick the blind master into shattering his skull before effecting the end of his apprenticeship, Huck Finn and Chapman Dorset (Bone) both fake their own deaths to escape the "trick" of false imprisonment. Even contemporary picaresques maintain this tradition: Payne's *Youth in Revolt: The Journals of Nick Twisp* sees an early "trick" (Twisp's mother's boyfriend's attempt to sell an unsound car) ultimately causing him to be "imprisoned" in a Christian-themed trailer park, where he perpetuates the pattern of trickery to "escape" by seducing Sheeni, his object of desire. Stuart Miller elaborates on this function, highlighting the "pattern of a relative innocent developing into a picaresque because the world he meets is roguish" (56) and thus connecting the world's first trick with other coming-of-age motifs (though others do not necessarily lead to the picaresque). Miller explains further that, unlike other forms of the bildungsroman, the picaresque's formative experience is such that few other paths are available: "By becoming a trickster, the hero makes the only choice other than suicide that the world offers him" (56). Much as trauma theory might see a horrific event in a person's past sharply reduce a person's potential future paths<sup>31</sup>, the overwhelming nature of the pre-picaresque's first experience of trickery ensures that no other outcomes are possible. Miller speaks of a "befooling incident" (61) that turns innocent youths into tricksters and is, in that sense, something of a "befouling" incident as well. This incident, the quintessential "picaresque rite of passage" (63).

The equation of the initial trick with psychological and physical trauma is not lost in picaresque SF; in fact, it seems to be more prominently displayed. Freya is the product of two

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<sup>31</sup> Lest this be seen as an overstatement of the way in which authors tend to use trauma motifs, consider Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter* series of novels. Regardless of any retconning that may take place in later entries involving supernatural forces, the initial premise was that the traumatic event of witnessing the chainsaw execution of their mother caused both Dexter *and* his brother to have little choice but become sociopathic killers repeating the horror they witnessed as children. Dexter's adopted father, Harry, *had* been expecting it, after all.

tricks of fate: she was created through an act of violence (the rape mentioned above) and, when finally activated, she finds that all was for naught anyway, as she was already obsolete. Her trajectory has been set by twin traumas. Lindsay, too, begins his journey with a traumatic trick being played on him, although, unlike Freya, he seems to have played a semi-willing part in his own victimization. Lindsay had entered into a pact with his lover, Vera Kelland, and his friend and competitor for Kelland's affections, Constantine. The intention was for Constantine to seize political power by using the lover's pact suicide of Lindsay and Kelland. Lindsay seems perfectly willing to comply, even trying and failing to publicly end his own life, but his eagerness to die proves his complicity in the trick played on him: the moths that kill his uncle were aimed at Lindsay himself, agents of Constantine's desire to solidify his political power and gain revenge against his romantic competitor. Lindsay, still idealistic, only realizes this later, when the first of Constantine's assassins comes hunting for him. Is Lindsay's survival of attempted murder that far removed from Huck's own escape from a drunken, physically abusive father?

Even Ubu and Maria follow this trauma/trick pattern, though they do so in a surrogate fashion. The formative trick was played not on the pair (unless one can consider the suicide of their father to be a trick), but rather on Pasco himself. During the course of the narrative, Runaway's computer periodically tosses up disconnected recordings of Pasco that eventually make it clear that Pasco, before Ubu and Maria had been born, had almost managed to secure a shipping deal that would have made him and his family financially secure enough to survive Consolidation, but that deal had been snaked from him by Marco, a competitor shooter. Shortly after, Pasco had lost his own shooter family in an airlock accident, leaving him alone and traumatized. Like any trauma, this trick is never processed and dealt with: its free-floating echoes reverberate across not only Pasco's life but that of his children, and the digital "ghost" Pasco

becomes merely a literalization of his own trick-borne trauma. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, observes that “[l]ong after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present . . . The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep” (86) - no different, really, than having holographic recordings of one's father, including his suicide, randomly playing. Williams stresses that the pattern of failure Ubu and Maria have been experiencing is an echo of Pasco's own failures, recalling the old sins-of-the-fathers motif: "Pasco. . . . Who schemed, and implemented, and lost interest, and never finished, and never won. And who recorded it all, programmed himself as a ghost, so that his children would see it all happen again, again, again" (348), ensuring that his children would mourn him "by imitating him, by trying to complete the pattern, failure echoed by failure, loss by loss" (348). It is, in fact, only through their own embracing of trickery that this pattern of failure can be broken, just as the same empowering trickery proves to be the solution to Lindsay and Freya's own trauma. The motif of the trick is, in fact, simply another variation of trauma theory (one that, considering it's antiquity, has proven quite prescient) adapted for a different purpose.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth observes that “[i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). Traumatic experiences are free-floating, unable to be integrated; past trauma tends to manifest itself in present life, either by unbidden memories resurfacing or patterns of behavior reminiscent of the original trauma manifesting that, in another person, would certainly be absent. This proves remarkably similar to the picaro's path,

wherein the "befooling incident" that "begins as initiation is soon converted by the picaro into initiative" (Wicks, *Picaresque* 64) to repeat the original event and enact similar tricks upon others. This perpetual trickery does, as Wicks suggest, "support the picaresque theme of gullibility" (64), the realization that "people want to be fooled" (64), but it seems that the interpretive tool of trauma serves as a better model. In fact, Ann Whitehead, in *Trauma Fiction*, observes that "[o]ne of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (86), providing a fair description of the episodic, Sisyphean organization of the picaresque that accounts for the perpetual trickery in a way that does not, necessarily, require the picaro to feel the need to exploit poor souls who want to be fooled.

Freya, for instance, is hardly of a malicious nature. Being a sexbot, Freya performs some rather different "tricks" during the course of the novel; in one episode, the Cinnabar Paris hotel offers to lose her bill, provided she can dredge up the memories of a sister of hers who had a fling with him some years before (and, of course, relive them with him). This is a very small example of her original "trick" replaying itself and is not inconsistent with the behavior of others who have experienced sexual abuse. The trick motif need not be so literal, however; there is little sense in having a picaro upon whom violence was done travel around committing violent acts. Typically, the trick manifests itself in a readiness to exploit and manipulate others. Lindsay is a very good example of this facet of the trick motif.

Upon his exile from the Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic, Lindsay, needing resources to survive, plans "a huge confidence trick that will bamboozle the entire world" (Sterling 34). The trick? Lindsay poses as a theatre impresario and cons the various

factions of the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu into helping him put on a play. Lindsay's trick is also not a malicious act: though Lindsay's initial plan had been to inflate his company's stock price and ruin the Black Medicals, he never quite gets around to it and, as the play proves a massive success (having adapted the outdated Shakespeare to contemporary needs and concerns), the Black Medicals, the Geisha Bank, and really everyone involved - including the audience and players - either make a huge profit or enjoy themselves immensely. This type of positivity seems quite incongruous with the genre, considering the oft-atrocious and amoral nature of many famous picaros, but even so "tricks" that prove beneficial to both parties are less exceptions than rules in postcyberpunk picaresques. If I may be allowed a game theory analogy, SF picaros are just as likely to always cooperate as they are to always defect in the classic iterated game of the prisoner's dilemma. In the dilemma, two prisoners are faced with either the choice to stay silent or to rat the other out: if a prisoner rats out the other who stays silent, he goes free and the other serves the maximum time (say, five years). If both defect (rat the other out), then both will serve a middle sentence (three years). If, however, both stay silent, both "profit" and only serve a single year. Obviously, defecting is a great strategy . . . unless one is in a world of defectors, and calling the chaotic world of the picaro a world of defectors would be very accurate. Movement picaros do tend to win these types of games, and it is not unusual to see one defect and profit at another's loss (perhaps even using deceptive tactics to convince the other to cooperate before defecting themselves). Still, these picaros are just as likely to deceive the other into cooperating so that both parties can benefit from the picaro's cooperation. This is exactly what happens in *Schismatrix's* first great deception: Lindsay fools all parties into cooperating to enact his Kabuki Intrasolar play scheme and, instead of reaping the greatest

payoff by defecting, he chooses to cooperate as well. This growing trend is a rather startling evolution from the traditional picaresque.

Even when postcyberpunk picaros play the defector's card and victimize others, they tend to convert the payoff of their defection into something that benefits others. For example, when the Investors arrive at Esairs XII, "[Lindsay] and Nora [parlay] their asteroid deathtrap into three months of language lessons and a free ride to the Ring Council," after which Lindsay uses "his instant notoriety as a friend to aliens . . . to inflate the Investor mystique" (124). As a result, Lindsay is partially responsible for the subsequent Investor Peace and the prolonged cessation of hostilities between Shapers, Mechanists, and everyone else in human space. This can only be regarded as a solar system-wide trick: Sterling explains that the alien "Investors were not even particularly intelligent. They made up for that with a cast-iron gall and a magpie's lust for shiny loot. They were simply too greedy to become confused" (124) - hardly the (presumably) enlightened alien beings found in such SF classics as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. No, Lindsay used his initial defection (through which he profited from selling art that wasn't art to the aliens) to drag a solar system into a larger cooperation through which everyone, including Lindsay, would reap rewards. In fact, his initial art scam was anything but a zero-sum game: the Investors no doubt made a tidy sum selling Lindsay's "sculpture" to someone else.

Walter Jon Williams provides a very similar use of the trick motif in *Angel Station*. As one would expect, Ubu and Maria's entire trajectory involves trying to put one over on someone else. They scam a casino for money, flee from paying their fees at Angel Station, then spend the rest of the novel attempting to scam as much profit as possible from their first contact with an alien intelligence while preventing bossrider Marco from snaking their score: "This is gonna be the richest cargo in history. And they're giving it to us for junk. Beloved isn't very smart" (174).

However, it must be recognized that even the small-scale victimizations bother the picaros: "It wasn't the Monte Carlo's money they'd won: the money was all the banker's. A wave of remorse dizzied Maria. Why hadn't she realized this before? The house was probably playing banker at most of the tables; she could have robbed the institution with a far clearer conscience" (48).

Unlike many picaros, Maria isn't actually amoral, feeling real remorse when she realizes that she cheated a person instead of a faceless casino. While Maria and Ubu do what is necessary to survive, they never lose perspective on their behavior. As a result, the casual and questionable exploitation Ubu and Maria perpetrate is blotted out in the later iterations of their scheme: Ubu and Maria not only save the always-defector Marco and his shooter family after beating him through a clever defection of their own, bringing him in on the ground level of their new alien/human trading cartel rather than leaving him a loser, they also use their victory to save the entire shooter lifestyle from vanishing under Consolidation - a kind of ultimate cooperation. The Movement picaro offers a very interesting twist on the trick motif: the picaros redeem the initial traumatic trick by playing ultimately beneficial tricks of their own.

Finally, Movement picaresques often turn the cooperative trickery into a tool of positive social criticism. *Transmetropolitan* has not been mentioned in this section, primarily because the series, inverting as it does picaresque tropes such as the trauma of childhood exile (Jerusalem is an adult and happily and willingly self-exiled; his "exile" is being forced to return to civilization), does not offer an example of befooling incident and as such is largely absent of the traumatic trick. Nevertheless, *Transmetropolitan* provides countless examples of trickery, both "cooperative" and "defective." Jerusalem is, by definition, a modern trickster, being based partly on Hunter Thompson himself and partly on Raoul Duke, Thompson's fictive trickster character. He is also an investigative journalist, a profession itself highly dependent on the arts of



deception. Of the countless examples of positive trickery in *Transmetropolitan*, Jerusalem's version of the classic tabloid journalist exercise of "monstering" is perhaps the most illustrative. Jerusalem's definition of monstering is as follows: "Monstering. Fine old journalistic art. Like kung fu. . . . It's the art of abusing people. Of ambushing them with questions, following them with questions, hounding them with questions, driving them to their fucking graves with questions" (5.55). Of course, monstering as most people understand it is as a bullying tactic: one thinks of a tabloid hounding a not-quite-out celebrity for no reason other than sales, or perhaps a Rupert Murdoch publication hacking phones, conducting private investigations, and running horrible stories until a critic of the publication goes away. Jerusalem certainly uses the full arsenal of monstering. His victim is one senator Tarleton Sweeney, about whom allegations of funding a porn flick (which he did, in fact, bankroll) have been swirling. Thus, Jerusalem begins to stalk the man, hounding him at press conferences and on the street with requests to see his genitals, etc. Jerusalem, however, is using this technique for what he considers a noble purpose. Jerusalem explains that "Monstering is, ultimately, about giving a shit. It's about giving something back to these bastards, these people whom we somehow let run our goddamn lives for us. . . . Every law that curbs my basic human freedoms; every lie about the things I care for; every crime committed against me by their politics -- That's what makes me get up and hound these fuckers" (5.66). Jerusalem's motivation isn't fundamentally dissimilar to the same abridgements of freedom that caused Lazarillo and his ilk to put any and all tricks possible over on their "superiors"; Jerusalem's politician and corporate victims are simply the new incarnation of the oppressive aristocrat masters early picaros victimized and thus exposed as frauds. Much like Lindsay, Ubu, and Maria, Jerusalem is deploying his trickery for a purpose ultimately beneficial to everyone: he is fighting the powers that be with the aim of exposing their

shortcomings and abridging their own ability to abridge freedom. In this, the picaresque has come full circle, using the trick motif to effect social criticism yet allowing the picaros to remain morally superior (in some ways), able to rise above the always-defect nature of the classical picaro.

### Role Playing and The Protean Form

"Everything that is profound loves the mask"

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

Connected to the motif of the trick, though lacking the darker psychological aspect, is the general tendency of picaros to change roles multiple times over the course of a narrative, both in a superficial and intrinsic sense. To a certain extent, wearing many hats is to be expected in a narrative form dependent upon a picaro's eternal drift from master to master. Wicks explains that the "very ability of the picaro to perform in as many jobs as he does and to play as many tricks as he can resides in this large repertoire of masks. He is not only the servant of many masters but the master of many masks" (*Picaresque* 65). As is to be expected, Movement picaresque maintains this motif. *Saturn's Children*, for instance, is heavily dependent upon Freya's ability to effectively masquerade; Freya, having joined what amounts to an espionage agency, adopts many other identities throughout the novel in pursuit of her various missions. Avoiding pursuit, she at one juncture adopts the temporary disguise of an exotic dancer named Kate provided her by Ferd, a quack doctor/mechanic character. At another, she must masquerade as the aristocrat Katherine Sorico as part of her first courier job, even receiving lessons intended to make the mask perfect. *Transmetropolitan's* Jerusalem also employs all manner of tricks, deceptions, and confidence games in order to further his journalistic mission. Clearly recalling Thompson's own

charades, Jerusalem, for example, sneaks into a presidential address (from which he is understandably barred) by masquerading as "the Reverend Colonel Jacob Capone, Chairman of the West Chapter of the Armed Corporate Hirelings for Jehovah" (2.18). Such overtly silly masquerades constitute part of Jerusalem's bag of journalistic tricks and, along with Freya's mission-oriented deceptions, illustrate the way in which the motif of role-playing can operate as "a survival tactic" (Wicks, *Picaresque* 65).

Of course, survival tactics in the traditional picaresque tended to involve actual survival rather than success in missions and in journalistic investigations, the picaros of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries typically being genuinely impoverished and near starvation. The vast majority of SF envisions a future of plenty, so survival often takes a more abstract level. *Angel Station* is the closest of the four example texts to providing genuine dire straits requiring trickery and role-playing to escape, but even here the pair still have a starship (though the bank seeks to repossess it) and thus many options. Their worst-case scenario simply involves having to go planetside and live a "mudville" existence. Even without the subsistence motivations driving earlier picaros, these are genuine moments of role-playing and reveal quite a bit about the deeper meanings of the role-playing motif. Consider one specific instance of role-playing in Williams's *Angel Station*. After having encountered Beloved's alien race and "tricking" her by trading a near-worthless load of old mining computers reconfigured as navigational equipment finer than anything the biotech-focused aliens have for an inconceivably valuable load of rare pharmaceuticals, Ubu and Maria are afforded the opportunity to play the unfamiliar role of the wealthy. However, their success attracts the attention of Marco de Suarez, the same shooter who snaked a crucial deal from their father years before. Again, history repeats and Marco manages to snake the Beloved deal from Ubu, stealing the aliens' location and beating the Runaway there.

In order to regain control, Maria decides to pretend to defect to Marco's ship and use her abilities to undermine them from within. In order to do this, she must be convincing: Ubu is required to savagely beat an unaware Maria so that her defection might appear convincing. His "savage" beating of Maria in order to facilitate her infiltration of Marco's operation is another form of role-playing, as both Ubu and Maria must sincerely commit themselves to this operation. Ubu, with his eidetic memory, will not be able to forget his actions; regardless of his motivations, he will remain haunted by that role. Maria, as well, must accept the consequences of her role-playing, descending into rather dark places in order to disrupt the de Suarez's ship. Picares, therefore, don't so much play a role as they become the role.

Wicks explains that "Metamorphoses and changing roles are part of the picaro's survival kit; as the world is in flux, so he can change roles to face it. Picaresque existence is a constant change of masks on the world-as-stage" (*Picaresque* 65), but it might be more accurate to say that the picaro's survival kit is built around constant changes of *being* rather than changes of masks. One of the more interesting consequences of Lindsay's own survival kit, his Shaper training, provides an illustration of such changes of being. "He closed his eyes and called on his Shaper training, the ingrained strength of ten years of psychotechnic discipline. He felt his mind slide subtly into its second mode of consciousness" in which "[h]is fear and his guilt faltered and warped away, a tangle of irrelevance" (Sterling 14). This second mode of consciousness is one in which Lindsay is able to spin lies and, most importantly, actually believe them as he tells them, and consequently he is quite able to adopt any role needed and believe he is, in fact, not a player but the role itself. Fyodor Ryumin, an old Mechanist wirehead Lindsay befriends, comments on Lindsay's nature: "you yourself don't know if you're speaking the truth? . . . they used psychodrugs to destroy your capacity for sincerity?" (20). Lindsay, at least initially, describes his

training a bit differently, suggesting that he can make himself "into a mirror and showed them their own desires" (23), recalling the picaresque's dictum that people want to be fooled while suggesting that he simply becomes whatever fantasy the listener wishes to project, but regardless Lindsay is, in fact, quite sincere: he becomes, at a level of belief, whatever he wishes to pass himself off as.

"Wanderer, who art thou?"

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

Both Bruce Sterling and Richard Morgan include an interesting feature in their picaresque heroes Abelard Lindsay and Takeshi Kovacs: the ability to soak up information about their environments at an almost instinctive level. Both derive this ability from special training; in the case of Lindsay, his Shaper diplomatic training gives him this ability: "When a diplomat was thrown into a new environment, he should repress all thoughts of the past and immediately soak up as much protective coloration as possible" (Sterling 50). Kovacs derives his from his Envoy training, something far more militaristic in intent but producing nearly the same outcome: "Envoys are good listeners. You listen, you file under local colour, you soak it up. Later, the recalled detail maybe saves your life" (Morgan, *Woken Furies* 14). It is interesting that many of the newer picaresques stress abilities that allow the picaresque, bacteria-like, take on qualities of the environment on instinct, as it is this tendency that foregrounds the picaresque's unique ability to *be* rather than *seem*. Chameleons simply roughly imitate their environment; bacteria suck up the DNA of other bacteria by absorption and can quite literally become what they consume.

Lindsay's ability to literally become a role rather than simply mimic it highlights the unique yet unstable nature of the picaresque's identity, what Stuart Miller refers to as the picaresque's

"protean" nature. Miller suggests that "[i]n his protean guises, the picaro's character becomes, once more, radically undefined. He assumes whatever appearance the world forces on him . . . making definition and order disappear" (70) and thus further emphasizing that "that the world is in chaos" (71). While Miller supports this reading of the protean nature of the picaro with a debatable reading of *Lazarillo de Tormes's* ending, believing that, by the time Lazarillo has become a town crier and married a prostitute, "[e]ven the fragments of Lazarillo's personality have dissolved. He has become to us and to his world sheer appearance, a living lie" (71), the point about a picaro's mutable inner world is solid and can be seen in nearly all Movement picaresques, peopled as they are with similarly mutable postmodern character types.

However, the protean nature of a picaro is not, necessarily, a negative, as Miller's statements regarding "sheer appearance" and "living a lie" imply. The protean form must be understood in terms of flexibility, since it is flexibility that allows a picaro to navigate, parkour-like, the chaotic and unstable structures of his or her own environment. Williams makes this rather explicit when outlining the limitations of Beloved's intellect: "What Beloved failed to realize was that she required servants who had been so polluted. She needed servants who could instinctively recognize human schemes, who could warn her away from actions that might worsen her situation. Her own icy rationality was not flexible enough to deal with the human threat" (364). Ubu, however, was flexible enough to form a theory of mind to account entirely for Beloved. "That's why I've beaten her" Ubu notes, "[b]ecause I've got Beloved in my head, and she won't put us in hers" (376). Indeed, his personality does, in a sense, dissolve - Maria states that "[e]very time she met him, Ubu was a little further removed from the brother she remembered. He had too much in his head now to ever be *just Ubu* again" (388) - but in another

sense his personality expands as well, allowing Ubu a great advantage, as he, like the bacteria analogy mentioned previously, absorbs his competition.

Ultimately, Miller's assertion that the flexibility of a picaro's inner world might pose a threat to agency seems wrong. Miller believes that the “picaro reveals in his variability his abdication of self-determination. If society is a chaos of appearances, he will embrace that chaos by becoming totally ‘other-directed’” (71), and, without a doubt most contemporary picaresque narratives begin with characters whose self-determination has been co-opted by external forces. *Transmetropolitan*: Jerusalem has been forced to return to the City. *Angel Station*: Ubu and Maria are at the mercy of the forces of Consolidation. *Saturn's Children*: Freya is subjected to the whims of a robotic aristocracy. *Rule of the Bone*: Chappie is haunted by the trauma of sexual abuse at the hands of his stepfather. *Housekeeping*: Sylvie is constrained by the need to abandon her wanderer lifestyle to take care of her dead sister's children. This list could continue indefinitely, as nearly every contemporary example of the picaresque, postcyberpunk or otherwise, includes this motif. However, the narrative is usually directed at the picaro regaining control of his or her own autonomy, either by escaping external controls placed on them or overcoming any internal scripting they have acquired. Clearly, a multitude of inner voices and different personalities can make a person eternally flexible, or the babble could just as easily make a person virtually non-existent. Imagine a person whose personality is composed entirely of identities and behaviors cribbed from soap operas. Such a person is emotionally crippled, able to respond to relationship cues only through overly-dramatic rote behaviors modeled from what the person sees on his or her soaps. Picaros often begin their journeys burdened with similar internal scripts (Huck's belief that he must see Jim as inferior, for example), until the journey itself helps to erase the script and harness the more useful properties of internal flexibility.

Lazarillo, though critical opinions vary, clearly seems quite cognizant of the implications of his marriage to an archbishop's favorite concubine; Lazarillo has now become exploiter rather than exploited, playing a role sincerely and yet with a knowing wink. He may well no longer be, as Miller suggested "a character with a more or less fixed ideal, trying to realize that ideal. . . . [and possessed] of a certain amount of personality organization" (73), having embraced "complete plasticity . . . becoming what life asks of him at each moment" (73), but surely this is an empowering state for a once disempowered orphan sold to an abusive blind beggar?

Contemporary picaros, postcyberpunk and mainstream, do often evidence rather extreme schizophrenic personalities, but multiple-personality disorders are only considered problematic and anomalous because human personalities are considered inviolate monads, and picaros both classical and contemporary learn to make this state serve their own interests.

#### Motifs Unique to Movement Picaresque

##### The Navigator

Lazarillo spends the entirety of *Lazarillo de Tormes* as a drifter, idly moving from master to master, never really taking control of his life. In fact, Lazarillo's most self-determined action was simply to leave a particularly unpleasant master. Huck is largely the same, drifting at the mighty Mississippi's whim until the very last, when he takes control of his own trajectory and goes West. Nearly all traditional picaresque narratives features tramps and wanderers, none of whom really expressed much agency in their choice of direction. Contemporary picaresques, especially Movement SF picaresques, seem to have reversed this attitude, slowly moving the picaro towards a role as navigator. This motif is tied to the quest for agency that, as I will argue later, lies at the heart of the current picaresque incarnation: as the picaro regains agency and



direction, the navigator motif becomes stronger, the picaro switching from being driven by others to actually sitting behind the wheel.

The reader's initial experience of such navigators is one of paradox: the reader is presented with a presumably competent navigator who, for various often inscrutable reasons, is unable or unwilling to take the position of driver. William Gibson, though not a writer of picaresque narratives, provides a useful introduction to the navigator motif, as he uses in his decidedly non-picaresque narratives characters who would not be out of place in a narrative strongly situated in the picaresque mode. Consider *Neuromancer's* Case. Case, the original console cowboy, is a loser, and a rather powerless one, at that. Considered by many critics to be nothing but a thin adolescent male power fantasy, the confirmation bias-free reality is that Case spends the majority of the novel a powerless tool of one force or another. In Chiba City he is the victim of his own failure, symbolized by the medical procedure that prevents him from accessing the matrix, and his various addictions, crutches compensating for his loss of power. After he is tapped by Armitage and, by extension, the AI Wintermute, Case is simply a tool for a higher mind, manipulated at every level into doing the will of an electronic god. Case even seems to be aware of this (or, at least, Gibson gives the audience a bit of a clue), demonstrated by Case's fascination with a shuriken he sees in a store: "The shuriken had always fascinated him, steel stars with knife-sharp points. . . . They caught the street's neon and twisted it, and it came to Case that these were the stars under which he voyaged, his destiny spelled out in a constellation of cheap chrome" (10). An apt metaphor, not simply because the razor-sharp throwing star is an image of violence and Case lives a violent life, but also because Case does not own the star. It is a curio in a storefront, an image that he recalls during significant moments, such as during the procedure to reverse the Russian mycotoxin damage that had robbed him of his ability. Again,

the star Case steers by isn't owned by Case, and it is appropriate that he would think of this image as he is being "repaired": though his abilities are returned, they are returned for him to serve another's will - the doctors rendered him "biochemically incapable of getting off on amphetamine or cocaine" (30), in addition to installing some custom toxin sacs to ensure he did the job. Clearly, his fate is not what he makes it. The star is, however, still an important image, a reminder of his need/quest for agency. He does come to acquire one: Molly Millions, who notices that he is always looking at shuriken in store windows, makes him a gift of one, calling it a "souvenir." Significantly, Case, before re-entering the matrix for the first time in years - his natural element - looks at it: "He glanced up; on the wall, just above the Sony, he'd hung her gift, tacking it there with a yellow-headed drawing pin through the hole at its center" (41). Case's guiding shuriken becomes partially "his" when he finally has some degree of control over his own destiny, free of his addictions and back in cyberspace, but he is still a puppet. After the Straylight run has been completed, Wintermute and Neuromancer merge, and Molly has vanished for parts unknown, Case allows himself one more very important realization about his star: "Stars. Destiny. I never even used the goddam thing" (201), and indeed, he did not, never having any real agency in the story. Significantly, his final act is to fling the star directly into a television screen, perhaps signaling his embrasure of his own autonomy. Free from the manipulative influences of artificial intelligences, Case is able to reclaim his own agency. Considering that the Finn, in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, tells Molly that the last he'd heard of Case was that had four children, he seems to have regained control of his life. While existing only in the periphery of the picaresque mode, *Neuromancer* illustrates the role of the navigator motif well: the motif becomes stronger as the picaro gains agency.

Allow me to illustrate this point further by applying the motif to the underappreciated (though not underrated - there are reasons why the film rarely sees higher than an 11 percent on *Rottentomatoes*) 2001 film *Joe Dirt*, which participates fully in the picaresque mode. *Joe Dirt* follows the episodic adventures of orphan and outcast Joe Dirt as he searches America for his lost family. Abandoned at the Grand Canyon while searching a garbage bin for snuff, Dirt tramps his way from place to place, living hand-to-mouth (or, rather, hand-to-French fries unwisely placed on the surface of the frozen contents of an airliner's septic system masquerading as a meteor-to-mouth). Dirt, after years of passing through foster homes, juvenile halls, and hobo campsites, finds himself in Silvertown, his own version of paradise, complete with (potential) girlfriend and dog. So emotionally wrecked by his unknown origins is Joe that he cannot accept his good fortune, and, one malicious comment by a convincingly-cast Kid Rock later, Dirt is on the road again, looking for his past. It is important to note that at no time in Dirt's search up to this point has he owned a car, though he clearly desires and obsesses about automobiles. The writers, David Spade and Fred Wolf, to their credit, make Dirt's need for agency masked as a hunger for automotive mastery plain, through both numerous conversational name-drops and several foregrounded jokes: for example, while at the mercy of Buffalo Bob (a *Silence of the Lambs* riff played by character-actor Brian Thompson), Dirt whines and refuses to "put the lotion on its skin" until supplied with a recent copy of *Auto Trader* magazine. Moreover, while on his quest Dirt manages to purchase what looks like a 1968 Plymouth Roadrunner with a 426 Hemi engine, but he immediately is separated from the vehicle when a sudden storm blows the tooth-shaped hot-air balloon he was in out of town (as I said, there are solid reasons for the 11 percent). Still, the scene's point is clear: the Roadrunner is a clear metaphor for self-mastery and agency, which Dirt simply does not have as of yet. In fact, when he finds himself a short time

later in a position to reclaim his prize, he does not have the money (a measly few hundred) to get it out of impound. He can only afford the somewhat less-respected and far more symbolic 1969 Dodge Daytona, albeit a version of the limited production run car in incredibly poor repair. This car becomes the butt of many jokes and is a constant source of embarrassment for Dirt, who feels excuses must be made for it. The Daytona is thus not a symbol of mastery but of failure and a lack of control. Dirt does not manage to reclaim the Roadrunner until the very end of the film, when he has, through his own excellent character, managed to gather a family around him to replace the horrible family that had abandoned him (having found them earlier in the film, he was driven to suicide by the final act of the film before being rescued by his surrogate family). In a somewhat formulaic closing scene, Dirt, in his Roadrunner along with his girlfriend and "mother and father" played by Rosanna Arquette and Christopher Walken respectively, manages to blow Bobby, Kid Rock's character, off the road, thus finally gaining true agency via the metaphor of driving. Dirt, then, ends as a true navigator after having begun as a drifter. (The Tim Burton fan certainly notes that every point made about *Joe Dirt* could easily be applied to *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*.)

*Saturn's Children*, while illustrating the navigator motif, does so in a very traditional fashion, and as such is a good place to begin. Freya begins the narrative as a literal tramp (no pun intended), bouncing from one part of the solar system to another, navigating only in the most pedestrian sense. As previously stated, the purpose of the navigator motif is to highlight agency/control in narratives where characters are lost and dependent on others or on society. The traveler is, of course, a very primitive form of a navigator, but in general a traveler moves at the mercy of other factors (airport delays, restrictive prices, etc.) and is hardly in true control; the traveler is less an image of agency than an image of victimhood, especially in a post-9/11 world.

Thus, the motif is usually taken further, meaning that picaresque navigators must become motorcycle riders, truckers, ship captains, etc. The traveler or wanderer thus foregrounds chaos. The notable absence of any real navigation by Freya in *Saturn's Children* serves to highlight the theme of purposelessness and obsolescence; one who does not drive is driven by others, subject to other wills and whims. Freya moves from wanderer to semi-secret agent, never really in control of her own fate until the very close of the novel. Freya does take control at the very end of the narrative: while she doesn't exactly pilot the ship herself, she does exit the solar system on a colony ship - hardly the place for people uninterested in creating their own destiny. Freya's final act of self-possession is thus marked as important due to the structuring absence of the navigator motif for the majority of the narrative.

*Angel Station*, on the other hand, is a far more contemporary use of the navigator motif. Ubu Roy and Beautiful Maria are both shooters, meaning that they both pilot "singularity shoots" that allow the instantaneous traversal of tens of light years at a time; Maria even has a near-supernatural facility for it. The physics are not worth explaining; Williams is simply tweaking the same mega-textual FTL trope that pops up in everything from *Battlestar Galactica* to *Event Horizon*. The only difference is that the pilot takes a very active part in the affair, using a neural computer link to ride the gravitational tides of the contained black hole in order to optimize performance. (If that still sounds like SF hand-waving, it is because it *is* hand-waving: all that matters is that some are good at it and others are not.) While Ubu was good, Maria was near-supernaturally good, having been genetically engineered by Pasco, her father, with a not-entirely-thought-out witches' brew of genetic material thought to be associated with extra sensory perception: "It wasn't until she began running through singularity shots on the simulator, and a substantial percentage of the difficulties that Pasco had programmed for her either failed to

appear or suffered mysterious delay, that Pasco began to realize something was up. . . . By the time Pasco killed himself, Maria's ability was keeping *Runaway* alive" (25). Pasco had engineered Beautiful Maria to be a "genuine witch" (25), although Williams does keep this within the realm of, if not believability, then acceptable suspension of disbelief. Maria possesses the ability to intentionally glitch electronics systems, having a deep, intuitive understanding of the atomic world. This results in a natural ability to navigate the singularities used for travel, as she can feel the quantum echoes of events somewhat before they occur. Again, a parallel can be drawn to shows like *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda*: the principle character Beka Valentine possesses an unusually high ability to navigate "slipstream," a transportation network vaguely analogous to *Babylon 5's* jumpgates, an ability chalked up partially to genetically enhanced reflexes and partially to pure intuition (organic intuition, not the more sexist gender-based kind). Maria, then, is a navigator's navigator, a kind of living Athena (or Poseidon - both were associated with the navigator's arts). Williams makes plain the importance of her talents: "No other shooter in existence could do this: no one else operated at this level. Her navigational aids lagged behind reality, unable to comprehend events on this scale; she worked from instinct alone, distorting gravity waves, dampening mutability, fighting tooth and claw against the furious, unforgiving mathematics of the singularity" (105).

Williams, far more adeptly than the screenwriters of *Joe Dirt*, seems to recognize this feature of contemporary picaros, as he highlights the navigator motif quite directly: "Ubu sat up in his couch and removed the headset. . . . 'Do you know the word cybernetic comes from the old Greek language? It means someone who steers a boat" (202), stating the very point explored by Timothy Leary in "The Individual as Reality Pilot." As with all picaros, however, Maria does not begin this story in much control of her own existence, despite having such a liberating ability.

Ubu and Maria begin the story in dire straits, having been burned on a mining equipment shipping deal and sitting under a massive loan that, once in arrears, will cause the Runaway, their ship and symbol of independence, to be sold out from under them. Ubu, as bossrider, devises numerous plans to escape this fate, including using Maria's abilities to glitch the bank software for a loan extension and scamming a casino for operating capital. Ubu is, like Maria, a picaresque figure, so there isn't a moral dimension involved; had Maria been in charge, she would no doubt have done the same thing. It is important to note, however, that she was not in charge, and, despite not being comfortable with Ubu's logical if desperate moves, always followed his lead: "She would follow [Ubu], follow the plan, follow until the last pattern flashed on the table, and the stakes were swept from the board" (65). Ubu, while intelligent and capable, is, like Maria, buffeted entirely by the effects of a Consolidation that chokes out independent shipping and the need to make good on their accumulated debts, and his decisions lead to the pair being subject to both a savage session of torture at the hands of casino security and later to arrest for bank fraud - victimization, in other words (ignoring, of course, that Ubu and Maria happily victimize others). Maria's first *active* choice in the novel is the decision to blow jail, steal their own ship, and jump into the unknown. While it is true that she is, in a loose sense, enacting part of Ubu's original plan, Maria is doing it alone and under her own direction. In fact, she actively uses Kit, her boyfriend and son of a competitive clan, to gain access to the Runaway, ruining her relationship with him and ruining his relationship with his family in the process - all at Ubu's protests, uneasy at the thought of hurting his sister further. Their escape culminates with the first description<sup>32</sup> of Maria using her abilities in a singularity shoot, foregrounding her agency in prose laced with a technological lyricism reminiscent of M. John Harrison: "The ship itself had

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<sup>32</sup> A previous description had been given as Maria played (and scammed) a casino game called Blackhole, which had been styled after the experience of shooting singularities.

vanished from her vision. She accelerated down the center of a crying radiant tunnel, poured down tightly confined magnetic fields onto the surface of a lightless sun. Above her, the universe spun past in accelerating brightness, its white light become shattering rainbows. The keen of dying matter sounded into her ears" (104). Though this line is not quite as remarkable and lyrical as Gibson's "fluid neon origami trick" that was Case's first (re)introduction into the matrix, as with *Neuromancer* the language alerts the reader to the fact that Maria, like Case, has regained agency, and the moment is joyous. Maria is a navigator, and to chart one's own course is an act of joy enough to leave one "laughing, . . . tears of release streaking [one's] face" (Gibson 42). Such moments of joy are ubiquitous in Movement picaresque.

#### The Master of Arcane, Forbidden, Outsider Knowledge/Skills

The navigator motif is but a very universal example of a larger category: specifically, most picaros found in Movement picaresque narratives seem to possess arcane and occasionally forbidden outsider knowledge and abilities that set them apart. Now, there is nothing new in protagonists possessing special abilities; genre protagonists have a long history of impressive abilities intended to set them apart from the common man, and of course epic heroes of all types are defined by such abilities. Virgil Samms, of Smith's *Lensman* series, is one of a long line of SF figures with greater-than-average abilities, he being the product of a complex breeding program (a motif also seen in Herbert's *Dune* series and hundreds of other genre books). SF picaros, it must be understood, have very little in common with such figures despite also possessing special abilities. Such figures tend to be tied to some hero's journey model, empowering them for the purpose of delivering a boon to humanity. SF picaros, however, tend not to be empowered by a deity or destiny, as these are both concepts that usually don't have a place in the chaotic worlds the picaresque constructs. Rather, the picaro's knowledge/skills tend



to be preexisting, if largely undeveloped, and certainly not delivered unto them by God or fate. Moreover, the picaro's abilities certainly are not intended to benefit all; picaros rarely deliver boons to society, unless said boon is blowback from the picaro's own personal ambitions. (*Angel Station's* ending seems an exception until one realizes that the boon was delivered to the underworld; picaros cooperate and defect, but tend not to *sacrifice*, which is the meat of the hero's journey model). At any rate, the self-sacrifice usually found in such archetypal heroes is typically lacking in the usually much more intelligent (read: sensibly interested in self-preservation) picaro. In fact, the picaro's "powers" are usually not particularly enviable, coming with major drawbacks or being somewhat trivial.

As such, the arcane skills do not constitute the adolescent empowerment fantasy that critics such as Nicola Nixon find in cyberpunk; the drawbacks that come with the abilities serve to reinforce the picaro's outsider status rather than making the characters superhuman. Freya, for instance, possesses the rather unpleasant training mentioned above, with all of its "subtleties," ensuring that her line was "properly trained to obedience" (125) by having it raped into them. While this did come with an entire suite of skills, including the crucial empathy required by picaros, few people would want such a training regiment's baggage. In fact, Freya receives several mind-state updates, giving her progressively greater abilities - espionage skills, combat training, etc. - but all seem to have the same terrible drawbacks, as they are derived from snapshots of Freya's progenitor (in this case, the prototype of her line). Lindsay possesses a similar ability derived from his Shaper training, and it seems to come with its own baggage. For instance, Lindsay, upon seeing Nora, his future wife, using "a diplomatic training device. A spinal crab" (81), a strange device that inflicts great pain both physical and psychological while bonding with the nervous system and exercising the body, goes berserk and destroys the device,

stating, "When I smashed that thing I felt real freedom" (82). In fact, Lindsay spends the majority of the novel slowly losing his Shaper abilities; though useful in their way, Lindsay equates them with inauthentic existence and bad memories. Jerusalem, by contrast, simply has mystical journalistic powers, augmented by a somewhat higher-than-normal tolerance for substance abuse. While this might seem like a standard stoner fantasy, the fact that Jerusalem is generally depicted as repellant defuses this somewhat.

While all of the texts contain examples of this motif, *Angel Station* provides the most obvious; Ubu Roy, due to his father's genetic tinkering, comes equipped with an eidetic memory, synesthesia, and other odd cognitive tweaks. Ubu's interesting mind seems like a desirable thing; for instance, his memory and his synesthesia give him excellent musical skills: "At the end he hauled the neck of the guitar in a long seesaw motion to produce a chorus vibrato that sent little waves of burning metal into his perceptions, like a strobe flashing off boiling, dancing quicksilver" (75). However, during the few times he sits in with a band, he screws things up, inserting strange rhythms that make sense only to him into the songs - a clear drawback of processing sound differently. Moreover, Ubu spends a great deal of time worrying about what memories he will be burdened with. A certain scam Ubu and Maria pull requires Ubu to savagely beat Maria, so that she can convincingly defect to a competitor ship and undermine their operation; Ubu's perfect memory means that he will forever be haunted by an act of violence against a loved one. Clearly, the picaro's special abilities and skills aren't designed to render them superheroic; rather, they are designed primarily to set the picaro apart, giving him or her a different, though hardly superhuman, perspective. Such powers make them outsiders, not gods. Ultimately, Ubu's outsider status allows him the perspective to construct a true theory of mind for an alien intelligence – "He was constructing Beloved in his mind, measure after measure. He

had been doing it for days" (349) - so that "[w]hen the time came, he would out-Beloved Beloved" (350) and thus ensure his and Maria's victory. Thus, it is the powerful outsider perspective provided by his mental powers that proves most crucial.

Like the navigator motif, this broader category is also tied to the possibility of regaining authenticity and agency, for it is often through these skills/knowledge that the protagonist is able to break the bike off of the programmed track, to use a Gibson image. Williams makes this explicit: Ubu, and by extension Maria, begin the novel as losers, doomed to failure after failure . . . just like their father, Pasco. Eventually, Ubu comes to understand that his own failure is largely due to repeating the patterns of his father: "We've got to change, Maria. . . . All Pop ever did was show us how to fail. If we don't change, we'll be nothing" (377). Ubu, then, with or without perfect memory, has had his behavior scripted by environment. The schemes he cooks up, the options and solutions he imagines, all seem to be echoes of mistakes made by his father. This sums up the experiences of most people ensconced in complex societies (or simple ones, for that matter): conservatism can be predicted by birth order, religious preference can be predicted by parental religious preference, etc. It is only through the adoption of an outsider's perspective that the manufactured nature of much of our "core" identity can be recognized and altered, leading to more fully authentic existences. Of course, the *other* function of the picaresque, social criticism, requires an outsider perspective as well, so this motif serves two masters - much like the picaros themselves.

#### The Fragmented Identity and the Saturated Self

Walter Jon Williams, potentially cribbing from Gibson's "Fragments of a Hologram Rose," puts an interesting statement regarding the human condition into the mouth of proto-

picaro General Volitional Twelve in *Angel Station*: "Somewhere in their past, Twelve thought, humanity had been shattered. Each individual had become a fragment, without a Beloved to arrange their lives to an appropriate pattern" (243). Twelve is referring to his own society's make-up, which features individual super-consciousnesses into which the various classes of non-volitional and volitional members link. Super-consciousnesses such as Beloved order thoughts, dispense pleasure and pain, give or rescind a sense of failure or a sense of meaning and well-being, etc. In short, Twelve's identity (prior to his semi-picaresque adventures aboard *Runaway*) is quite unified, being entirely engineered by Beloved. This focus on unified identity even includes strict information hygiene, Twelve being constantly on guard for "thought pollution," which, Maria speculates, is "not a metaphor but a reality, a genuine contamination written into the structure of the memory like a phage virus written into human genes, one that could be passed from one individual to another and eliminated only with the destruction of the minds that held it" (208) - a significant observation, because Ubu himself possesses an eidetic memory significantly more accurate than the aliens' already formidable memory. By the end of the novel, Ubu's mind, something he spends a great deal of time trying to protect from unpleasant data, such as the memory of "Black, hard tumors" (111) dotting a gene-line of pork gone bad, has grown to encompass even Beloved's vast consciousness: "I've got Beloved in my head . . . But I'm contaminated now. Beloved's a part of me . . . Her responses are going to be part of mine forever" (376). Ultimately, Ubu's mind will contain parts of many others, not just himself, a posthuman form of consciousness very much in antithesis to the idea of a unified sense of self. For Ubu this is a useful state, as it allows him the mental flexibility to triumph over his competition, but it does mean that his sense of self is largely shattered, broken into pieces and reassembled from often mismatched parts. Maria, at the novel's close, worried that Ubu "had too

much in his head now to ever be *just* Ubu again" (388), even makes it "her self-appointed work to keep Ubu human" (388), the necessity of which saying volumes about the fluctuating state of Ubu's identity.

It is the presence of protagonists marked by this fluctuating identity, populated by the fragments of others consistent with the notion of the saturated self described by psychologist Kenneth Gergen, that forms a major cornerstone of the contemporary picaro's construction. All picaros, classic or contemporary, must have some variation of this fluid sense of self; as explained previously, one of the features distinguishing the picaresque from the romance is the disunified identity of the picaro. Even so, contemporary picaros see a unique change to the traditionally scattered sense of self, one intimately tied to both the madness scene discussed previously and the background chaos of the picaresque world proper. Though having rather fluid senses of self, contemporary picaros find their identities both shattered by and so overburdened with outside voices and information that their own agency, not simply a cherished unified sense of self, becomes threatened. When this threat becomes real, the picaro must develop strategies to overcome the cognitive dissonance and scripted voices abridging his or her agency, one of which is the picaresque road-narrative itself. As this idea forms the basis of Part 3, little more needs to be said here, save for the observation that, while the idea of a fragmented identity is common across postmodern texts, the solutions found in picaresque novels are quite unique and help set the genre apart.

Letting Go of Ideology: Picaros and Picaras as Tabula Rasa

"Pretend I'm a theatre audience, Dr. Mavrides. Tell me about your ideology."

"I don't have one."

-Sterling, *Schismatrix* (1985)

Rigid, ideologically-defined thinking has always been poison to picaresque existence. Lazarillo, at best, paid little more than lip-service to religion, usually preferring to spend his time exposing the contradictions and illusions inherent in the belief structure. Priests were exposed as venal and grasping, vow of poverty be damned<sup>33</sup>, while indulgence peddlers were exposed as cheap con-men relying on theatrics even televangelists would find embarrassing. While other picaros who were themselves derived from the Lazarillo formula might have professed varying levels of religious belief, critics tend to regard out-of-place piety as ironic or a rear-guard action against theocratic retaliation. Miller, for example, writes concerning the various pious sentiments found in the ending of *El Buscón*, observing that "[t]here is reason even to doubt the moral proposition (possibly put in for the benefit of the Inquisition), since this sentiment is practically the only one of its kind in the book" (113). Miller says much the same concerning *The Adventures of Roderick Random's* unexpectedly saccharine ending (Random reconnects with wealthy family and inherits enough money to marry Narcissa immediately): "religion had been largely absent from the book. A new vision of a just world . . . suddenly erupts at the end - the good are exalted, the evil punished roundly. Faced with the necessity of an ending, Smollett has supplied one, but its vapid cliché quality makes one feel that even he did not believe in it" (127). Indeed, few and far between are picaresque narratives that truly, authentically embrace religious piety, and picaros embrace piety no more fully than any other restrictive and demanding worldview.

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<sup>33</sup> Obviously, not all priests are required to take a vow of poverty, but Canon Law calls even Diocesan priests to lead lives of material simplicity.

Indeed, the very nature of the picaro makes such a wholehearted acceptance of rigid belief structures somewhat impossible. As previously discussed, picaresque narratives are heavily invested in the theme of discovering one's values anew. Moreover, picaros are defined by a certain characteristic empathy, a rather advanced theory of mind allowing for the drawing out, conversationally speaking, of other people. An inflexible worldview is fundamentally incompatible with both features, for how can a picaro discover values anew when incapable of abandoning the old ones or properly empathize with another lifestyle while obligated to revile and judge? A picaro must always be ideology-free. That said, it must be observed that, just as the navigator motif takes most of a novel to develop, most potential picaros found in contemporary picaresques, SF or otherwise, must focus on unlearning previously instilled values as much as learning new ones. Lazarillo, having very little education, didn't require much deprogramming; current picaros, however, being products of a consumerist culture in which bizarre ideologies running the gamut from traditional (Catholicism, Judaism, etc.) to the ersatz (New Age "philosophies," Mormonism, Scientology, etc.), all compete in the cutthroat marketplace of ideas for the brains and dollars (mainly dollars) of potential believers. In such an environment, it would be a miracle for a picaro to *not* be carrying some sort of crippling mind virus needing a road cure. For such unfortunate, un-mellow travelers, the narrative eventually brings them to a "clear" state, if I may liberate a term from L. Ron Hubbard's church. Whatever the picaro's starting point, the end is always the same: freedom from ideological inflexibility.

While Freya, Ubu and Maria, and Spider Jerusalem all offer countless examples of inherently flexible and ideology-free thinking, Sterling's *Schismatrix* actually provides a monologue on the subject. Lindsay, while attempting to convince the Shaper colony inside the asteroid Esairs XII to save their lives by complying with the pirates aboard the Red Consensus,

makes the following statement: "Mech, Shaper, those are only labels. The point is that we *live*" (74). Lindsay repeatedly stresses life over ideology (the labels "Mech" and "Shaper" being largely ideology-based, one group fetishizing hardware and the other wetware, amongst other differences), though others rarely listen. "Negotiations" between the Shaper group and the pirates eventually break down, leading to war - only Lindsay and his future wife, Nora Mavrides, survive, handily demonstrating the folly of the Shapers clinging to worn-out ideologies: when the aliens arrive, Lindsay's point about the pointlessness of labels is handily made for him. Lindsay did not, however, begin the narrative as such a flexible thinker: he begins the novel as a political radical, a true victim of ideology, who, in the novel's prologue, believes that "suicide [is] the last protest" (5) and screams "In the name of humanity! And the preservation of human values! I freely choose to-- [self-terminate, I assume he meant to finish]" (5) as he tries to stab himself to death to punctuate his lover's similar self-righteous suicide. Much like the slow burn that renders wanderers into nascent navigators, the sundogging of Sf picaros slowly works to deprogram them and burn away whatever ideological dirt clung initially to their heels.

Not only does Sterling give Lindsay monologues outlining the picaresque abandonment of ideology, he actually summons up what might as well be the spirit guide of the picaro and gives *it* an ideology-bashing monologue to boot. At the novel's close, Lindsay, prospecting on the ocean's bottom for suitable genetic models for his current European terraforming project, encounters a mysterious alien entity called the Presence, hinted at earlier in the novel, who had apparently been following Lindsay for some time. This Presence, before converting Lindsay to its own unique way of life, engages in a little dialogue with Lindsay, pointing out that people who ask "the Final Questions" tend to "get the Final Answers, and then it's goodbye" (235). For the Presence, those big answers, that absolute truth, is a kind of death-sentence - regardless of



whether the transcendent ascends to godhood or not. Big Answers are a kind of epistemological defeat.<sup>34</sup> The Presence rejects the very notion of absolute truth: "My answers? I don't have 'em. I don't care what goes on beneath this skin, I want only to see, only to feel. Origins and destinies, predictions and memories, lives and deaths, I sidestep those. I'm too slick for time to grip, you get me, sundog?" (236) and goes on to say that "I want what I already have! Eternal wonder, eternally fulfilled. . . . I'll wait out the heat-death of the universe to see what happens next!" (236). The Presence, which can easily be seen as the spirit of the picaro, seeks to be filled with eternal wonder - a good totem for SF, incidentally - and can only accomplish this by rejecting destinies, predictions - belief structures and absolute truth, in other words. The fluid Presence is the eternal rejection of ideology, and Lindsay's becoming a Presence himself is akin to Huck's decision to go West: it is a final farewell to restrictive belief. Interestingly, the Presence echoes loosely a similar speech by modern fantasy's greatest (if rarely labeled as such) picaro: Robert E. Howard's Conan the Cimmerian. Conan, in the classic story "Queen of the Black Coast," responds to a question by Bêlit, a female pirate with whom he has become involved, with the following: "I seek not beyond death. It may be the blackness averred by the Nemedian skeptics, or Crom's realm of ice and cloud, or the snowy plains and vaulted halls of the Nordheimer's Valhalla. I know not, nor do I care. Let me live deep while I live . . . I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content" (*Coming* 131). Conan is a fantasy picaro, eternally flexible, who cares not if there is an ultimate truth. This utter absence of ideology is a hallmark of Movement picaresques, hard-won though it often is.

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<sup>34</sup> This is hardly a unique sentiment. Iain M. Banks's Culture novels feature a process called "Subliming" by which a mature civilization folds itself into a fundamentally different dimension. Tantamount to ascending into an afterlife, these cultures don't interact very much with the familiar level of existence, and are regarded by the Culture as hyper-decadent and somewhat cowardly. The Culture, far from exhausting its interest in living, is unlikely to transcend.

### Just-In-Time Adaptation/Flexibility

A corollary motif to the abandonment of ideology is the SF picaro's capacity for flexibility and instant adaptation. While all picaros, of any time period, must be capable of such flexibility, one sees in Movement picaresques a certain turning of this screw, as the picaros demonstrate flexibility with and adaptation to information and events well outside of the standard human range of experience. Consider that staple of SF: encountering alien life forms. Even in respected SF texts, encounters with alien Others are treated in ways not dissimilar from Spielberg's treatment in *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which is to say with a natural affinity and sense of brotherhood that immediately overleaps the likely biological and psychological realities of such an experience. In short, much fiction romanticizes this encounter. The reality, however, is likely to be a profoundly impacting and potentially crippling experience; after all, if images of giantisopods and angler fish, which are benthic zone dwellers and about the closest thing to alien life on earth, can manage to provoke unease and anxiety in viewers, what impact would an actual alien, lacking any of the subconscious points of reference we rely on, have on a viewer? While there are no *actual* alien encounters (as of yet) from which to draw data, there have, in fact, been encounters, though these encounters might not extend beyond the boundaries of the human mind. I speak not of SF, but rather of the alien abduction phenomenon, which is nevertheless something of a bastard child of the genre. Though there is no reason to believe that any alien abductions have ever occurred (abductee accounts are likely the result of numerous factors ranging from misunderstanding of sleep paralysis to the return of the Western world's own repressed colonial past filtered through an SF framework), the abductees *do* believe in the validity of their experiences, so even though their encounters might be born from the projection of deep fears bubbling up from untapped wells, their *experience* provides a good

illustration of how humans might handle alien otherness. From abductee narratives, be they products of fantasy or the unintentional implantations of regression hypnotists, one can see consistent themes of terror and trauma. Sadly, it wasn't Spielberg's films but rather the Spielberg tribute-film *Paul* that acknowledges the harsher reality of alien encounters (weed-smoking aliens notwithstanding), as the standard response to meeting the gray alien Paul is for the human to faint and/or scream in horror.

Michael E. Zimmerman, in the essay "Encountering Alien Otherness" found in 2002's *The Concept of the Foreign*, explores this often ignored probability. Zimmerman contextualizes the alien encounter by relating it to the discovery of the New World, noting that the "discovery of native others caused Western man a narcissistic trauma perhaps even more serious than that brought about by the Copernican revolution" (9), as medieval certainties about centrality were displaced, and of course the shock to the less technologically developed peoples encountering horsed, armored Europeans was even greater. Zimmerman focuses on the abductee's experiencing of the "alien gaze," and points out that abductees, "[o]ften emphasizing the remarkable power of the alien gaze, . . . claim that it terrifies and depersonalizes them" (14), and that the "extraordinary terror [that] often arises when abductees are forced to look into the large, almond-shaped, intensely black, and seemingly impenetrable eyes of the aliens. . . . leaves one feeling drained of personhood and agency" (16). Thus, Zimmerman is suggesting that the experience "generates 'ontological shock' on the part of abductees" (22), for "[s]o bizarre are the aliens and so advanced are their technological capacities, that some abductees report experiencing an almost complete worldview collapse, whether it be secular humanism or some traditional religion, as well as a crushing blow to the personal identity connected with and dependent on that worldview" (16). Though the experiences of abductees are certainly based not

in reality but rather in their own psychology, the paralyzing effect of the experience does tell us a great deal about what a "normal" reaction to something wholly alien would be.

Thus, the first hurdle, then, of an encounter with such radical otherness is the utter collapse of both identity and agency (it should be noted that other abductees report feeling not terror and collapse but love and harmony, however I would think it clear that immediate feelings of love and brotherhood immediately disqualify the other as Other; *E.T.*'s titular alien is about as alien and Other as a family dog). The second hurdle, assuming the terror wasn't all-consuming, would simply be perceiving something clearly alien outside of the various preconceived notions upon which our cultures are built. Zimmerman notes that "[i]n the event of a verifiable manifestation of alien presence, such powerful projections (sinister invaders vs. benevolent space brothers) would prevent most people from being able to perceive the aliens competently, much less to discern their intentions (assuming that 'intentions' could be ascribed to such non-human intelligence" (14), speaking mainly of cultural programming, as most people would be burdened with good alien vs. bad alien imagery derived (or most people) from television. Thus, an SF picaro, upon encountering the utterly alien, would have two distinct hurdles to overcome, one biological/psychological and one intellectual. The fact that such picaros overcome these encounters with ease - something no doubt outside the realm of possibility, no matter how flexible one's mind might be - should rightly be seen as a literalized metaphor.

One must assume that the same responses no doubt extend to any form of otherness, including environmental, suggesting that protagonists placed into alien settings as well as being subject of an alien gaze should experience similar crippling effects. It is in this regard that the just-in-time adaptation of the picaro stands in stark contrast to the probable biological outcome of such encounters, as picaros tend to experience zero negative responses when encountering

otherness, adapting instantly. Sterling's *Schismatrix* offers a very clear example of this mental flexibility. When the bizarre, lizard-like aliens known as the Investors come aboard the asteroid, Lindsay has nothing like a moment of fear one might express when one meets an alien - but the scene's humor nevertheless plays upon the assumption that one should. Sterling has already established that no intelligent alien life has ever been encountered (and, considering that the consequences of this meeting prove revolutionary to Sterling's solar system, one wouldn't have expected first contact to be so banal). Lindsay, quite unfazed, simply introduces himself and Nora to the large, reptilian aliens, who are similar enough in description to the abductees' grays to evoke some terror response, and proceeds to dicker about a piece of "art" the aliens want to buy - in this case, the sculpture of a head that got caught in some polymer and is floating attached to the asteroid. Lindsay barter this piece of found art, which he claims as his own, into a lift off the asteroid and alien language lessons, and is, for his efforts, ever after referred to as "The Artist" by the aliens - an admirable confidence scam, by roguish standards. When the aliens ask Lindsay if he is the artist of the piece, the easy lie of his reply is the essence of the picaresque trick: "'Yes,' Lindsay said. He pointed at the screen. 'Notice the subtle shading effect where our recent blast darkened the sculpture'" (106). Considering that the entirety of Lindsay's first contact experience (the aliens had already made contact with humanity, having been in the system for days - Lindsay's group was just isolated) takes less than two pages and ends with Lindsay's slick "Let's talk" (106) offer, the authorial intent to highlight Lindsay's capacity for adaptation is clear.

Movement picaresques tend to literalize the quality of adaptation as much as possible. Brian McHale explains that "realized metaphors" operate by "rescuing metaphorical objects from the limbo of nonexistence and reintroducing them as existents in the presented world of the text" (134). McHale's point is that postmodern fiction (*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is presented as

an example) uses the realized or literalized metaphor as a strategy of "foregrounding [the] ontological dimension" (134) of the literature, and, as SF is both built around a similar ontological dominant (who we are, rather than how do we know what we know) and consequently one of the expressions of postmodernity, it, too, makes use of literalized metaphors, often to an extreme well beyond that typically found in mainstream postmodern texts. At any rate, picaresque SF tends to offer up literalizations of many of the core picaresque features, such as that of psychological flexibility, in ways far more concrete than Lindsay's car salesman approach to dealing with alien Otherness. Sterling offers an interesting spin on the Western showdown that illustrates the literalization of adaptability: Lindsay, accepting an offer to settle old scores with his enemy Constantine, agrees to partake in an alien virtual reality arena battle. While seemingly simple, the "arena" actually requires Lindsay's consciousness to be projected into a simulated insectile alien body that will be fighting in an alien environment with wildly different architecture and physical laws. Sterling makes the reasoning clear: "A proper duel should assure the triumph of the better man. It was argued that this required a test of alertness, will, and mental flexibility, qualities central to modern life" (173). Lindsay triumphs, adapting to the alien environment more rapidly than his opponent - though it does come with a cost, as Lindsay spends a few years after the encounter in a mental hospital.

The duel, itself a strong literalization of the picaro's adaptability, is accompanied by another literalization: Lindsay, like Jerusalem, Ubu and Maria, and Freya, is no stranger to drug use, and Lindsay makes use of a novel drug called "Shatter" to give him an edge during the duel. Sterling describes the drug in terms that suggest it strips the mind of any rigidity at all: "The Shatter helped him forget [his twinges of vestigial humanity]. By rendering everything novel, it was intended to rob everything of novelty. While it broke up preconceptions, it heightened the

powers of comprehension so drastically that entire intuitive philosophies boiled up from a single moment of insight" (176). Shatter serves the same role that Red Nine and Blue Heaven do in *Angel Station*, or the requisite "whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughs" (Thompson 1) and the like that make up Spider Jerusalem's daily Thompson-esque regiment. Obviously, the characters who make use of such literalizations of flexibility are operating closer to the picaresque type, much as the child who selects the right toys (among other things) is assumed, by virtue of what is little more than a metaphoric (or, rather, metonymic) association, to be the reincarnated Dalai Lama. And, of course, the novel's conclusion, in which Lindsay becomes, like the Presence, an alien himself, a thing "that could not be pinned down, an incarnation of unverifiable fluidity" (217), is as full a literalization of flexibility as one could want: Lindsay quite literally becomes adaptability.

This general theme of adaptability marks one of the strongest bonding points between the picaresque proper and Movement fiction, with its deep interest in adapting to the changes of the future, however shocking said future might be. As Suvin has argued, SF is *the* literature of cognitive estrangement, and as such it is something of a spiritual descendant of the picaresque, which was (and is) another literature of cognitive estrangement - any literature that transforms a protagonist into a tuna to defamiliarize social customs should be regarded as a spiritual ancestor of SF<sup>35</sup>. SF's picaresques, featuring literalized just-in-time adaptation, are figures who are perpetually estranged cognitively (at least, as long as they are on their journeys), and as such they provide rather excellent postmodern types, reflecting the ideal of Toffler's (as true a Movement fiction ancestor as Brunner and Dick, or even Gibson and Sterling) inherently flexible tomorrow people. Alvin Toffler observes that the "adaptive individual appears to be able to project himself just the

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<sup>35</sup> *El Lazarillo de Amberes*, the anonymous 1555 sequel to *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

"right" distance in time, to examine and evaluate alternative courses of action open to him before the need for final decision, and to make tentative decisions beforehand" (420). Toffler's description of an effectively adaptive individual isn't far removed from the discussion of theory of mind found above; adaptive individuals have minds perceptive and flexible enough to properly apprehend situations, assess the intentionality of people (and phenomena, though the term "intentionality" maps poorly onto an agency-less term), and react as the situation demands, rather than react to the situation as society might expect. (One might almost see a precursor of this idea in Philip K. Dick's "The Golden Man," but for the fact that Cris wasn't exactly sentient.) Regardless, Movement picaresques make a theme of this flexibility and foreground this theme through literalized metaphors.

#### Worlds Gone Stale

While the typical picaresque world is governed by chaos and randomness, this state has occasionally, especially in more recent incarnations of the picaresque, been counterbalanced by outbreaks of choking, oppressive order - order not in any way connected with the visions of paradise that Miller observes are used to foreground the theme of chaos. Many Movement picaresques present the reader not with nightmarish social orders liberally borrowed from *Blade Runner* and *Mad Max* (pre- and post-Thunderdome) but rather with civilizations that have long since passed their sell-by date and begun to ossify or, worse, degenerate into irrationality and madness. These are civilizations gone stale, evolutionary dead-ends that no longer have the external selection pressures or the influx of new blood needed to fight off the progressive transcription errors destined to doom the civilization in question to in-bred destruction. Twain's *Huck Finn* provides a partial illustration of this principle in action. Huck's fear of being forcibly civilized was quite justified, because the social order he ultimately chooses to flee is a stale one,



an evolutionary (and historical, not to mention economical) dead-end. This is, perhaps, a bit of an overstatement: the Antebellum South is hardly a *perfect* example of an in-bred civilization, but it is worth observing that the heart of the tale lies in Huck's ability to see fatal contradictions that have been normalized by the unchallenged (specifically, being unwelcoming of challenge and thus resistant to change) reasoning of slave-holding society. The South, in an effort to maintain its own status quo, had chosen to embrace an insular attitude, interested at a cultural level in reliving feudal fantasies rather than evolving and industrializing<sup>36</sup>.

Robert E. Howard, in a letter to H. P. Lovecraft in which he discusses the Lincoln County war, hits upon a useful description of a world grown stale and the ultimate consequences:

I think geography is the reason for the unusually savage and bloodthirsty manner in which the feud was fought out . . . The valley in which Lincoln lies is isolated from the rest of the world. Vast expanses of desert and mountains separate it from the rest of humanity - deserts too barren to support human life. The people in Lincoln lost touch with the world. Isolated as they were, their own affairs, their relationship with one another, took on an importance and significance out of proportion to their actual meaning. Thrown together too much, jealousies and resentments rankled and grew, feeding upon themselves, until they reached monstrous proportions and culminated in those bloody atrocities which startled even the tough West of that day. (*Conquering* 382)

Howard's *other* classic Conan story, *Red Nails*, encapsulates the stale world motif described in his letter. In the 1936 serialized novella, the last to be written about Conan, the barbarian and Valeria come to an isolated city called Xuchotl, cut off from the world by dinosaur-like monsters in the jungles surrounding the city. The inhabitants of the city have, over the years, degenerated into two warring camps, the leaders of which are driven by inscrutable and paradoxical motivations (one, for instance, seeks to use Valeria to prolong her own rather pointless life), the isolation causing them to lose all perspective on the triviality of their obsessions. The details of

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<sup>36</sup> See authors such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown.

the plot are really secondary: as with most Conan stories, he eventually kills all of the insane inhabitants of this city. What is important is why the inhabitants needed killing - they had gone down a cul-de-sac from which they could not escape. It is quite appropriate to find such a stale world in Howard's work; as previously mentioned, Conan is very much a picaro and, while no single Conan story follows the episodic framework or the other defining features mentioned above, when the stories are taken en-masse, Conan's saga easily reads like the staggered Sisyphian wanderings of any other picaro. For Howard, civilization always tended to be equated with the lunacy of Xuchotl: Xuchotl was simply an extreme example. Conan, able as a barbarian to see civilization from the periphery, often comments on the absurdity and irrationality of the cultures and peoples he encounters, in particular the ancient cultures that, rather than evolve, seem eager to implode under their own gravitas.

This implosion reaches an entirely new level in Movement picaresque narratives, in which order, meaning tautological and hermetically-sealed, becomes synonymous with stagnation while chaos becomes synonymous with life itself. The partially-picaresque novel *The Centauri Device* by M. John Harrison provides an early example of this stagnation, in which closed, stagnant ideological systems from Earth consume the entirety of human occupied space. In Harrison's universe, the oft-baffling to outsiders ideological/religious conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, now known as the Israeli World Government and the United Arab Socialist Republics, has continued to rage for centuries, gobbling up all of Earth and spreading out into space. The protagonist, John Truck, by chance the last Centauran, is hunted by the two governments (in addition to parodic religious and artistic cults) as he is the only person with the proper genetic birthright to make use of the eponymous Centauri Device, found during excavations of the ruins of Centauri, a planet long since bombed out of existence by the Earth

governments. Truck is a rather inactive picaro, working as a space trucker many, many rungs below, say, Malcolm Reynolds of *Firefly* fame. (Truck is quite a bit lower even than John Canyon of *Space Truckers* fame - a true loser, in other words.) After being hounded across space and witnessing the casual brutality the various pursuers level against the marginal areas in which he tries to hide, this loser protagonist, not *quite* a picaro, recognizes that the only solution is to acquire and activate the device, destroying the entirety of the infected area (Earth, Centauri, and everything in between) via a hypernova, leaving only the fringe areas - the picaro's fertile, chaotic stomping ground - in existence. In *The Centauri Device*, the stagnant civilization - a civilization, mind, that produced a religion called "the Openers," who believe that truth and honesty are somehow promoted by installing see-through paneling in the human torso - is seen as a cancer, incurable save by radical surgery. While Harrison's Centauri Device is not *quite* a picaresque narrative, it bears most of the hallmarks and it is an early example of this picaresque motif, one which appears in the closer-to-picaresque narrative *Against a Dark Background*.

Iain M. Banks's *Against a Dark Background* offers a similar motif in a more easily identifiable picaresque-mode package. (And it is worth noting that while *Against a Dark Background* was published in 1993, Banks actually reworked the novel from a version that he had written in 1975 - the same year that Harrison's *The Centauri Device* was published.) *Against a Dark Background* features a rather unique setting: a singleton solar system tossed far, far away from the galactic plane. The protagonist, Sharrow, while meditating partly on the Solipsist cult pursuing her and partly on her own alienation, likens her own solar system to the human brain, which, despite being a cooperating cluster of cells amidst an entire ecosystem of chemicals forming the body that houses it, is nevertheless

. . . utterly alone.

Like Golter; like poor, poor Golter.  
It had found itself alone and it had spread itself as far as it could and produced so much, but it was still next to nothing. (508).

Sharrow sees this isolated solar system as an empty house that humanity had grown to fill, only to eventually look out the windows and see nothing at all surrounding them, not unlike the situation the inhabitants of Xuchotl found themselves in. Like the inhabitants of Xuchotl, unable to escape their prison, the inhabitants of the Golter system

. . . could not ever hope, within any frame of likelihood they could envisage existing, to travel to anywhere beyond their own system, or the everywhere-meaningless gulf of space surrounding their isolated and freakish star. For a distance that was never less than a million light-years in any direction around it, Thrial -- for all its flamboyant dispersion of vivifying power and its richly fertile crop of children planets -- was an orphan. (508)

Golter, then, becomes the essence of a world gone stale, a true evolutionary dead-end, destined for eternal in-breeding until all possible combinations, sane or otherwise, have been exhausted.

Golter comes across as a stellar-scale toxic marriage, so overburdened by history that no real growth or redemption is possible. Geis, speaking of the upcoming decamillennium, observes:

"Because we all have a criminal past, don't we, Sharrow? That's what poor old Golter's had on its conscience all these ten thousand years, isn't it? That first war, and the billions who died, "hoping for a reset, a "year zero" (598). No such reset is likely to come, of course, and all those trapped within will continue the downward spiral. Much like Harrison's Openers, Banks's novel offers a similar religious cult to symbolize the stagnation and doom of this stale world: the Solipsists, who believe that all reality exists only in the gray matter - an apt metaphor for a solar system that will never have any input from outside itself.

Clearly, when a hermetically sealed world (or worldview) is encountered by a picaro, only one possible outcome is in order: bursting the bubble, and this is exactly what one finds in

the most picaresque of the four example texts, Sterling's *Schismatrix*. Lindsay and his team break the interdict on Earth in order to sample the biodiversity found in deep-sea volcanic vent ecosystems for the ultimate purpose of seeding the oceans of Jupiter's moon Europa (of Clarke's *2010* and *2061* fame) with genetically engineered life. As they are passing through the atmosphere of isolated Earth he and his crew observe that a "gridwork of streets split a checkerboard of white stone shelters. The houses were marshaled around a looming central core: a four-sided masonry pyramid" (223). The city's organization is intended to be reminiscent of a Sumerian (or similarly ancient and religious) society: the pyramid possesses the only telecommunications equipment and is thus the only window to the outside world, much like the ziggurats of Sumer that contained everything from palace bureaucracy to recipes to bake bread (or so we assume). While this version of a city is alien to most of the observing posthumans, Lindsay understands, recalling a similar "domed stronghold" of his past and the "psychic atmosphere within it, the sense of paranoid isolation, of fanaticism slowly drifting past the limits through lack of variety. A world gone stale" (224). Earth, Lindsay reflects, wanted stability at all costs, afraid that rampant technological change would destroy them, and for this purpose cut themselves off from the rest of the solar system. "Anywhere there is variety there is risk of change. Change that can't be tolerated" (224), and so Earth closed their borders, eliminating the potential for change, resulting, among other things, in "cities . . . identical as circuit chips" (224). It is this boundary that Lindsay must violate in order to complete his terraforming operation, itself a wild celebration of evolution and change and thus the antithesis of dead-end Earth.

This is significant because it is one of many microcosmic reflections of a larger macrocosmic occurrence in *Schismatrix* itself. The novel begins with Lindsay, Vera, Constantine, and the rest of their cadre of revolutionary Preservationists attempting to enact a

revolution that would transform the Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic into a place dedicated to the preservation of humanity and human values in the face of rampant Mechanist and Shaper change. Via the parallel at the novel's close, the Preservationist ambitions are shown to be no different than those of Interdict Earth, neophobia leading both factions to lock the doors and draw the blinds. To paraphrase Tacitus, they make a cage and call it peace, and in doing so deny themselves the ability to evolve. This theme is further highlighted by a gift Lindsay receives from the genetic clone of Vera, his Preservationist lover who died nearly a century before (and who later is revealed to also be his genetic daughter). Lindsay is gifted with a three hundred year old lab rat, "one of the first creatures to attain physical immortality" (212). The immortal rodent, locked in its cage, is the biological equivalent of Golter, or Xuchotl, "its capacity to learn completely exhausted by age, . . . reduced to absolute rote behavior. The twitchings of its muzzle, even the movements of its eyes, were utterly stereotyped" (212). Lindsay's first impulse, like that of any good picaro, is to open the cage, aware that "[p]rison has set [the rat's] mind . . . It will take a long time to melt the bars behind its eyes" (213). And, indeed, in a scene 53 years after Lindsay frees the rat, the audience finds the "loud chattering of the ancient rat on Lindsay's shoulder" (215), the rote, stereotyped behavior believed to be inherent utterly melted away.

This is the shape of the Schismatrix itself: the solar system slowly turns in on itself, wrapped in the madness of Shaper/Mechanist ideological war, until the Investors, alien traders, come and unlock the cage by their very presence (regardless of their own greedy motivations). Even when the Investor Peace breaks, as it eventually must, the horizons have expanded, and when the old rivalries between Shaper and Mechanist heat up, it no longer means the same thing, because, unlike Golter, there is now a true frontier. Posthuman clades of all bizarre imaginable

shapes begin springing up everywhere and humans begin setting up embassies on alien worlds. Intelligent alien gasbags begin colonizing Jupiter. To put it simply, the world is no longer stale. Even the Mavrides' asteroid habitat, like Lindsay's rat, serves as a microcosmic reflection of the larger macrocosm of the solar system. Paolo, even when the television news tells the combatants that the siege is over and the war has been retconned out of existence, can't stop fighting. Nora is forced to choke Paolo to death, breaking the survivors out of the stale stasis built on inflexible ideologies.

All of the selected works illustrate this motif to some degree. *Angel Station* is set against something called Consolidation, a word that the shooters spit as a curse. Consolidation was "an end to the uncontrolled growth that was wrecking their [the people inhabiting planets in the core of human space] lives. A planned expansion, guaranteed not to stress the system" (21) and thus ensure "stability. Continuity" (20). *Saturn's Children*, as previously discussed, is set against a neo-feudal background that is itself the result of legacy programming parameters that the robots have little choice but to obey. And *Transmetropolitan*, while giving the reader a city that is anything but stale in the traditional sense, nevertheless constantly emphasizes the truncated horizons of its inhabitants – City denizens do not pay attention to the news, are gullible, and have no sense of history, etc. We have already encountered *Transmet*'s cultural preserves: Jerusalem excoriates the public on several occasions for a blindness to history, illustrated by the fact that people simply don't visit the preserves, commenting on the utter failure to historicize that plagues victims of what Joe Bageant has labeled "the Great American Media Mind Warp," although the problem is consistent across all post-industrial cultures. This atemporal obliviousness is a form of the stale world motif, for this blind ignorance creates the same kind of psychological isolation that Golter experiences from physical causes. Stale worlds, rather than foregrounding the

random, unfair heart of existence, instead foreground the need for flexibility and chaos, for these attributes drive evolution. Worlds gone stale *demand* acts of redemptive transgression, a picaro's stock in trade, and this idea will be explored in greater detail in Part 3.

### Scripted, Prescribed-Pattern Spaces

Stale worlds tend to translate into constrictive worlds, so a corollary of the stale world motif is the scripted space, or space in which one's agency becomes either truncated or co-opted by other forces. As with the stale world motif, the idea of the scripted space will be explored in detail in the third chapter, but a brief illustration of the idea is worth considering. *Angel Station* is built around three rather distinct spaces: the Multi-Pollies, the Edge, and the uncharted space where Ubu and Maria hunt singularities. The Multi-Pollies are the core systems of human space, the oldest and most developed, while the Edge is the equivalent of the frontier. Uncharted space and the Edge are areas of great freedom, where the various shooter families and attendant businesses develop their own cultures, and the action of the plot cycles back and forth between uncharted space and the Edge. However, the Multi-Pollies cast a long shadow, and the withering effects of the central systems' economic policies are felt in the Edge. Both Maria and Ubu at various times observe the limited lifespan of their way of life: "'The Fringe is dying,' Ubu said. 'We can't stop that. No matter how successful we are.' He looked away. 'I don't want to have to watch it go'" (193).

The reason for the Edge economies' demise is an economic policy known as Consolidation, which, early in the novel, is explicated by the holographic "ghost" of Ubu and Maria's father, Pasco, him having scattered recordings of his life and thoughts in the Runaway's computer.



A similar time of troubles has been plaguing human economies in the last century . . . Waves of wealth generated at the frontier were impacting on the center of human space with a suddenness and force that had been undreamt-of in previous centuries. . . . Billions thrown out of work! Lives disrupted! Investments made worthless overnight! . . . And what did all those unhappy people want? . . . They wanted stability. Continuity. Consolidation. . . . But what did Consolidation do to the Edge economies, when they were based on unlimited growth? When the best economic units for carrying out what growth was permitted were the large stable corporate haulers rather than the small entrepreneurial shooter families? . . . We die a slow death. (21)

Obviously, this change is viewed quite negatively by those whose lifestyles are eroded by this policy; shooters and other Edge people consider the authoritarian policy an effort to render "the entire universe . . . nothing but a succession of white humming corridors, filled with orderly humanity busy accumulating capital, making investments in the safest places, giving it to the Outsiders to finance the Multi-Pollies' policy of Consolidation, denying the Edge, the margin, expansion" (11). Pasco, in a very perceptive analysis, explains the thinking behind Consolidation by relating it to a similar economic phenomenon, namely "Europe following Spain's conquest of the New World. Importation to Europe of enormous quantities of American bullion resulted in inflation of all European currencies. . . . The result was a century of religious wars that killed millions of people, destroyed the vigor of the Spanish empire, ended the ideal of Christendom as a unifying European concept, and almost plunged Europe into a new dark age" (20). Thus, the Multi-Pollies perceive their way of life threatened, making draconian policies restricting heavily the economies and subsequently the cultures of the Edge seem justified.

*Angel Station* sees the fringe economies, where the shooter families and their particular brand of freedom thrive, being whittled away over time by the effects of consolidation. Williams hammers this point home with the inclusion of a former shooter named Mitaguchi, who worked for a transport company, "waiting for a vacancy to be promoted captain and finally get a chance to use the master's certificate he'd earned when he was eleven years old" (238). Shooters have a

very distinct culture not much related to those found on the settled worlds; both Ubu and Maria were genetically engineered and grown in an incubator by their father, then subjected to accelerated growth programs: both were bossing singularity shoots while people from the inner systems were still in grade school. Mitaguchi is thus a very sad figure, emblematic of a dying way of life; he convinces himself that he is in love with Maria, willing to leave his wife and children to follow her, but clearly longs simply for the freedom his life had before he became indentured to a job that did not let him be what he had intended to be. Such is the dilemma in picaresque narratives: the stale world, be it Huck's St. Petersburg or Maria's Angel Station, will "sivilize" by limiting choice, scripting response, etc. Mitaguchi, under the effects of Consolidation, is subjected to a *severely* limited range of possibilities: he can work for a massive corporation, he can go down the gravity well and live on a planet, or he can starve.

This specific situation, surprisingly, is repeated in numerous SF novels and series, some picaresque and some not. An immediate comparison can be made to the situation in Whedon's *Firefly*, in which the margins that allow independent operators (and, incidentally, the space in which one may engage in utopian imaginings of different approaches to life) are being whittled away by larger entities. Specifically, the Alliance, the government of the central worlds in *Firefly's* solar system, seeks the centralization of power through warfare, genetic engineering, and social engineering (as the Pax treatment applied to the planet Miranda - *Serenity's* plot - reveals). The result is the same: personal agency is abridged, unless one chooses to go West, as it were, to the frontier of space, as has the captain of the hauler *Serenity*, Malcolm (read: malcontent) Reynolds. Roddenberry's *Andromeda* performs a similar trick with something called the Free Trade Alliance (even though, due to writer-creator/network disputes, this idea was never developed and probably never would be if Robert Hewitt Wolfe's fantasy-tinged "Coda" to the

series is any predictor, the existence of the FTA is nevertheless indicative of this trend). In short, the Free Trade Alliance is a kind of corporate conspiracy that, like *Angel Station's* policy of Consolidation, attempts to maintain dominance of galactic shipping to promote stability, mainly for the involved parties' financial benefit. Suspiciously similar to Walter Jon Williams's idea, the FTA results in hardship and potential extinction for independent shippers and their way of life. As is the case with the stale world motif, scripted spaces require radical breaks: Ubu and Maria are forced into uncharted space in a desperate bid to find singularities to sell while Malcolm Reynolds and crew must operate at the very edge of settled space (no solution was ever addressed in *Andromeda*). This motif and the relevant strategies required for regaining agency and escaping the effects of what amounts to the agency-sapping ubiquity of Sarte's "look of the other" will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

#### Lighting Out for the Territories

"I notice that there's a long gap in your job history and it said for 22 years you went Kerouac on everyone's ass?"

-*Step Brothers* (2008)

Many traditional picaresque narratives ended with the picaro firmly ensconced in some place or role, no longer wandering or dislocated. This may have been done ironically for the purpose of social criticism, as it surely was with *Lazarillo*: *Lazarillo de Tormes* concludes (or, rather, catches up to the present, implying future adventures) with Lazarillo married to an archbishop's concubine - hardly an image of quiet retirement and family life. Often, however, it was done in sincerity: Lesage's *Gil Blas* concludes with Blas in a position of wealth and in service to the prime minister, though, as with all picaresque narratives, the episodic nature of the

narrative does at least imply that all happily-ever-after endings are temporary affairs, at best. Even so, it is only with contemporary picaresques that the ending that most readers associate with stories about rogues actually came to be common, or, in the case of Movement picaresque, ubiquitous. Twain's *Huck Finn* serves as a prototype: Huck reasons that he "got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it" (388). Many modern picaresques take this as a model; imitations like Banks's *Rule of the Bone* obviously end with the protagonist lighting out for the territory - *Rule of the Bone*'s Chappie gets a job on a low-end cruise ship, heading out for that uncharted, five-mile limit territory - but the loss of a frontier to escape to somewhat hampers the use of this motif in mainstream picaresque narratives. Of immediate note would be Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* concludes with the protagonist, Raoul Duke, fleeing west from Vegas back to California, where he can vanish into the far less atavistic culture of the coast, "just another freak in the Freak Kingdom" (83), as sure an image of lighting out for the territories as Twain's own. Robinson's *Housekeeping* ends in a similar fashion, with the temporarily domesticated picara Sylvie returning to her transient ways and taking the narrator, Ruth, along with her, escaping into whatever "territory" remains. Still, such examples from mainstream picaresque narratives grow scarce; it is in genre fiction, which can so easily create worlds with genuine frontiers and margins, where the motif of lighting out for the territories finds fullest expression.

Each of the four example texts makes use of this motif, or offers a riff upon it. *Saturn's Children* concludes with Freya and one of the Jeeves (Reginald) with whom she has formed a relationship (he also is a humanoid robot) hopping a "colony starship" (302) to an unsettled world, a virtually identical end state to that of frontier-bound Huck Finn, which is to say no end

at all. *Schismatrix* concludes, as previously mentioned, with Lindsay becoming the eternal picaro/voyeur after he has become one of the slippery, presumably immortal entities called the Presence(s). While perhaps not quite as obvious an exit as Freya's, Lindsay's move to become an eternal wanderer is nonetheless the essence of the lighting out impulse. *Transmetropolitan* provides its own slightly modified version, one that maintains the spirit of the escape while operating within the boundaries set by the plot. Jerusalem, believed to have been infected by I-Pollen and thus suffering an irreversible and degenerative neural disease, uses his illness as a pretext to go back to his mountain retreat, established in the first issue as the frontier antithesis to the City. Like any good picaro, Jerusalem is running a confidence scam; he is, in fact, one of the few who recover from the disease, and thus has used this trick to escape civilization. His enemies no doubt think of him as a cripple and harmless, so he is free to do what he wishes. *Angel Station* seems at first glance to be an exception, as Beautiful Maria and Ubu Roy end the novel as the incredibly wealthy founders of a new trading company, based upon their success at manipulating Beloved and the other alien clans discovered while prospecting the edge of known space. While picaresque narratives often end with the protagonists ensconced in static lives of incredible wealth - Lesage's *Gil Blas* ends in such a way, as does Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* - one can hardly consider extreme wealth and the incredibly tedious demands of running a corporation a frontier. Williams, however, has provided with this ending a rather brilliant riff on the idea of lighting out for the territories: the purpose of Maria and Ubu's efforts to create their shipping concern was to preserve their way of life, making it possible for all other shooters to light out whenever they want, rather than being forced to become commercial pilots. Ubu and Maria's monopoly on trading with the aliens they discovered ensures that "Consolidation had been paralyzed, then reduced, and now almost abolished; the Multi-Pollies had been forced to

unleash shooter entrepreneurial talent in the hope of creating Edge economies that could compete successfully" (390), thus ensuring the continued existence of the Edge itself. The lives of Ubu and Maria might have changed, but they create an eternal Fringe for people to inhabit, thus offering a meta-example of lighting out, rather than a simple direct image of the pair shooting off into the sunset (or event horizon, as it were). While it is true that Movement picaresques do not, as a rule, provide the generic self-referentiality that critics like Mancing see as crucial to the picaresque (since, as I have argued, once the picaresque becomes a mode the immediate genre precursor demanding reference ceases to be the picaresque), the sheer predominance of this motif suggests at least some acknowledgement of ancestry.

It must be realized, however, that the motif of lighting out, whether one finds it in classical picaresque narratives or Movement picaresques, is deployed to make a very clear statement: if one wishes to overcome the past (though not, necessarily, forget it) and escape slavery to one's history, family, tradition, etc., one must abandon everything and light out. Sterling goes to great pains to emphasize this point, foreshadowing Lindsay's final escape. Lines like "Lindsay shook himself free of the past" (11) become something of a refrain in *Schismatrix*; Lindsay even has this trait hurled at him as an insult by those who are attached to identities built around nationality, ideology, etc. Those individuals, such as his wife, tend to come to bad ends, while Lindsay keeps going (forever, as the ending suggests). Every abrupt shift between episodes in his life is accompanied by sentiments such as the following: "His problem was simple now: survival. It was wonderful how this cleared his mind. He could forget his former life . . . It was all history" (21), drawing focus to the immediate, important present and letting all the detritus of social existence fall away (recalling Huck's abandonment of the failed worldview the well-meaning Aunt Sally intended to force on him).

### **PART 3 VIOLATING SPACES: HOMOGENIZED WORLDS AND TACTICS OF MARGINALIZATION**

"Do this, don't do that - can't you read the sign?"

- 5 Man Electric Band, "Signs" (1971)

Vivian Sobchack observes in *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* that "[o]ne need not feel overly threatened by the possibility of 'absolute' emptiness when one knows a McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Baskin Robbins, and Holiday Inn are just out of frame" (267). Appropriately, this observation itself becomes a sight gag in the 2004 comedy *Wake Up, Ron Burgundy* (the alternate version of *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, compiled from deleted scenes and a dropped sub-plot). Burgundy and his news team have been presumably travelling through the California badlands (whatever badlands exist outside of San Diego) to reach an observatory in order to confront the Alarm Clock Bandits when, predictably, they become lost. Panicking at the thought of starvation in the wild, Burgundy proposes "the eating of flesh for the sustention of life," and the group, armed with rocks, turns on reporter Brian Fantana - and all the while, in the background, the viewer can see signs for gas stations, fast food joints, and even an American flag. The premise of this joke rests upon two unstated truths: first, that the wilderness, in its fullest Turner Thesis sense, is a space where weighty choices far beyond the ken of polite society can and sometimes must be made; and second, that this wilderness, defined as being outside of civilization, no longer exists. According to (likely wrong) popular lore, the Donner Party, lost in the Sierra Nevada and far from the social controls of civilization, resorted to cannibalism when supplies ran low; obviously, one can only contemplate the otherwise

"evil"<sup>37</sup> act of cannibalism when outside the neon menu by which we define civilization. If a person is driving across town and hunger strikes, the decision-making process involved in satisfying that hunger is (usually) far more restrained . . . and constrained. The town's skyline is literally a chorus of voices, each shouting a different option. "McDonald's two-for-one Big Mac special!" "Taco Bell's Fourth Meal!" A hungry mind populated with thousands of such voices doesn't really make a decision, at least not in the sense of exercising one's agency. Such a person makes a rather arbitrary choice between thousands of equally arbitrary offerings. No radical decision making is required; indeed, there is no outside to require such decisions.

Globalization, that ongoing phenomenon of progress inexorably compressing both time and space, tying the most distant and once irreconcilable places and cultures together, is the elimination of earth's marginal areas and people. The logic is simple enough: if one can find a McDonald's in Prague's Museum of Communism, China's Yangshou province, Paris's Rue Saint Lazare (in a historic building, no less), *and* in the middle of Israel's Negev Desert, then all the walls that once separated countries and cultures have crumbled and the once exotic "over there" has been reduced to the common "right here." However, globalization's closing of all frontiers hides a secondary phenomenon: the closing of the mind, or, to be more accurate, the elimination of choice and agency. Just as once disparate societies homogenize and distinctiveness becomes planed down to the finest of tolerances, so too do human choices and behaviors flatten out, being largely products of the material environment. Thomas Pynchon's circuit board city, with which the introduction to this study began, is a ubiquitous literary and visual metaphor that captures this phenomenon perfectly. More than a simple passing resemblance between the aesthetic of a

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<sup>37</sup> Philip Cole's *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy* provides a sustained discussion of the methods by which the placeholder concept of "evil" has been used to demonize practices such as "the eating of flesh for the sustention of life" for the purpose of more solidly defining tribal boundaries.



motherboard and the rational design of a city viewed from above, the circuit-board hints at the deeper programming, or scripting, that takes place in such environments. If the electrons fail to follow the paths prescribed to them, then the computational processes themselves fail: "illegal operations" occur, and as such, dissenting and uncooperative electrons (as my metaphor is beginning to leave the science behind, let's just say people) are not to be tolerated. Consider the 1982 film *Tron*, which sees resistant programs in the electronic world (one which resembles the architectural dreams of modernists and futurists alike and is a literal circuit board city) rounded up and eliminated in gladiatorial games. Similarly, the 1995 film *Hackers*, which tellingly begins with a bird's-eye tracking shot of New York's city grid dissolving into a circuit board, follows the activities of a group of computer hackers as they battle against society (and semi-corporate eco-terrorism); the hackers, like the programs, are "electrons" resisting the flow imposed upon them by the structure of the system they inhabit. These two films join company with nearly the entire corpus of Movement SF, offering commentary on the restricted, programmed nature of modern existence. Like medieval serfs, contemporary humanity isn't encouraged to deviate from its "naturally" appointed path<sup>38</sup>.

Obviously, these twin phenomena - the closing of marginal areas and the erosion of choice - are toxic to the picaresque project, for how could an incipient picaro or picara disappear into the hinterlands to begin mapping and demythologizing society when said hinterland no longer exists and, moreover, the poor picaro or picara wasn't even aware that disappearing was an option? Even so, it falls to the picaresque to map these societies (or, at the least,

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<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that there need not necessarily be an intentional, fascistic area denial strategy in operation, designed by some shadowy cadre of corporate minds - that's the real of paranoid conspiracy theory. Rather, the very nature of our overly-determined, scientifically-managed modern milieu that generates a lack of choice and furthers not only the elimination of "outside" areas, but also one's ability to recognize the ones that still exist.

demythologize them, if the project of mapping has been rendered pointless by runaway homogenization). Rowland Sherrill, whose *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque* provides a useful exploration of the uniquely American take on the picaresque genre, argues convincingly that the United States, regardless of the flattening effect of globalization, is still a massively pluralized nation (though, arguably a pluralism that exists entirely under the totalizing umbrella of late capital), comprised of countless still-distinct cultures and proto-cultures. It falls to the picaros and picaras to explore, document, and demystify this pluralism (while at the same time freeing himself or herself from its constraints), so it stands to reason that some solution to these twin problems must obtain and there must be some way for potential picaros and picaras to escape enmeshment in whatever society birthed him/her, since the picaresque, as the previous chapter demonstrated, is alive and well in science fiction.

The goal of this chapter, then, is twofold. First, this chapter explores the two complementary problems that conspire to prevent picaresque experiences from occurring, the first being the elimination of the traditional marginal areas necessary for picaresque activity (in literature if not entirely in reality) by the progressing project of globalization, and the second being the elimination of the freedom of choice and anomalous personality types required for envisioning picaresque travels (let alone true utopian possibilities) due to numerous trends common to (post)modern society that cause, intentionally or otherwise, the "scripting" of thought and experience. Once the shape of the problem faced by contemporary picaros is understood, the chapter will turn to its second goal: the study of the tactics of marginalization employed by picaros and picaras in Movement picaresques for the purpose of carving out marginalized areas

and positions, including the conscious "othering" of the picaros and picaras themselves, in order to attain the powerful outsider position that enables both observation and free action.

That said, it is crucial to understand that it is not the purpose of this chapter to argue for or against the *objective* reality of globalization, Fordist/Modernist success at social engineering, the complicity of McDonaldization in homogenizing human diversity, etc. That is a task best left to the scholars of each individual phenomenon, and, in any case, any final judgment on the reality of these phenomena is impossible while they are still developing. Even George Ritzer, the sociologist who first explored McDonaldization's effects, makes it plain that "[p]eople do not yet live in an iron cage of McDonaldization. . . . [and] are unlikely ever to live in a totally predictable, completely McDonaldized world," though he does caution that "it is clear that people live in an *increasingly* predictable, increasingly McDonaldized world" (*McDonaldization* 82). No, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that this oppressive, totalizing, and profoundly anti-picaresque system exists in the literature under discussion - SF and, in particular, Movement science fiction - and is, in fact, intentionally foregrounded as one of the authors' most pressing concerns. It is not reality these picaros and picaras must escape but rather their own particular literary representations of reality, be they realities built upon the principles of rationalization and scientific management run amok (as in Lucas's film *THX 1138* or Wimmer's *Equilibrium* - neither film picaresque nor used in this chapter, mind, but accessible examples nonetheless) or upon the entertainingly tragic process of McDisneyization.

The Oppression of Place

No Quitsies: The Bound(ary)less Space(s) of Globalization

"One does not simply walk [out of Mc]Mordor"

-Boromir Meme (modified)

Traditional picaros and picaras were highly mobile figures, wandering from one distinct place to the next. Some, like Smollett's Roderick Random, abandon the old country for the new, sailing to exotic locations such as the Caribbean and South America. Others, like Twain's Huckleberry Finn, abandon civilization entirely and, out of disgust, set out for the Western frontier. The picaresque as a genre is defined by characters who abandon one location for another, entirely different (one where the picaro or picara can be different as well). Sadly, though the process of globalization has brought many admirable changes, one major drawback lies in the fact that few, if any, frontiers are left for picaros and picaras to fly to, and what few exotic locales remain are still connected enough that the traveler must remain themselves wherever he or she might go. This is not an age for exploration or radical reinvention. Juliet, suicidal and mourning her exiled Romeo, declared "That 'banished,' that one word 'banished,' / Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts"; now, her suicidal depression would be no greater than the standard existential angst Twihards and other teen types face as she could simply Skype her Romeo between texting sessions. Romeo himself, far from believing that "[t]here is no world without Verona walls" could simply go to the same chain restaurants outside of Verona's walls as he could inside - likely he could find a McMab's somewhere. Indeed, the idea of "walls" or "borders" becomes archaic: the process of globalization has eliminated the distinctions between places, reducing the inside/outside binary to a boundless *here*, an effect often referred to as "[t]ime-space compression . . . the effective shrinking of the world by technologies of transportation and

communication" (Cresswell, *Tramp* 23). Before turning to the effects Fordism/Taylorism and scientific management on society, the impact of Modernist architecture on behavior, and the apotheosis of both phenomena in the ongoing McDisneyization of society, the state of contemporary tourism bears brief examination, as tourism in the globalizing world serves as an ideal metonym for the dilemmas of the picaro in a boundless world.

### The Pre-Packaged Tourist

The fifth season of the sitcom *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* featured a tourism-themed episode entitled "The Gang Hits the Road," an episode in which Frank, played by Danny DeVito, decides that he wants to see the Grand Canyon before he dies, that icon of debased authenticity discussed by Walker Percy in *The Message in the Bottle*. The remarkable thing about this episode is that the gang never quite manages to leave Philadelphia, despite an entire day of driving. They get distracted, feeling the need to visit a farmer's market in order to provide Charlie with a pear (Charlie, apparently, having never consumed one) and to purchase wicker furniture so that they may sit in the empty U-Haul trailer they are towing. A series of "adventures" ensue, based not on encounters with difference (what one would expect from a tourism-themed episode) but rather on their own atrocious behavior - a breakdown is caused, for example, by a somewhat drunken Dennis driving over the toppled bike of a bicyclist who, moments before, had been felled when Mac threw a beer bottle at his head. The episode ends with the gang having been returned to their bar (by a hitchhiker who also steals their vehicle), never having left Philadelphia. This episode perfectly encapsulates the contemporary tourist experience.

Traditional tourism was a rather simple equation: distance + otherness = fun and adventure. Contemporary tourism, by contrast, seems to be an inversion of this formula, with sameness replacing distance and otherness and comfort replacing fun and adventure. It's likely fruitless to try to specify exactly when this change occurred - after all, wealthy British travelers have been enjoying all of the comforts of home at the Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan, Egypt, since 1899, and Mark Twain's 1869 travelogue *The Innocents Abroad* is, among other things, an early critique of a very primitive version of the McDonaldized tourism discussed here (in the sense that Twain rails against greed and the cheapening of the past). However, it is interesting to note that Disneyland and the first McDonald's chain restaurant "opened in the *same year* - 1955" (Ritzer, *Thesis* 135), so the critical mass moment probably hides around then. Regardless, it is clear "that tourism is growing increasingly McDonaldized. The highly popular Disney theme parks can be seen as paradigms of this process" (135). George Ritzer, in his sociological study *The McDonaldization of Society*, argues that society is being redesigned along the lines of the fast-food industry's guiding principles: efficiency, calculability, predictability, control, and the replacement of the human element with more reliable technologies, and indeed, these principles dominate the contemporary tourist experience, which features standardized tourists who are offered predictable adventures at standardized locations.

Ritzer notes that a contemporary "tour group from the United States will likely be made up of like-minded Americans, with the majority of one's time spent with those (highly predictable) people" (*McDonaldization* 96), highlighting the first of many barriers to picaresque experience such travelers face: they travel in a bubble of sameness. Even Tolkien provided diversity for his group of tourists (although, quite brilliantly, he waited to do this until the "tour group" of hobbits had actually left the Shire), but, not too far removed from Twain, surrounded

by American tourists on the USS *Quaker City*, contemporary travelers tend to travel wrapped firmly in a group that reinforces rather than challenges the assumptions and worldviews of home. One wonders how effective Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* would have proved had he undertaken the journey in a bus filled with other aging folk with heart conditions (and, of course, no poodle).

Moreover, the "adventures" the travelers experience are as thoroughly predictable and standardized as any perfectly weighed and measured hamburger one might receive in a Wendy's or Carl's Jr (Hardee's to the east-coaster). Ritzer notes that "[r]ationalization involves the increasing effort to ensure predictability . . . [and] emphasizes such things as discipline, order, systematization, formalization, routine, consistency, and methodical operation" (*McDonaldization* 79), and indeed it is this autistic approach to scientific management that strips away random events and resultant unique perspectives from travel in the name of making travelers feel comfortable and secure. The package tour, perhaps the best example of contemporary homogenization of travel, translates the tenets of McDonaldization (predictability and efficiency) into "an effort to allow minimal contact with the people, culture, and institutions of visited countries" (96), offering by way of compensation "a firm, often tight schedule, with little time for spontaneous activities. Tourists can take comfort from knowing exactly what they are going to do on a daily, even hourly basis" (96). Theme parks, with parades as punctual as a Nazi train schedule and ethnically-themed areas free of any distressing natives, are the static variant of the package tour's cloistered mobility; Ritzer, like Alan Bryman after him, is quick to point out that "Disney theme parks work hard to be sure that visitors experience no surprises at all" (*Thesis* 135). The challenge to the picaresque should be obvious: how does a genre that depends on a picaro or picara authentically engaging with broad swaths of the social spectrum

operate in circumstances and locations that actively conspire to eliminate both the social spectrum and the unpredictable events that might lead one out of the controlled experience on offer? Ritzer lays the issue bare when he states that "package tours . . . represent the application of Fordism to the tourist industry" (136).

Finally, the very locations that tourists aspire to visit are standardized, undermining the notion that travel can get a person to the margins of a culture. According to Ritzer's McDonaldization argument, "people often travel to other locales in order to experience much of what they experience in their day-to-day lives" (*Thesis* 137), largely because their day-to-day lives have conditioned them to expect predictability and to be unnerved by its absence. Consider the odd example of food served to tour groups. Ritzer explains that, while the idea of a standardized meal offered by a package tour developed for the practical reason that tourists often found indigenous food difficult, "now tourists can be safely left on their own at most locales since those who want standardized meals will almost undoubtedly find them readily available at a local McDonald's" (137); in other words, a package tour's prepackaged meal is unnecessary because the "exotic" locales have conveniently prepackaged themselves. Nearly all tourist destinations have followed this path, such that a traveler can easily drive across the North American continent - taking side roads, no less - and have little trouble finding a familiar fast food or restaurant chain to eat at or motel chain to sleep in, never once inconvenienced by some exotic unknown. Even the "attractions" themselves follow such standardized logic, having become a form of entertainment that resembles the experience of ordering food. Charles Jencks, who has written extensively on modernist and postmodernist architecture, discusses Modernity's complicity in this approach to tourism, arguing that "the quality of tourism has declined because the tourists are treated as so many cattle to be shunted from one ambience to the next in a smooth



continuous flow" (13), a process as efficient as any drive-through or overly-popular peep show. This assembly line attitude towards excursions, "a process which was perfected by Walt Disney, has now been applied to all areas of mass tourism, resulting in the controlled bland experience" (14). In a thoroughly McDonaldized world, tourists can't help but want vacation experiences that are predictable, efficient, calculable, and controlled (Ritzer, *Thesis* 138). Traditional tourism, being used here as a placeholder for travel in general, was once dependent on one's hope to "experience something new and different" (139), and in the clear difficulty of finding such experiences in tourist destinations that are, in all the ways that matter, identical to one's point of origin we can see the full shape of the contemporary picaro's prison: not only is it difficult to encounter new people and new experiences, the *terrain itself* has been designed to deny those possibilities.

#### Mallrats in (Hyper)Space

From the discussion of tourism above, we can extract three basic premises that conspire to eliminate the possibility of picaresque experience: the homogenization or standardization of individuals, places, and encounters. As such, we should expect to find evidence of this in the backgrounds of contemporary picaresque novels in general and, specific to our purposes, science fiction and Movement/Postcyberpunk literature in particular. And, indeed, these three premises repeat themselves as themes throughout nearly any given example of Movement SF, in ways both subtle and overt. However, the most visible indicator of all three premises in operation is the ubiquity of the "total space," or hyperspace, in the worldbuilding designs employed by Movement authors. Hyperspace, popularized by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, is

an excellent (if occasionally hopelessly obtuse) concept embodying the totalized, imploded worlds our society currently promotes, and received arguably its best explication by Fredric Jameson via the example of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel<sup>39</sup> in Los Angeles. Jameson describes "the Bonaventure . . . [as] a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city" (39), citing the unique architectural design of the hotel itself, such as "curiously unmarked ways . . . that . . . seem to have been imposed by some new category of closure governing the inner space of the hotel itself" (38-39)<sup>40</sup>. While typically framed as a discussion of the spatial strategies of late capitalism, totalizing spaces or hyperspaces are also indicative of the problems of travel and tourism encountered in SF: hyperspaces are by definition without boundaries, entrances and exits having been recessed and masked, and contain a möbius strip of familiar locations and people.

Ritzer, like Jameson, identifies hotels but also casinos - both standard(ized) tourist attractions - as hyperspaces, suggesting that they are typically "so vast . . . that one has little need or desire to go anywhere else" (*Thesis* 144), which, in terms of profitability, is likely the point. Cruise lines, according to Ritzer, are far better examples of hyperspace than hotels, as cruise lines, containing everything from gymnasiums to theatres to casinos, are micro-societies in and

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<sup>39</sup> As something of a testament to the accuracy of Jameson's discussion of the Bonaventure's totalizing space, the lobby of the hotel appeared as part of the fictional city of Los Santos in the video game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, called simply "The Atrium." The Atrium served as the location for a set action piece in which the player must face off against a small army of attackers. Notable is the fact that the disorienting architecture made figuring out how to exit the hotel quite difficult: the player had to find out-of-the-way stairwells in order to exit into a second-floor courtyard.

<sup>40</sup> Jameson, Edward W. Soja, and others want to draw a distinction between the postmodern building, represented by the Bonaventure Hotel, and modern buildings of the International Style to which Jameson somewhat charitably attaches the label "new Utopian space of the modern" (40). Even so, there seems to be little real reason to make a distinction between postmodern and modern architecture; the Bonaventure is widely regarded as modernist only, and modernist glass boxes, of which the Bonaventure is a prime example, have always been seen as "totalized," self-sufficient machines for living/working/playing.

of themselves, eliminating nearly every reason to leave the ship, regardless how exotic a port of call might be (144). However, it is not the cruise ship itself but rather the "islands *owned* and completely controlled by the cruise lines," islands which feature fake "natives" imported from local islands to staff the tourist trap along with such flourishes as fake four-hundred year old sailing vessels sunk for divers' entertainment (147), that serve as the best example of the effect of the hyperspace on the once-liberating act of travel. The picaresque, as the previous chapter explains, is concerned with demythologization, a process which often involves exploration into hidden areas and discovery of secrets not meant for the uninitiated. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, after all, exposes to the audience the deception of a seller of indulgences when he discovers that the constable who was cured of what seemed like demonic possession by an indulgence was, in fact, in collusion with the pardoner all along. As such, one could easily conclude that the picaresque requires textured, multi-layered realities, complete with dark secrets, to operate properly. However, the defining feature of a hyperspace, at least insofar as a custom-designed tourist location is concerned, is an intentional absence of any meaningful depth to speak of, whether that depth is defined as complex, multi-leveled history or rich, intricately tapestried social groups.

Picaresque experiences are all but impossible in planned environments, unless, of course, one's aim is to engage the hidden maintenance closets and suss out the secret alley where costumed employees go to smoke. Pynchon touches on this idea in *The Crying of Lot 49*, that godfather of cyberpunk texts. One of the enigmatic Inverarity's real estate ventures is a housing development called "Fangoso Lagoons," a planned upscale community which was intended to feature "a floating social hall in the middle of an artificial lake, at the bottom of which lay restored galleons, imported from the Bahamas; Atlantean fragments of columns and friezes from the Canaries; real human skeletons from Italy; giant clamshells from Indonesia-all for the

entertainment of Scuba enthusiasts" (31) - a plan identical to that of the cruise line island described above. Ignoring the problem of whether any of the lake's attractions are real (one wonders how many "genuine" Atlantean artifacts exist off the coast of the Canary Islands), the more pressing issue is that, once removed from their historical contexts, these attractions become meaningless. A diver who swims down to explore the attraction learns absolutely nothing unique or interesting about the place the attraction actually occupies, because the carefully arranged attraction, "real" or not, offers no insight into the hidden history of the place itself. No battle was fought in that lake. Nobody died there. No continents sank. While this might be fine for a diver, it is crippling for a picaro or picara, because it is the *underworld* of a place, the hidden world of secret histories and potential mysteries (which can be anything from dark, shadowy histories of fraud and genocide to the private narratives of minority groups), that create exteriors in which unique mental activity, picaresque or otherwise, can take place. Game/film series like *Silent Hill* take anomalous abandoned spaces like Centralia, Pennsylvania, under which a coal fire has been burning since 1962, and transform them into schizophrenic spaces like Silent Hill, full of hidden histories involving demon-worshipping cults, secret drug production and distribution, and genocide (not to mention the literalization of traumatic history when the demonic world bleeds unexpectedly into the real world) - a person can *lose themselves* in such rich, perpetually unfolding interstitial spaces, stumbling from one perspective-changing discovery to the next. How can one move into a marginal position when you know that the pile of skulls found while diving was intentionally placed at the direction of an "imagineer" expressly for a diver to "discover"?

Considering the consumerist trajectory of Western culture, it is apt that one of the most common examples of totalized hyperspace found in Movement SF is the shopping mall<sup>41</sup>. Scott Bukatman argues that "[t]he shopping mall is emblematic of this spatiality: it possesses a monadic self-sufficiency in which the outside world is denied (the mall has no windows and no weather, while points of egress are hidden off to the side) . . . reconciling the irreconcilable differences between public and private, or inside and outside" (126), going on to label it a "total space" in the same category as Jameson's *Bonaventure*. Bukatman could very well be describing a space station when he describes a self-sufficient space that denies the exterior, and indeed, it is through the trope of the space station that the hyperspace of the shopping mall often appears in SF. Gary Westfahl's exhaustive study of the space station trope, *Islands in the Sky: The Space Station Theme in Science Fiction Literature*, identifies a number of space stations serving as shopping malls in contemporary SF, including *Mallworld* (1984) by the composer/author Somtow Sucharitkul, which features "a huge cylindrical shopping center with over 20,000" (Westfahl 60) attractions, including the "scandalous amusement park, Copuland" (60). Westfahl gives quite a comprehensive list, in fact, and many of his examples precede Movement fiction, such as Jack Vance's "Abercrombie Station" (1952), Mack Reynolds's *Satellite City* (1975), and Philip K. Dick's *The Crack in Space* (1966), among many others. Perhaps the most identifiable

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<sup>41</sup> While I have chosen to focus exclusively on space stations as an example of hyperspaces in the worldbuilding strategies of SF authors, it is worth mentioning that the zombie genre, that (deceased) child of SF, has perfected the mall-as-hyperspace trope. Beginning with Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978, the zombie genre has had over three decades to perfect this trope, and seems to have done so in the video game *Dead Rising 2*. The original *Dead Rising*, in a tribute to Romero (and a brilliant setting), takes place in a mall during a zombie outbreak as a reporter attempts to uncover the outbreak's cause. The sequel, however, offers a much finer commentary on our culture by taking place in Fortune City, Nevada, a fictional version of Vegas. The game world is a sprawling hyperspace: leaving one casino will take you to a mall which connects to a theme park which connects to a casino which connects to a mall, ad infinitum (or until you return to your starting point). There is no outside to the consuming zombie-infested city, save a helicopter ride at the conclusion.

example for our purposes is Gibson's Freeside, the space station in *Neuromancer* owned and operated by the Tessier/Ashpool clan. Gibson describes Freeside as "brothel and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa. . . . Las Vegas and the hanging gardens of Babylon" (99), words equally appropriate to most shopping malls (provided one is a bit flexible with the meaning of "brothel"). Freeside, according to Case, resonates with the dance of Biz, of Commerce (141), although, considering that going through customs "consisted mainly of proving your credit" and the first sight seen by Case upon entering Freeside "was a branch of the Beautiful Girl coffee franchise" (119), his commentary is hardly necessary to recognize Freeside's nature. Like the tourist islands discussed above, these malls in space are designed to eliminate the exterior in both its physical and sociological sense, and it is telling that the plots of these novels operate through the violent destruction or penetration of the consumerist facade.

The orbiting mall is but one specific instance of inescapable hyperspaces in SF; the most typical expression of hyperspace is simply that of urban sprawl, described by Bukatman as an "urban space [which] is directionless - coordinates are literally *valueless* when all directions lead to more of the same" (126). Any and all space stations, such as Gibson's Freeside, qualify as such spaces, the streets full of brothels and casinos wrapping back around on themselves as they trace their way along the inside of the station's hull. Terrestrial examples of the same phenomenon can be seen in the famous urban sprawl of Gibson's Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis or in the endless cities of films such as *The Fifth Element* and graphic novels such as *The Incal*. Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* features such an endless city - endless in that Jerusalem, entering it in the first issue, never actually leaves until the last issue. These and other examples will be discussed in context below, belonging more properly to a discussion of the standardization of space, but suffice it to say that the issue of McDonaldized tourism offers a convenient thumbnail sketch of

the problem picaros and piaras face, including the elimination of traditional boundaries and marginal areas by hyperspace. Travel in and to hyperspaces demonstrates a decidedly anti-picaresque incarnation of mobility: take what you know with you to a place much like home where you know exactly what to expect. Traveling without moving, indeed. Having shown via the theme of tourist attractions that SF picaros (and postmodern picaros in general) face a unique problem as regards the vanishing of marginal areas, let us turn to the three premises upon which this margin-less worldbuilding strategy proceeds: the standardization of people, the standardization of locations, and the standardization of encounters.

#### Standardized People: Fordism and the Scripted Worker/Society

Despite leading to a clear material improvement in the lives of most people (in the developed world, at any rate), Henry Ford's own application of Taylor's scientific management principles to industrial production and its resultant impact on society are hardly above criticism. As regards the prohibitive physical and social environment encountered by picaros both in and out of SF literature, however, only one aspect of the rationalization of labor program bears scrutiny. It can be argued that Ford's approach (and all approached derived from it, including Ritzer's McDonaldization and Bryman's Disneyization implementations discussed below) creates standardized humans who possess three traits antithetical to picaresque experience: standardized (read: ideal) workers are dull, incurious, and homogenized, such that they fit well into a heavily bureaucratized system and lack the active, critical form of intellect that might lead to dissatisfaction; they are pliant, willing to accept a given situation without criticism or complaint; and they are very attached to place, creating a dependable worker base unlikely to move

suddenly (or shift loyalties suddenly). These three traits translate into both a lack of individuals with whom the picaro might profitably interact and a huge hurdle for the picaro himself or herself to overcome, assuming he or she came from such a crippling background (in picaresque terms, at least), and Movement fiction, whether picaresque or not, consistently foregrounds both the processes that create such standardized individuals and the individuals themselves as crucial components of worldbuilding strategy.

Ritzer explains that both Ford and Taylor "sought to hire people who resembled animals" (*McDonaldization* 110); indeed, Taylor wished for workers who "resembles in his mental make-up the ox than any other type" (qtd. in *McDonaldization* 110), and Ford agreed that those of creative bent are unlikely to be able to stomach the kind of labor scientific management required (110). Indeed, the rote, repetitive tasks required under assembly line conditions are demoralizing and even hypnotic, so it is hardly in the interests of capital to place individuals in such positions who might be inclined to be offended and thus rebellious. It is not hard to see how the dull, incurious minds forged by the repetitive labor of Fordist/Taylorist practices give rise to the Morlocks of Wells's *The Time Machine* (although, strictly speaking, Wells's work preceded Taylor's, published in 1911); the designers of rational management techniques coded dehumanization into the process from the beginning. One might argue (as did and do many industrialists and service industry moguls) that Ford and Taylor's rethinking of the working environment provide opportunities for unskilled types that otherwise might have few prospects; however, seeking such workers is not very far removed from causing the creation of such workers, since the laws of supply and demand apply to the labor market as well. To put an evolutionary spin on it, if one does not conform to the personality requirements of the only available food source, one likely won't be successful enough to have little baby workers of one's



own. As such, Movement fiction - particularly movement fiction of the 80s, when the shift from Fordism/Taylorism to decentralized postmodern alternatives was proceeding apace - is practically teeming with standardized worker types, artisans and other ancestor species of the pre-industrial world having gone extinct or surviving only in tenuous relict populations.

Moreover, both companies and national entities were complicit in the creation of homo(genized) sapiens unsapient. David Harvey explains that, while one of the intentions behind Ford's high wage strategy and steady work hours was to lay the groundwork for a consumer economy in which the workers had both time and cash to purchase and enjoy the fruits of Ford's own mass-production, "this presumed that workers knew how to spend their money properly" (126) - something very much in doubt, considering the impoverished and thus frugal backgrounds of not only Ford's potential workers but most of humanity. Ford, in a rather transparent act of social engineering, "sent an army of social workers into the homes of his 'privileged' (and largely immigrant) workers to ensure that the 'new man' of mass production had the right kind of moral probity, family life, and capacity for prudent (i.e. non-alcoholic) and 'rational' consumption to live up to corporate needs and expectations" (126), and, while this and other such programs did not last, one can easily see the intention to script the lives of employees, honing them into not simply components on an assembly line but components in the larger machinery of consumer culture. National entities offered much the same in support of the consumption dynamic Ford's vision required; Harvey also notes "[g]overnments . . . moved to provide a strong underpinning to the social wage through expenditures covering social security, health care, education, housing, and the like" (135). Industrial attitudes towards education, in particular, have drawn a great deal of scholarship; many commentators have noted that government-controlled education served to train future workers in the "skills" needed in the labor

market, such as punctuality, deference to authority, and conditioning to the sound of a bell or whistle. Harvey explains that because "Fordism depended . . . upon the nation state taking . . . a very special role within the overall system of regulation. . . . [it] has to be seen, therefore, less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life" (135), and it was/is this "total way of life" that both demanded and produced a programmed vision of society, in which pliant and incurious citizens were expected to participate in the consumer system and give little thought to outside perspectives.

Governments were also complicit in creation (or at least reinforcement) of the sedentary populations required by industrial labor. Tim Cresswell notes that "[t]raveling as a way of life has historically met with violent, symbolic, and legal resistance" (*In Place* 84), going on to list a series of discriminatory legal practices over the last two centuries (the industrial period, roughly) designed to persecute "people associated with seemingly aimless traveling" (84), such as the "1959 Highways Act [that] made it an offense for a Gypsy to camp beside a road" (84). "In a society with geographic norms of property ownership and the separation of home and work," Cresswell continues, "a traveling lifestyle is highly abnormal" (85). The implication is clear: as highly mobile people are unlikely to participate in the growing consumer culture in a way beneficial to the owners, the various state agencies were obligated to make such mobile, non-participatory lifestyles as difficult as possible. Cresswell, in *Tramp in America*, points out that the various "tramp scares" in US history - particularly in the late 1800s and early 1900s - and their complex public narratives designed to demonize migrant peoples were largely aimed at migrant *workers* who, due to the various economic downturns (such as the Dust Bowl of the 1930s) were forced to become mobile in order to survive. Despite the clear fact that most migrants worked (largely in seasonal agriculture jobs), the tramp narrative sought to render them

disease-ridden, immoral homeless peoples intent of begging, grifting, and otherwise destroying the fabric of America. Clearly, such a narrative worked to the benefit of local capitalists rather than the migrant, as it clearly established the "rightness" and "naturalness" of being tied to a community and, more importantly, gainfully employed *by* that community. Few shed tears over the hobos (many of whom were migrant workers) abused by railroad police forces such as the Pinkertons, having been robbed by public discourse of any humanity. In this we can see a third force rallied against picaresque experience: authoritarian discouragement of mobility via both psychological and physical violence (hobos riding the rails were regularly knocked from trains by blasts from fire hoses or hot coals).

As the second chapter explains in great detail, mobility is absolutely crucial for successful picaresque engagement; how else is one to experience the full panorama, social and geographical, of a country or even a city? By demanding and even inculcating incuriosity, conformity, and stasis, Fordism and its descendants created a very difficult barrier for hopeful picaros and picaras, and this barrier is made painfully clear through the defamiliarizing effects of SF literature. Perhaps the most deceptively light-hearted example can be found in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* in the figure of Y.T.'s mom. Y.T.'s mom works as a programmer<sup>42</sup> for the Federal Government in Fedland, and the terms the novel uses to describe her employment - "Duty, loyalty, responsibility. The collagen that binds us into the United States of America" (280) - are all of a piece with any ideal of company of loyalty, with or without the oath. The bizarre security procedures - "She always walks up the center of the ramp, between the rows of parked cars, so that the EBGOC boys won't think she's lurking, loitering, skulking, malingering, or smoking" (279) - clearly demand that employees not stray too far, when the job not only

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<sup>42</sup> Programmers, once a far freer and more creative profession, are now widely regarded as the equivalent of factory workers, a development on which films like *The Matrix* have capitalized.

requires long hours (those who put in overtime are favored) but also requires a serious time commitment to even get into the building. Employee conformity is also demanded and enforced via "[w]eekly Fed polygraph test" and, later, a revealing and quite unethical interrogation concerning her daughter's activities. Stephenson makes the level of worker conformity required by the company an object of black humor. In addition to several pages recounting memos related to toilet paper use (part of Y.T.'s mom's company's ongoing austerity program - quite eye-opening, considering conservative America's current fascination with austerity), Stephenson includes a hilariously soul-killing discussion of memo-reading protocols:

Less than 10 min.: Time for an employee conference and possible attitude counseling. 10-14 min.: Keep an eye on this employee; may be developing slipshod attitude. 14-15.61 min.: Employee is an efficient worker, may sometimes miss important details. Exactly 15.62 min.: Smartass. Needs attitude counseling. 15.63-16 min.: Asswipe. Not to be trusted. More than 18 min.: Check the security videotape, see just what this employee was up to (e.g., possible unauthorized restroom break. (286-287)

It is instructive to note that this odd interpretive schemata for a memo that has an "estimated reading time is 15.62 minutes" (286) lacks any possible interpretation of perfection; the Fed seems not far removed from any cult religion environment in which the inability to ever attain perfection is used as a guilt tool to manipulate the mind virus victim into further dependency and conformity.

Y.T.'s mom is part of a long tradition of salaryman depictions in Movement fiction, itself a function of the "Nipponification" of American popular culture in the 80s. Japanese corporate models, with far greater emphasis on conformity and company loyalty than US counterparts, were and still are regularly used as a stand-in for the ills of rational management techniques<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Even a show such as *Code Monkeys*, an animated comedy designed to resemble the aesthetic of an 8-bit video game, featured multiple episodes depicting the *zaibatsu* style of business management in dehumanizing terms. On Japanese employ, for instance, petitions one of the

Perhaps the most blatant (and frequent) use of the salaryman trope can be found in the *Shadowrun* series of novels and videogames, the same series discussed as "technosleaze" and "cyberdrol" in the first chapter. *Shadowrun*'s corporate-controlled dystopian future is populated largely by company men who are, for all intents and purposes, indentured servants, dependent for their livelihoods on their companies and, as such, are very hesitant to offend the ones who write the checks. Like Y.T.'s mom, *Shadowrun*'s salarymen are very sedentary figures, despite the ease of travel provided by a futuristic society: "Like a good salaryman, I never went far from Renraku property except on corporate business" (Charrette 82). Additionally, they practice conformity of both thought and appearance: one of the novels based upon the series presents a paradoxical figure who is paradoxical precisely because he put a bit too much effort into conformity: "Akabo's well-tailored gray suit was cut from expensive material, far too costly for a typical salaryman, though the outfit mimicked the current fashionable cut" (98). Akabo is clearly a variation of the gray flannel figure of 50s America, a sedentary figure (tied existentially to his suburban home) not generally remembered as a questioner of authority. Indeed, the assembly-line product of the gray suit-clad corporate component<sup>44</sup> isn't far removed from Gibson's moving (and often controversial) metaphor for the state of labor under scientifically managed systems: the meat puppet. Molly Millions explains the process by which special cut-out circuitry is implanted in the brain, allowing one to prostitute oneself on autopilot, as "[renting] the goods" (*Neuromancer* 143). A salaryman might be conscious, but the conscious personality is of no real value to the corporation, no more than a line worker's capacity for creative thought is of value to the line itself. A salaryman's life is of little value in Movement fiction (interestingly, in the video

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protagonists for amphetamines, his boss having kept him working for "forty-seven consecutive hours."

<sup>44</sup> A very interesting implementation of 50s conformity in SF narrative occurs in Marc Laidlaw's novel *Dad's Nuke*.

game variants the player takes a slight reduction in karma if he or she decides to randomly execute salarymen on the street, but so slight a deduction is it that it hardly functions as a disincentive), and is hardly a worthy object of picaresque scrutiny - if you've seen one you've seen them all. Similarly, picaros and picaras can only emerge from such backgrounds with difficulty, as a picaresque journey requires the rejection of the conformity, pliancy, and immobility core to a salaryman's being.

#### Standardized Places: Modernist/Post-Modernist Architectural Philosophy

"We throw the out-of-date tool on the scrap heap . . . This action is a manifestation of health, of  
moral health"

- Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (1923)

If Fordist management strategies sought to standardize individuals, modernist architecture sought to standardize location (and, consequently, the individuals inhabiting the locations). Modernist architecture came into being (depending on one's preferred source) with the industrial revolution itself and rose to international prominence (the influential International Style) through the designs and popularizations of architects such as Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and most importantly Le Corbusier. Modernist architecture's debt to the industrial revolution does not lie simply in the materials of choice (glass, steel, reinforced concrete) made suddenly available; industrialism provided a philosophical foundation for modernist architecture project. David Harvey notes that "Fordism and Keynesian state managerialism became associated with an austere functionalist aesthetic (high modernism) in the

field of rationalized design" (139), and Jencks furthers this point by explaining that "the major metaphor for modern architecture . . . [was] the factory" (31). Corbusier's own popularization efforts bear out this very uncontroversial observation; Corbusier sought to "follow the structure of machines in the design of mass housing . . . [through] the borrowing of formal elements from automobile design" (Heuser 53). Corbusier reasons in *Towards a New Architecture* that the icons of design of the modern world - the airplane, the automobile, and the ocean liner - are the products of a complex selection process whereby the designs that don't optimize performance are eliminated in favor of superior versions, and from this assumption he argues that "[t]he house is a machine for living in" (4). In short, modern architecture aimed to provide orderly and smoothly-functioning societies via orderly and smoothly-functioning "machines" in which people lived and/or worked.

Tom Wolfe, in his famous takedown of modernist architecture's pretensions, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, depicted modernist architects in cult-like terms, labeling them members of a "compound." While Wolfe's often inflammatory language *seems* hyperbolic, the words of Corbusier tend to support Wolfe's excesses, showing a movement philosophy (or ideology) heavily invested in a desire for order and control. Le Corbusier, in a move anticipating the declaratory language of future fanboys and fangirls defending Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, celebrates the engineer as a benevolent, divine figure working tirelessly to optimize the world: "The Engineer . . . puts us in accord with universal law. He achieves harmony" (11). Indeed, Corbusier is so invested in idealizing the engineer (being the authority upon which modernist aesthetics rest, one can understand the need) that he feels it necessary to embiggen (to borrow a *Simpsons* term similarly applied to mythology) every aspect of the engineer, peppering his writing with such statements as "[o]ur engineers are healthy and virile, active and useful,

balanced and happy in their work" (14)<sup>45</sup>. Many of Corbusier's points about his new vision of architecture are delivered as if they should be engraved on stone: "Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan, both for the house and for the city" (3) - and, presumably, a similar plan waits to be drafted for human behavior, considering his repeated pronouncements for "[t]he necessity for order" (3). In fact, Corbusier's calls for order are repeated often enough in this text to qualify as an invocation: "An inevitable element of Architecture. The necessity for order. The regulating line is a guarantee against wilfulness [sic]" (67). Corbusier's vision of modernist architecture, framed as something of a holy crusade, takes a very instrumentalist view of society and, by consequence, human behavior, so it should come as little surprise that, "[d]isillusioned by the inability of democratic governments to undertake what he considered the essential tasks of modernization, Le Corbusier turned first to syndicalism, and later to authoritarian regimes, as the only political forms capable of facing up to the crisis" (Harvey 129). Modernist architecture (in the views of its major proponents, at any rate) conceived its mission as the optimization of the human experience.

The Age of Moral Machines (for "Living")

"Standardization is imposed by the law of selection and is an economic and social necessity"

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<sup>45</sup> Le Corbusier's desire to deify the engineer as an ideal example of rationality and progress - a position, incidentally, that seems laughably ludicrous when one realizes that many recent polls demonstrate that, among the sciences, engineers show a disproportionate number of believers in creationism and intelligent design, both beliefs about as backwards and unscientific as can be - is hardly an isolated position, historically speaking. Ayn Rand made an identical effort through the architect Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead* and, through a slew of engineers in different fields, *Atlas Shrugged*. In fact, every astounding story featuring super scientists (if I may play on *Astounding Stories* original title) found from the 30s onwards (such as Dr. Benton Quest of *Jonny Quest* fame) serves this same agenda.



- Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (1923)

Modernist architecture's optimization through standardization takes on a distressingly religious dimension in the words of architects and critics alike - an appropriate fit, perhaps, considering that religion sought the "rational" standardization of the human mind and experience long before the industrial revolution (and was arguably far more successful); their desire for order and harmony lead to an approach that attempted to standardize (read: perfect) the inhabitants through standardized (again, read: perfect) design. Towards this end, Corbusier in particular took a bizarre interest in the interior design of his projects, blithely issuing pronouncements regarding what people should want, regardless of what their individual needs might require. Le Corbusier laments the presence of non-functionalist accoutrements, asking "why the elaborate bookcases?" and "[w]hy the mirrored wardrobes, the washstands, the commodes?" (115), preferring instead that these fittings (storage, etc.) be built into the home itself (116) and thus reducing one's choice of "fittings" to the most utilitarian and standardized version possible. In fact, he provides something called "The Manual of the Dwelling," which outlines what a person should and should not want/do. Again and again Corbusier stresses the importance of "built-in fittings," but this obsession is accompanied by multiple pronouncements about appropriate behavior within one's machine for living, making very clear that the homeowner is less an operator than a component of their machine. Corbusier states that one needs "[a]n adjoining room to be a dressing-room in which you can dress and undress. . . . [as one should] [n]ever undress in your bedroom . . . [as] [i]t is not a clean thing to do and makes the room horribly untidy" (122), on the same level, one suspects, of a factory worker blasphemously eating at his or her pristine workstation. Wolfe comments on this tendency towards

standardization, painting the modernist architects as very dictatorial, authoritarian figures indeed, who permitted "[n]o alterations, special orders, or loud talk from the client" (17) and who "policed the impulses of clients and tenants alike" (76). And while Wolfe certainly exaggerates the architects' overt intrusion, it should be obvious that insisted-upon design choices such as in-built, unchangeable fittings and Venetian blinds that have only three possible positional selections (Wolfe 76) are intended to nudge the occupants themselves towards more optimal behavior.

If it seems a stretch to suggest that architecture could have much success programming morality into its occupants, consider that Corbusier believed that people needed "to be 'reeducated' to comprehend the beauty of 'the Radiant City'" (Wolfe 32), having been too long steeped in archaic traditions. In other words, Corbusier felt that it was the traditions of ornamental architecture that had programmed individuals' aesthetic values, so it was only logical that by changing one's environment one's thinking would be changed. Jencks even observes that the modernists' "Purist style, [their] clean, salubrious hospital metaphor, was meant to instill, by good example, corresponding virtues in the inhabitants" (9), going on to note that "[t]he hope of these artists and architects was to reform society on a new class and functional basis: substitute power stations for cathedrals, technocrats for aristocrats. A new, heroic, democratic society would emerge, led by a powerful race of pagan supermen . . . the technicians and captains of industry" (37). Of course, this ambition degenerated into pure, cheap consumerism, as Jencks notes, but the instrumental attitudes towards space and place remained.

Nowhere was this attitude better expressed than in the various public housing projects designed by modernists, Pruitt-Igoe being the most famous but only one amongst many. The Pruitt-Igoe housing project of St. Louis was completed in 1954 as part of an ongoing response to

increasing slums resulting from middle-class movement from the inner city to the suburbs, and its almost immediate decline has been attributed by critics (like Wolfe) to the failure of High Modernist ideology. While modernism's blame is not entirely justified in the project's decline - Katharine G. Bristol makes a very compelling argument in "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" that the narrative of architectural blame is something of a red herring detracting attention away from real issues of class and race - the project nevertheless was designed quite faithfully in the International Style and demonstrates a clear attempt to order society, regardless of the designers' personal intentions. Two design features of particular interest are the "skip-stop elevators and glazed internal galleries . . . intended to create 'individual neighborhoods' within each building" (Bristol 165). The elevators only accessed every third floor, from which the residents could walk via the galleries to their apartments. Any gamer (or viewer of the film *Dredd*, which takes place in a similar, though far larger, modernist housing project) will recognize instantly that this design creates a choke point, and indeed the more criminally ambitious residents used the galleries as exactly that: "[f]orced to walk through the galleries to reach their apartments, residents were threatened and attacked by gangs" (166). Gangs used the skip-stop elevators and galleries for what they were: strategies of area denial. Modernist architecture celebrated sunshine and open (if cramped) spaces, therefore occupants were "optimized" to use these spaces. For the purposes of this discussion the success or failure of the housing project is immaterial; what matters is that "[m]odern architecture ended up imposing its own social ideal on its buildings' inhabitants" (Heuser 58), seeking to make an efficient population of residents. And in all honesty, when the post-WWII housing boom "lead to domiciles so alike that one "could wander into someone else's house and not realize for a moment that they were not in their own home" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization* 98), could one doubt that people would be much different?

Though Oscar Newman's theory of defensible space has its critics, it is undeniable that place does much to shape our behaviors and expectations of behavior. Cresswell explains that "the word *place* clearly refers to something more than a spatial referent. Implied in these terms is a sense of the proper . . . *expectations* about behavior that relate a position in a social structure to actions in space" (*In Place* 3). When places are standardized, then the logic of "machines for living" ultimately means that humans must be similarly standardized, with the most appropriate and therefore "best" lifestyles selected for via the same intelligently directed heuristic process that produced the designs of the airfoils and automobiles that Corbusier so admires. Modernist design principles treat individuals as standardized components of the standardized system, and this insect-colony organization can be seen at both the macro and micro level. Sabine Heuser, discussing that great symbol of modernist architecture, the skyscraper, notes that "[s]kyscrapers afford the vantage point for surveying the 'city as a vast map,' with its various networks of streets and traffic patterns forming an abstract grid for pedestrian movements, now suddenly and naturalistically comparable to ants" (52), hinting through the ant metaphor at the scripting of behavior - pedestrian traffic must flow in this direction, vehicular traffic must flow in that direction, etc. In this, as with the example of Fordism, the theme of the curtailing of mobility reappears. Freedom of movement (and the subsequent agency it implies) is mainly illusory in Modern cities, regardless of the degree to which "postmodern" architectural ideas have been enacted. Consider the once-iconic image of the train. The train was once an image of agency and escape; Cresswell reminds us that it was "[t]he technology of the railroad [that] provided the conditions for the emergence of a new social type - the tramp" (*Tramp* 28), serving as a far more effective version of Huck's Mississippi. Within the framework of the modern city, however, the train - now subway - has mutated into an image of control and containment. Subways are

circular, taking a person not to distant lands but to his or her starting point, passing along the way hidden areas without even the suggestion that one could or should step off and explore. The 1998 film *Dark City* demonstrates the train's devolution quite effectively: the unnamed city of the film floats in space, controlled by alien intelligences, and as such cannot be escaped. While the subway is supposed to go eventually to the utopian Shell Beach, it instead goes in circles forever, driving one character - detective Eddie Walenski - to draw perplexing spirals across the walls of his home before jumping in front of a train. Ultimately, reaching the beach requires a heavy act of transgression - the shattering of a wall leading to the vacuum of space - and the literal creation of the beach, since it does not as of yet exist. The evolution of the train from icon of empowerment to one of imprisonment demonstrates the constrained mobility at work in rationally planned cities.

#### Arcologies of the Future

Pruitt-Igoe may have been (mostly) demolished in 1972 and along with it, according to Jencks, modernist architecture, but rumors of its death have been greatly exaggerated, considering that the International Style yet retains its international popularity and that modernism's spatial design strategies are present in postmodernist buildings (hidden, perhaps, by "double-coded" features) and, most important for our purposes, the bulk of Movement SF. Modernist spaces serve as a cornerstone in the worldbuilding strategies of many SF novels, taking various forms from homes to entire cities but always featuring the same elements of control discussed above. Perhaps the most interesting Movement representation of Modernist space (though hardly the most common) is the arcology, that massive and self-contained

technologically advanced community popularized by architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Paolo Soleri. Arcologies have a distinguished history of positive description in SF, and rightly so - the idea of a self-sufficient, self-contained sustainable ecosystem serving many thousands of people is very noble, especially in an era of overconsumption and ecological suicide. However, the depiction of arcologies in *Movement SF* is another matter entirely, being almost universally negative and reinforcing the themes of standardization of people and location discussed above, along with the sub-theme of curtailing mobility. As such, arcologies can be seen as a representation of the spatial challenge to picaresque engagement.

One need not look far to find an arcology in post-80s SF. Any viewer/reader of the *Judge Dredd* series should be familiar with Mega-City One's countless City Blocks, which are micro-cities (or hyperspaces) housing tens of thousands of people. The underrated 2012 film *Dredd* featured just such an arcology in the form of the slum Peach Trees, a City Block stretching 200 stories and containing stores, a hospitals, and tens of thousands of residents (including Ma-Ma Madrigal's gang - the focus of the plot). Peach Trees is presented as a future version of housing projects like Pruitt-Igoe, and is likely inspired by the Ponte City Apartments of Johannesburg<sup>46</sup> (where much of *Dredd* was shot), a similar though smaller crime-ridden public housing skyscraper designed around a central hollow core. The vertiginous central core of Peach Trees (and the Ponte City Apartments) immediately recalls the hyperspatial city design found in Moebius's depiction in Jodorowsky's *The Black Incal* graphic novel of "Suicide Alley . . . a direct nonstop fall straight down to the great acid lake, which dissolves everything it touches"

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<sup>46</sup> The Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel in Atlanta seems like it should be a source for *Dredd*'s Peach Trees, as it, like the Ponte City Apartments, is a cylindrical hollow tube modernist design surrounding an open core and suspiciously shares the same name. Even so, screenwriter Alex Garland and comics author John Wagner have stated several times in interviews that the name Peach Trees came from the restaurant where the two met.

(Jodorowsky 3), surrounded by countless levels of habitation. Bukatman describes the scene as follows: "[t]he concentrated city fills the frame as we look down at level upon level of urban sprawl: the bottom is invisible in a diffused cloud of white, and thus this is a city without top, without bottom, without limits" (129) marked, if anything, by chaos and "spatial dislocation" (129), connecting Difool's city and consequently Dredd's Peach Trees with the hyperspaces of modernity and postmodernity. Indeed, *Dredd* sees several people pitched from the top stories of Peach Trees to splatter on the atrium at the central core's bottom. Ironically, these falls, like the "suicide" in *The Black Incal* (the protagonist, John Difool, was pitched over the side) help to foreground the abridgment of mobility in these arcologies; the plummeting characters cover distance without traversing any territory. Indeed, the plot of *Dredd* is driven forward by a large-scale truncation of mobility: Madrigal's gang triggers a security test, reverting the building to war footing and causing titanic blast shields to cut off the inhabitants from the outside. Tellingly, a homeless person (Cresswell's highly-mobile tramp figure) is squashed when the shields come down. Like Pruitt-Igoe, Cabrini-Green, and many other housing projects, the rationally designed interiors were intended to produce the kind of harmonious living Corbusier describes; its failure and the heavy-handed Judges who try and execute criminals on the spot merely underscore the modernist emphasis on controlled, rational societies.

Interesting though *Dredd's* use of the arcology may be, the most transparently negative use of the trope occurs in Cyberpunk fiction (and its bastard child, technosleaze). Scott's *Blade Runner* - cyberpunk's forerunner and one of its inspirations - offers an ancestor of the cyberpunk arcology in the form of the Tyrell corporation. The Tyrell corporation is housed in a giant glass pyramid structure, a shining futuristic (futuristic by way of a ziggurat, at any rate) beacon in the decaying ruins of L.A., and its business is the churning out of standardized humans in the form

of replicants. The Tyrell corporation is placed in contrast with the dilapidated hotel in which lives J.F. Sebastian, a genetic engineer for the corporation and an intellectual equal of Tyrell himself (the parallel is made explicit when it is revealed that Tyrell and Sebastian play ongoing games of chess). Sebastian's dilapidated home is, in fact, the L.A.'s Bradbury Building, built in 1893 in an Italian Renaissance Revival style littered with the kind of Baroque ornamentation detested by modernists; J. F. Sebastian lives in very human clutter, surrounded by his eccentric creations - art for art's sake - while the Tyrell corporation (though not necessarily Dr. Eldon Tyrell, who inhabits a very human and perhaps even Howard Hughs-like apartment at the top of the corporation's pyramid) is all clean lines and curtain walls. This binary formula - modernist arcology = inhuman/baroque decay = human - serves as the basis for Gibson's own depiction of arcologies in his *Sprawl Trilogy* (and, to a lesser extent, his *Bridge Trilogy*).

*Count Zero* features another arcology-as-corporation known as "Maas Biolabs North America" (Gibson 23) that, like Peach Trees, foregrounds the theme of abridged mobility common to arcologies. Heuser observes that, for Asimov, arcologies "were geodesic domes that enclosed self-sufficient societies, and so functioned as an ideal representation of 'the engineering of human souls'" (54), and this is a fairly accurate description of Maas Biolabs, assuming one is a bit liberal with the phrase 'engineering of human souls'. Maas Biolabs, a titanic structure "carved into the heart of a sheer mesa" (88), deals in biochips and other wetware, technology that literally engineers perfection into humans by fusing them with technology. Of course, biotechnology does not necessarily mean the standardization of humans, nor does it mean social control via converting humans into robots; however, much like the Tyrell corporation's use of biotechnology to create disposable slaves, Maas Biolabs tends to put their technology to unethical uses, such as control of employees. One major plot thread of *Count Zero* involves a mercenary named Turner



attempting to extract a biochip engineer from the Maas arcology. The engineer, Christopher Mitchell, wishes to defect to Hosaka, a rival company, but leaving one's employer is rather tricky when arcologies are not simply a self-sufficient environment but rather impenetrable states unto themselves, "laboratory-corporate hierarchies" (89) possessing military forces and advanced weaponry. Maas Biolabs was not simply some building to which Mitchell commuted: "To Mitchell, it had been prison and fortress, his home for nine years" (88). No mobility was possible for Mitchell without contracting for a dangerous corporate defection in which he must be physically rescued from Maas's premises. Physical extraction is only half of the problem, too: Maas's mobility control extends even to the use of the aforementioned biotechnologies to prevent employees' escape. In the case of Mitchell, Hosaka found it advisable to build a neurosurgery clinic to receive their prize, since there was "[n]o telling how they [Maas] might have our boy [Mitchell] kinked" (40).

As is often the case, technosleaze, fueled by a naked desire to capitalize on cyberpunk's bag of tricks, manages to foreground cyberpunk's themes as well as or better than the original, unburdened, as are all knock-offs, by subtlety. The *Shadowrun* series, borrowing liberally from Gibson, features giant corporate arcologies in central villain roles, and, even more so than in Gibson, these arcologies demand standardized behavior and curtailed movement. Like Maas Biolabs, the sheer size of these "highrise hives of steel, glass, and concrete" (Wolfe 81) is stressed by the authors, likely to enhance the reader's sense that the arcologies are worlds apart and authorities unto themselves: "Renraku arcology, its massive presence dwarfing the tall office buildings of the nearby central business district . . . [and enclosing] a dozen city blocks" (Charrette 10). These arcologies are typically presented as being full of the salaryman workers discussed in the previous section; in fact, the Sega Genesis version of the *Shadowrun* franchise

populated the arcologies with cowardly cookie-cutter employees (revealingly, the art designers spent little time on the salaryman character models, making them all very bland) who, assuming the player had broken in, were more than willing to play snitch. And, like in Gibson's novels, players are regularly contracted by clients who require risky "extractions" from corporate monocultures with the help of the mercenary "shadowrunners." Private military forces fight to prevent employees from relocating and are perfectly willing to kill employees rather than allowing other corporations to successfully headhunt them. Bukatman, in *Terminal Identity*, explains that the alienated culture of the 50s yielded "a science fiction in which the city is projected as claustrophobic and isolating, an outsized monadic structure sealed off from its surrounds" (125), going on to cite Asimov's *Foundation* and *Caves of Steel* as examples. Asimov's arcologies, however, are utopias when compared to the immobility, standardization, and (violent) instrumental control leveled at occupants by the arcologies found in Movement SF.

#### Standardized Encounters: McDisneyization and the Scripted Experience

Jencks, writing in 1977, offers that "Modern architects haven't altogether mastered this territory of Disneyland and ride through parks, of Kings Road and Sunset Strip, but they are beginning to try, and we can already count the triumphs" (32). No doubt he would be less cautious in his estimations in 2013, for Disney is a shining beacon of scientific management (the glare helps to mask the dehumanizing flaws). Disney, however, isn't strictly speaking modernist; Disney is merely the postmodern result of a chain of development that began with Ford's managerial strategies, a position it shares with, at least in sociological studies, Ray Croc's McDonalds chain. Alan Bryman, author of *The Disneyization of Society*, notes that the

"identification of Disneyization with theories of consumer culture seems to imply that whereas McDonaldization is a modern phenomenon, Disneyization is a post-modern one" (Bryman, "Disneyization" 43), going on to note that "the proliferation of signs, dedifferentiation of institutional spheres, depthlessness, cultivated nostalgia, and the problematization of authenticity and reality" (43) do associate Disney with postmodernity. In Bryman's analysis, Disneyization is an evolutionary descendent of the McDonaldization process described by George Ritzer in his 1993 study *The McDonaldization of Society*, a process that tended towards "creating a world of homogeneity and sameness" (4) that maintains the essential pillars of the McDonaldization process - efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control - while tweaking the process by replacing homogenization with a curious brand of predictable and controlled "variety and difference" (4) for the same purpose: consumption. Regardless, the superficial changes are just that, and the core of "McDisneyization" (a term coined by Ritzer in *The McDonaldization Thesis*) is nevertheless the inheritor of "a production system that rested so heavily upon the socialization of the worker to long hours of purely routinized labor, demanding little in the way of traditional craft skills, and conceding almost negligible control to the worker over the design, pace, and scheduling of the production process" (Harvey 128). McDisneyization is also a major component in globalization; Ritzer argues that many things have been or are being McDonaldized, ranging from phone sex (*McDonaldization* 12) to religion (13), and the same can be said for Disneyization, which impacts everything from tourism to film and television. It isn't much of a stretch to suggest that, between the two, McDonaldization and Disneyization have colonized the vast majority of Western culture; even city design is impacted by these two processes. McDonaldization and Disneyization, twin totalizing forces, shed a great deal of light

on the erosion of mobility and the standardization of human interaction, the two major problems faced by contemporary picaros.

### Scripted Journeys/Scripted Souls

"Do not use for the other use"

-Perplexing warning label found on a food processor

Like its antecedents, McDisneyization seeks to reign in human mobility, controlling space in the service of greater consumption. Though hardly the originator, the fast food industry began the process of turning the practical act of controlling behavior into an art. Ritzer discusses at great length the methods by which McDonald's and its imitators control movement and thus behavior, pointing out that, from the moment individuals enter a given restaurant, "customers enter a kind of conveyor system that moves them through the restaurant in the manner desired by the management" (*McDonaldization* 105). The drive-through is the most obvious example, but it is crucial to realize that the "rules" of movement are also *internalized* by patrons, resulting in people that know "they are supposed to line up, move to the counter, order their food, pay, carry the food to an available table, eat, gather up their debris, deposit it in the trash receptacle, and return to their cars" (105). Ritzer calls these "unwritten, but universally known, norms for eating in a fast-food restaurant" (105), and therein lies the crux: McDonaldization has succeeded like no other institution in human history in making programmed patterns of behavior "natural," and it has managed this by tying these "natural" codes of behavior to a sense of place. A theme running across much of Tim Cresswell's work on place is the connection between a given place and

norms of behavior perceived as "natural"; once a behavior becomes coupled to a society's perceived meaning of place, the behavior attains the unquestionable status of natural and therefore "right." Anyone who has ever tried to urinate in a parking lot and been confronted by security will understand; despite the 250,000 years preceding the construction of restrooms by homo sapiens sapiens, public urination is perceived as wrong and unnatural, judging by the inevitable horrified and disgusted expressions on the faces of the security guard and the family in the adjacent SUV. The behavior of elimination is thoroughly coupled to a specific place - the restroom. Half-serious example aside, it is important to recognize that most places in contemporary society have, to some extent, been McDonaldized, meaning that the internalized strategies of motion and behavior discussed above are always active in some measure, especially in larger cities where non-McDonaldized space is scarce.

Disneyization refines the spatial control strategies pioneered by the fast food industry, masking the level of control with spectacle. Bryman explains that "[f]rom the moment visitors drive onto Disney property, they are being controlled" (*Disneyization* 133), citing the multitude of signs beginning in the parking lots directing the motion of patrons, signs explaining which buses (and, presumably, other "people movers" such as the monorail or the ferries) go and where and how one should behave while waiting, and signs instructing patrons as to what behavior is acceptable and what is not (public urination on the World Showcase is right out, I can report). In fact, Disney endeavors to "channel the movement of visitors in certain directions" (134) by restricting direction choice and through the use of "various lures, which Walt [Disney] called 'wienies', . . . [intended] to entice the visitors in certain directions" (134), going so far as to place "food and drink carts, restaurants, and shops . . . strategically . . . to maximize consumption opportunities" (134). Even the park's separation of space into themed areas is intended to restrict

*psychological* mobility, insofar as the separated areas are, as Bryman notes, intended to prevent one thematic narrative from being negated by collision with another - no liberating Burroughs cut-ups are permitted. Of course, the patron is complicit in each mobility-reducing strategy, but the elimination of marginal areas and perspectives brought by the lack of mobility is real all the same.

While the strategies of spatial control described above aren't too dissimilar from the strategies employed by fast food restaurants, Disneyization has managed to further refine the standardization of place to include the standardization of individuals' *encounters* with place, a quite horrific development when viewed through the needs of the picaresque. Point of fact, the various attractions (like EPCOT, which was originally intended by Disney himself to be a fully-functional utopian community) are both conceived of and operated as an industrial manufacturing process, producing carefully regulated experiences of "wonder" attached to specific places - a statement, incidentally, that shouldn't come as a shock to anyone who visited the Disney/MGM Studios as a child, took the animation tour, and saw actual animators animating in what looked for all the world like an assembly line - that is, before computer animation forced the tour's closure (tours moving through the off-site studios of whatever firms Disney has currently purchased being a bit hard to arrange, apparently). Bryman stresses just this fact, though from the perspective of the ride operators: "[t]his McDonaldized aspect of the work of the ride operator's job means that to a large extent the work is pre-programmed and controlled by the pace and frequency of the ride, much like an assembly line" (137). As mind-numbing as such an operator job might be, the effect on the visitors surely must be worse: "In the words of a Disney cast member: 'After a couple of rides, guests almost seem as if they are in a cattle round up or something'" (133) - which doesn't mean that the visitors aren't enjoying themselves, but the

cattle analogy does suggest a very vacuous (as in, *la vaca*) form of entertainment, not to mention a very willing complicity in the fencing of their own experience. Beyond the issue of patron processing, the attractions themselves are designed to standardize visitor experiential consumption, as "[e]ach person sees the same as everyone else so that the experience of many theme park attractions is controlled and thereby standardized" (134). Bryman notes that the rides are designed to stop and the vehicles themselves designed to turn "so that the visitor's gaze is directed towards exactly the 'right' spot" (134), which is, I imagine, determined quite scientifically. The park even provides approved photography spots, so chosen "because they are deemed to provide especially good vantage points" (134). The level of control theme parks like Disney World direct at the personal experiences of park visitors is so thorough that it is entirely possible that separate individuals will have identical *experiences*, viewing the same attractions in the same order and likely having the same emotional responses. That alone suggests the death of marginal perspectives.

Indeed, the success of the ultimate agenda behind the standardization of both space and experience - a pliant people ready for consumption - suggests that those marginal perspectives have been largely conquered. Bryman notes that "[i]t is often suggested that the parks do not encourage visitors to use their imagination but instead consign them to a state of passivity, whereby they become onlookers - reveling in the imagination of others (Walt and his Imagineers) - rather than being active participants" (135). Such is the result of what Bryman terms "dedifferentiation," which is the collapsing of the two categories of shopping (consumption) and entertainment (play). This strategy should properly be regarded as a spatial strategy considering that Disney has intentionally fused places whose social meanings are tied with play to places associated with consumption; every stop on Epcot's World Showcase is a gift

shop where one can buy a beer, to name but one (admittedly fun) example. And this is a very, very successful strategy, at least when viewed from the standpoint of the park. Bryman notes that visitors "adopted a predominantly ludic response to their experience of the parks. They were rarely critical, even of the blatant attempts to entice them to purchase merchandise" (141), which suggests that marginal perspectives are not much of a problem, as it would take an outsider view to really appreciate and rebel against the sheer magnitude of instrumental control leveled at park visitors . . . or people in general, really, since the strategies employed by Disney are hardly confined to the park. Ninjalicious, the late popularizer of the urban exploration phenomenon discussed in some detail below (and, as such, almost a picaro himself), offers a critique of the experience of contemporary city life that isn't much different from that of a Disney vacation: "urban living consists of mindless travel between work, shopping and home, oblivious to the countless wonders a city offers. Most people think the only things worth looking at in our cities and towns are those safe and sanitized attractions that require an admission fee. . . . It's no wonder people feel unfulfilled and uninvolved as they are corralled through the maze of velvet ropes on their way out through the gift shop" (3). The only element lacking is that of dedifferentiation, but with all due respect to Ninjalicious, he is quite mistaken in suggesting one actually has to begin going through the motions of leaving to reach a gift shop: any mall is as Disneyized as the park itself. Suffice it to say that picaresque engagement is all but impossible in environments where standardized experiences ensure standardized minds and controlled mobility prevent discoveries that might lead to alternate perspectives.

Scripted Encounters/Scripted Selves



Not only does the Disneyization process manage to retard mobility and standardize one's experience of place, it also doubles down by standardizing one's experience of other people, performing a rare hat-trick against a picaro's future prospects. The most straight-forward method by which this standardization of human interaction is effected is through the simple replacement of humans with robots or other technological solutions. Ritzer, for instance, points out that "[t]he great source of uncertainty, unpredictability and inefficiency in any rationalizing system is people . . . . Once people are controlled, it is possible to begin reducing their behavior to a series of machinelike actions" (*McDonaldization* 101), with the ideal end being the complete replacement of the unpredictable individuals in question with far more manageable machinery. While this is an interesting development (and one that is proceeding apace - quite a few companies actually make use of chatbots instead of actual humans in, at the very least, the initial stages of online customer support) it is also one that has been discussed ad nauseam by other critics and as such requires only a passing mention here. Far more interesting are the efforts made by corporations to script human communication, effectively preventing the meaningful contact picaros and picaras require. Ritzer, discussing the complexity of interaction required by McJobs, explains that "[m]uch of what is said and done in fast-food restaurants by both employees and customers is ritualized, routinized, even scripted. These familiar and comfortable rituals and scripts help make fast-food restaurants attractive to legions of people" (81), continuing to explain that the "six steps to window service: greet the customer, take the order, assemble the order, present the order, receive payment, thank the customer and ask for repeat business" (81) are a good general illustration of the scripting of interaction. The scripting or programming of interaction is quite a bit more pervasive than most customers realize; Ritzer explains that even when a customer believes that they have gone off-script with an employee,

said employee might actually be following a "series of subscripts" (82) designed to handle "unusual requests or behaviors" (82). Ritzer offers the hypothetical example of "a subscript for customers who object to being subjected to the same scripted interaction as everyone else. In fact, the subscript might be written to appear as if it reflects the 'real' feelings of the employee and is not scripted" (82). Anyone who has visited a fast food restaurant and witnessed such ritualized communication in action knows that it is eagerly seized upon by both employees and patrons alike and, due to its status of comfortable conversational default, is thus incredibly difficult to surmount. The routinized, ritualized interaction of a McDonaldized society shares similarity with the call/response structure of a Catholic mass, a similarity that speaks volumes about the difficulty of getting outside such a structure (not that anyone would mistake the teenager handing you your burgers for a priest, thank heavens).

As with the standardization of place, Disney has implemented a similar version of the fast food industry's McConversation innovation. Bryman observes that the park employees, or "cast members" in the duplicitous newspeak of Disney (almost as bad as Wal-Mart's "associates"), are forced to practice "scripted interaction, whereby the cast members closely follow a script, which varies very little from one occasion to the next, when announcing a show or when providing the patter for a ride" (*Disneyization* 134). Cast members and employees are always working under the umbrella of a script, even in moments that seem genuine or off-the-cuff: "amusing patter . . . is rarely ad libbed or spontaneous, but has invariably been cleared before being used in practice" (136). Adherence to script (or variations within the remit of one's script) is ensured by park surveillance of employees and patrons alike; cast members must remain ever-vigilant, as Big Brother may be secret shopping them. Bryman explains that "theme park employees are being watched to ensure that they follow rules and procedures properly and that they exhibit emotional

labour in the expected way and to the correct degree. . . . Disney uses 'shoppers', that is, employees who are dressed as tourists and interact with cast members in order to provoke them into a non-Disney response" (147). Fans of Foucault will no doubt draw Panopticon comparisons, but the process as described by Bryman, with the added element of "emotional labour," seems far closer to the internal self-policing practiced by cults, such as Scientology's implementation of "security checks" conducted by "ethics officers" designed to trip up the victim into revealing some "out-ethics" or "suppressive" thoughtcrime. Disney employees are not expected simply to follow scripts mechanically; they are expected to provide their scripted interaction with the proper emotional content. As such, Disney has a vested interest in controlling the inner life, or "emotional labour," of cast members, and the prospect of a secret shopper or similar mole does much to force employees into arguably unnatural emotional states. Ritzer actually described a similar process operating in a company called Combined Insurance: "Combined Insurance attempts to go further--to transform them as people, to lead them to embrace a new identity" (*McDonaldization* 90). Combined Insurance involved door-to-door salespeople, so the McDonaldization process worked on everything from scripted dialogue to body language and emotional response. This is the same scripting that takes place at Disney, on a smaller scale: the entirety of a worker's being must be reshaped into a controllable asset - a robot by another name.

It takes little thought to realize that such intense control of the inner lives of employees must be both soul-killing and transformative: as Nietzsche said, if you stare into the cubicle too long, it shall stare into you. Disney's addition of an expectation of *emotional* control, recalling McDonald's oddly imperative slogan cum attempt at mood manipulation "I'm Loving It!," merely exacerbates an already difficult problem. The barrier McDisneyization creates for

picaresque engagement is twofold: first, and most importantly, individuals who work McJobs are effectively crippled as picaros and picaras both on and off the job, as the psychological effects of such work don't end with the work day. Ritzer quotes "one employee of United Airlines . . . [who said] "My body became an extension of the computer terminal that I typed the reservations into. I came to feel emptied of self" (117). Thus an airline employee - a McJob if ever there was one - becomes little more than a fleshy algorithm, experiencing what Bukatman describes as terminal identity, though in this case the employee's terminal is really only a small part of the problem. Robotic interaction with a keyboard is but a reflection of the employee's robotic interaction with customers. A person so controlled cannot easily become a picaro or picara, for picaresque experiences require creative and oblique approaches to interaction proscribed by scripting. The second problem is that, to "those who have lived only in McDonaldized societies and have been reared since the advent of the McDonaldized world . . . McDonaldized society represents their standard of good taste and high quality. They can think of nothing better than an increasingly rationalized world . . . uncluttered with many choices and options" (177). In other words, people who are products of McDisneyized societies are unwilling to abandon comfortable scripted interaction, having known nothing else and conceiving of scripted interaction as "natural." The largest barrier picaros and picaras of earlier eras faced was prejudice; it is difficult to engage authentically with others and practice that empath(eor)y of mind discussed in the previous chapter when one is programmed by society to regard strangers as inaccessibly alien and "other." Contemporary picaros face the greater barrier of programmed interaction. Alien other or no, when both parties are chatting with each other right at the border of Turing Test compliance, nothing meaningful can come of it.

Revisiting the arcology trope discussed previously can show the presence of the strategies employed by McDisneyization in Movement SF, specifically the spatial scripting represented by Bryman's concept of the dedifferentiation of space. The semi-arcology Freeside, as previously discussed, is not unlike a mall in space, but like all postmodern hyperspaces this carries with it a certain element of Disneyization as well. Freeside contains casinos, hotels, and shops, but it also contains extreme sports as well, one of which is a bicycle race in low gravity that, by using "high-traction tires, [can] get up over a hundred kilos and hour" (106). In fact, Gibson's description of Freeside is strikingly similar to Hunter S. Thompson's own description of the Circus Circus: Gibson sets up a scene in which Case walks out of his hotel room onto a balcony only to witness "a trio of tanned French teenagers ride simple hang gliders above the spray . . . One of them swung, banked, and Case caught a flash of cropped dark hair, brown breasts, and white teeth in a wide smile" (120), while Thompson sets up an almost identical scene in which one enters the Circus Circus only to "look up, and there, right smack above your head is a half-naked fourteen-year-old girl being chased through the air by a snarling wolverine" - part of the Forty Flying Carazito Brothers trapeze act (46). Through the overt merging of sexualized play and consumption one can see the dedifferentiation of space at work, in that what is clearly a consumer space is also coded as an entertainment space. The truer arcologies, however, manage an extra turn of the dedifferentiation screw, causing consumption and play to be mapped along with work and domesticity onto the same space, with little clear distinction between the four meanings. The Renraku arcology described above serves well enough as an example of this; the Renraku arcology as depicted in the Sega Genesis version of the *Shadowrun* franchise is a large, aesthetically modernist area containing several stores, a corporate bar, and the corporation's headquarters which, like Maas Biolabs, serves as both a work space and living space. While

there is certainly an interesting critique of late capital resting somewhere between this fusion of space, of interest to this argument is the fact that, when our once largely distinct spaces of play and consumption become fused, where lies the outside? Marginality, to some extent, depends upon clear distinctions between place. Prior to this fusion, if one grew weary of dickering over prices downtown one would go to a park or some other public space to relax before returning to whatever space was associated with work. Thus, the park was "marginal" or outside of the spaces associated with shopping, allowing different thoughts and behaviors to develop. One could, for instance, be critical of high prices and obvious rip-offs in the entertainment space of the park, since one would be far enough removed psychologically from the consumption experience to be critical. When spaces begin to collapse in on one another, so to do the behaviors associated with each space. Consumption becomes playful and entertaining, and consumers behave accordingly, but never achieve the critical stance regarding the shameless chiseling of their finances that might have been achieved in the space of the park. *Freeside* highlights this problem quite well: the spaces are all collapsed, and the disorienting, hyperspatial nature of an orbital station in which all directions eventually wrap back around on themselves foregrounds the absent "outside" dimension of the experience.

Scripted interaction also is overrepresented in *Movement SF* and its derivatives, though it tends to take more varied shapes than spatial compression itself. The most common representation of scripted interaction is the robot - not Asimov's robots, mind, or even those of *Star Wars*, but rather robots that are clearly deployed by the author as replacements for unpredictable human "machinery." While the droids of *Star Wars* fail to qualify, possessing as they do clear personality and, for want of a better term, consciousness, there are some film depictions of robots that do explore this theme. Among the derivatives of *Movement SF*

featuring human replacements stand Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990). *Total Recall* confronts audiences with the genuinely creepy "Johnny Cab," a roboticized cab service driven by a Disney-style animatronic cabbie. Quaid must burn precious seconds grappling with the cab's programmed responses before he finally decides to just tear the robotic torso from the floor and drive the cab himself - an understandable reaction to looped scripted responses. *Robocop* himself is intended by his creators to be a walking scripted response, replacing the unreliable (and corrupt) law enforcement agents with a programmable tank. Of course, the narrative arc of *Robocop* concerns officer Murphy's struggle to regain his humanity, proving that he is more than a simple machine, discounting the latter stages of his evolution as an example. Such film depictions of truly robotic robots are rarities, however; one is more likely to encounter an "alive" Johnny Five than a Johnny Cab (since the 80s, at any rate).

Depictions of robots (not cyborgs, mind) are typically very different and very pessimistic in Movement SF proper, at least compared to their more fantasy-laden film counterparts. Ritzer explains that "[s]cientific management clearly strove to limit or replace humans with nonhuman technology. . . . Taylor believed that the most important part of the work world . . . [was] the organization that would plan, oversee, and control the work" (*McDonaldization* 109), and this is exactly the attitude corporate entities in Movement SF take. Gibson's *Dixie Flatline* is an excellent example of this attitude, for the Flatline is as limited and replaced as a human could get. *Neuromancer's* backstory presents the Flatline as an excellent hacker who earned his name by flatlining - full brain death, slightly more severe than what the airline employee mentioned above experienced - three times while on the job. By the time of the novel's events, the Flatline has finally flatlined for good and has been "reincarnated" as a construct, a "ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, kneejerk responses" (74). When the construct is shut

off, the Flatline reverts to his initial state, losing everything that had been stored from the previous encounter. Case tests this by shutting him off mid-conversation, and when he is fired back up, the Flatline responds with the same line to Case: "'Miami,' said the voice, 'joeboy, quick study'" (77). The Flatline is also aware of his impossible, static nature and wishes to die, if such a term can be used - the Flatline, after realizing he is dead, asks Case to erase him. That the Dixie Flatline, who repeats himself, cannot grow, and wishes to die is a near-perfect hyperbole for McDonaldization's desire to replace workers with predictable and controllable non-human solutions. The Flatline can be rolled out for a given task and will perform in a very predictable fashion, largely because he is unable to evolve into someone new.

#### The Tactics of Marginalization

"I [dis]believe in order to understand."

- St. Augustine (edited by author to correct for epic failure of objectivity)

In *Road Book America*, Rowland Sherrill points out that "no matter where he or she [the picaro or picara] is or has arrived . . . he or she stands as the outsider, the alien" (143). Here, Sherrill is taking marginality for granted, as an inherent and natural part of the picaro or picara (or, at the least, their experience), something that is attained simply by travelling. Moreover, Sherrill observes that picaros and picaras, by traveling to places full of strangers who see the traveler as stranger still, are able to experience "self-recognition of 'the self as a stranger to others' . . . [which] can be a crucial beginning for the picaro and picara to develop those virtues of social being that their marginal place demands" (144), and indeed this is very true, but Sherrill



seems to have placed the cart before the horse, for his position presupposes that the picaro is marginal by virtue of being a picaro who is mobile; as we see with the discussion of tourism, one could easily travel the world today and never be marginal in any real sense of the word, so any assumption that picaros and picaras by sheer virtue of movement become alien is a bit overly-hopeful in Megamerica, that great edifice of Mylar, neon, and Plexiglass (and, hence, entirely modernist) described by DeLillo in the pages of *Americana*. The previous section of this chapter has argued that the worlds encountered by picaros in contemporary (and, specifically, Movement SF) narratives feature intense and ubiquitous standardizations of individuals, spaces, and encounters. However, Sherrill makes it plain that the picaro's purpose is to violate boundaries in order to survey the full panorama of a culture. This survey is accomplished through transgressions into alien territory that render the picaro or the picara similarly alien - it is a fundamental feature of the genre - but one cannot trespass when one cannot find genuine boundaries, and one can hardly be seen as alien in a sea of standardized individuals. If, as Sherrill argues, the picaro's goal is an honest assessment/engagement with pluralism, but that engagement is scripted by external forces (whether through some spatially-conveyed grand narrative as de Certeau might assert or through the standardized spaces and scripted interactions of a McSociety), then it stands to reason that a successful picaro must develop and deploy tactics of marginalization - methods to get outside a seemingly inescapable standardized space and to become, in the process, alien - before any honest engagement can become possible, before the picaro can experience "urban spaces directly as an actor rather than as a passive spectator" (Pinder 400).

In a very loose sense, tactics of marginalization are synonymous with McDisneyized environments; employees (and citizens) dissatisfied with standardized environments and

mechanical experiences always find ways to resist. For example, Ritzer explains that employees working in McDonaldized settings attempt to exert some independence by "providing extra services or exchanging pleasantries" or choosing to "withhold smiles" (*McDonaldization* 83), depending on circumstance. These minor forms of resistance do manage to interrupt the scripted exchanges and exert at least some degree of autonomy and independence on the part of the worker, but such acts, or tactics, of resistance are anything but revolutionary. However, even very overt tactics need not necessarily be meaningful, certainly not in the sense required by the picaresque project. Among some of the more entertaining/horrifying examples of guests' tactics of resistance, Bryman recounts an incident occurring at Disney World in which an employee dressed as *Pinocchio's* wolf was rather expertly pinioned and fondled by several teenage girls with whom he was having his picture taken (*Disneyization* 151). Sexual assaults upon the cast are common, as are children attacking cast members in costume; apparently "a Brer Bear has been stabbed" (151), though whether any of this actually telegraphs "resistance" is debatable. Certainly, some degree of displeasure with the Disney experience lies behind the molestation of a person in a wolf suit (unless, of course, the girls were militant members of a predatory Furry collective), but the resistance hardly changes the nature of the spaces in question nor does it really offer the perpetrators meaningful marginal positions (since one doesn't typically continue interacting with the social environment after shanking an Uncle Remus character). While violence can, in fact, be a tactic of marginalization, the tactics as described here are hardly sustained enough to achieve anything other than momentary releases of tension.

A few other decidedly less violent approaches to resistance may serve to highlight the distinction between a tactic of resistance and a tactic of marginalization. The first tactic, one which is tragically common amongst those who work in McDonaldized environments,

demonstrates the general shape of a tactic of resistance. Bryman recounts two techniques used by employees to escape the stultifying effects of standardization: "[o]ne response is to 'switch off'. . . . Various names are given to this sensation: automatic pilot; going robot; can't feel a thing; lapse into a dream; go into a trance; checking out. . . . [the second] is to become difficult or overbearingly polite. The latter essentially entails exaggerating emotional labor with the clear implication that the worker clearly does not mean it" (*Disneyization* 151). Both are tactics in a loose sense, but they are profoundly non-picaresque tactics; picaros and picaras would be far less passive, unwilling to surrender one's sense of self. Moreover, picaros and picaras would not choose to resist by exaggerating one's "emotional labor." Such an exaggeration would telegraph one's resistance to the script, sure enough, but it would negate any possibility at all of meaningful engagement with the other party. When considered a bit more deeply, both of these tactics smack of complicity: the result of the scripting is not overcome in either case, for an employee who willingly checks out mentally still works, and an overly-polite one still participates in the scripted exchange. As such, these tactics must be regarded as tactics of resistance, and poor ones at that. By contrast, consider the behavior of mallrats, a subspecies that flourished in the late 80s and 90s yet became all but extinct in the last decade. Bryman notes that "[v]isiting the mall to while away time, often with little intention of buying anything, is a not uncommon activity to which several commentators on malls have drawn attention and is itself indicative of resistance to the aspirations of malls and their designers" (*Disneyization* 153). The individuals Bryman describes, known popularly as mallrats, are actually demonstrating through their resistance two distinct forms of marginalization: firstly, the mallrats transform themselves into undesirables who do not belong, if only for the simple fact that it is "natural" to consume at a mall and they have become "people with no shopping agenda," to use a line from Kevin Smith's picaresque-in-

spirit film *Mallrats*; and secondly, the space of the mall, with its very clear modernist heritage as a machine for buying, is converted into a completely different space altogether by the actions of the mallrats, who essentially carve out a different kind of space entirely from the marble monument to consumption. The difference between a tactic of marginalization and a (half-hearted) tactic of resistance should be clear: tactics of marginalization succeed in both making the transgressor an alien Other by the standards of meaning attached to the place in question and simultaneously transform the meaning of the place, such that an "outside" is carved from an otherwise totalized space. Resistance, ultimately, is futile for picaros and picaras (if I may steal a phrase from a film also concerned with mechanical, programmed behavior); outright marginalization is needed.

One further distinction must be made: it is true that any effort to derationalize can be seen as a tactic of marginalization when one's society is largely rationalized (as, say, an arcology in SF might be), but ultimately efforts to derationalize alone are stop-gap at best, at least from a picaresque perspective. Ritzer spends some time encouraging people to do just this, assuring readers that, "[t]o avoid the iron cage, they must seek out nonrationalized alternatives whenever possible" (*McDonaldization* 199). This sensible advice is partially correct, but *any* tactic of resistance is, in a loose sense, an effort to derationalize. For instance, Bryman mentions many other forms of worker resistance directed at visitors, ranging from "the seatbelt squeeze - tightening a seatbelt excessively" to "the break-up-the-party gambit - members of a party are separated at the last moment so that they ride on different cars" (*Disneyization* 152), all of which interrupt, at least momentarily, the rationalized system. Certainly, in a theme park designed to maximize euphoric enjoyment (and, thus, spending potential), intentionally separating groups and thus killing the fun isn't predictable and calculable behavior serving the park's interests. Even

so, such efforts to derationalize do nothing to change the nature of the spaces within which they occur<sup>47</sup> (an uncomfortably tight seatbelt actually increases safety) offering at best a momentary gratification via the subversion of stultifying labor. By contrast, Ritzer discusses "people who continue to bake, and prepare elaborate home-cooked meals, from scratch" (*McDonaldization* 178) in an age when such things have become both unnecessary and, from the viewpoint of a thoroughly McColonized mind, unnatural. This form of derationalization is, in fact, a tactic of marginalization, albeit a small one, because in addition to clearly marking practitioners as "abnormal" in a society dominated by take-out and pre-packaged, pre-cooked meals, the practice recontextualizes the space of the home, something of an irony in itself considering that homes were once busy hives of communal, highly social food production. For derationalization to be effective one must genuinely work to "carve out nonrationalized niches" (179) in the fullest sense of the statement; one must recontextualize self and space and, in the process, create marginal niches from which reflection and critical assessment can occur.

#### Unnatural Defections: Being "Out of Place"

"That's what porn is: turning the normal into the abnormal by fucking it!"

- Zach, *Zach and Miri Make a Porno* (2008)

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<sup>47</sup>An hilarious example of a failed effort to derationalize occurs in the *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* episode "How Mac Got Fat." In this episode, Frank, who is desperate to engage in some anti-social behavior for fun - sort of an addled effort at culture jamming - decides to screw up traffic patterns. His method: he adds two extra stop signs to an intersection, believing he has created a situation in which "no cars can go." It takes Charlie, who despite possessing the most limited of intellects and suffering from clear learning disabilities must often double as the voice of reason, to point out to Frank that he has "created a four-way intersection . . . [and] if anything made . . . [the] intersection safer." This, like the limited forms of derationalization characteristic of garden-variety tactics of resistance, does more to serve the rationalized system than it does to increase the marginal status of the "tactician."

Core to any workable tactic of marginalization is a recontextualization of space or, more accurately, *place*; fortunately Tim Cresswell's work in the area of mobility and place provides a useful theoretical basis that can itself be recontextualized to operate as a model for picaresque marginalization. Cresswell explains a curious feature of place in his work *In Place/Out of Place*, which analyzes three instances of spatial transgression - namely, graffiti in New York, the persecution in England of hippy groups attempting to use Stonehenge for a religious festival, and the media treatment of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp's protests of the RAF Greenham Common airbase throughout the 80s: over time certain behaviors associated with a place become normalized to the point that they are considered "natural." Cresswell explains that "[s]omething or someone *belongs* in one place and not in another. . . . Insofar as these expectations serve the interests of those at the top of social hierarchies, they can be described as ideological" (*In Place* 3); homelessness can be understood through this lens, in that homeless individuals are typically treated by authorities as "people out of place" (5) - homeless people do not belong in an alley, which "belongs" to a business, or an abandoned subway line, which codes as an area of transportation rather than habitation, etc. Cresswell uses Heidegger's idea of "dwelling" to further explain the "natural" meanings attached to place: Heidegger argued "that to be human is to have a place, to be rooted. . . . [equating] 'place' with 'being' through the concept of 'dwelling'" (*Tramp* 15). Consequently, one who was highly mobile was unable to achieve authenticity, as such a person couldn't form an effective bond between self and place. Highly mobile peoples (gypsies, for example) under this system of thought became inauthentic and unnatural, dehumanized through their lack of rootedness. Of course, like much philosophy, rootedness fails under scientific and historical scrutiny and is revealed to be both justification for

racism and prejudice against social development; one could easily argue that rootedness is an unnatural, deforming condition forced on humanity when changing climate caused a few tribes of Neolithic hunters around the Black Sea to start supplementing their diets by growing wild grasses. Regardless, by this point in human history rootedness, despite crippling logical flaws, is the dominant cultural belief: it is natural and right for people (or behaviors or ideas) to have a proper place.

Consequently, anything or anyone that is "out of place" must be regarded as unnatural and suspect. The "ideological use of nature is to present something as though there were never, and could never be, any alternative" (*In Place* 158), which means that natural becomes conflated with normal and by extension human; Cresswell uses the treatment of homosexuality as example, which is defined by largely religious opponents as out of place in faithful societies and thus unnatural, a term which translates to abnormal and subhuman (158). Thus, members of the LGBT are positioned as outsiders through a *spatial* mechanism, for it is meanings attached to a place (however broadly defined) that set the boundaries for inclusivity/exclusivity (cries of "go back to X" make this clear). "Outsiders," states Cresswell, "are not to be trusted; insiders know the rules and obey them. The definition of *insider* or *outsider* is more than a location marker. . . . An outsider is not just someone literally from another location but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of 'our' place - someone who doesn't know the rules" (*In Place* 154). In this spatial formula distinguishing insider from outsider Cresswell hints at the tactics of marginalization: society defines its social boundaries in spatial terms and excludes violators, but picaros and picaras can make use of society's ideologically-driven *strategies* of marginalization, reversing them and forming tactics which allow picaros and picaras to carve out a niche or make a full exit. The hobo, or tramp, from American lore is a good example of this in action: Cresswell

observes that public perception of the tramp during the late 1800s and early 1900s "was one of a shiftless, idle hooligan who avoided work at all costs. The vast majority of tramps, however, did work. Many were employed in a number of different industries in the course of a single year, including construction, fruit-picking and mining" (*Tramp* 40). In short, the image of the tramp was constructed by society around "natural" assumptions about place; by the simple act of being mobile, thus rejecting a "rooted" existence in a given place, they became objects of suspicion. Religions fight against atheism more vehemently than anything else (including other religions), because atheists are truly "out of place" and thus unnatural; an individual who converts to another religion still plays the game of faith, but an atheist who has opted out calls the naturalness of the entire system into question. So it was with the highly mobile tramp, who became unnatural and thus deserving of persecution because, by not fully participating in local economies and not recognizing local beliefs, customs, and hierarchies, the tramp undermined the presumed natural order of the places he or she visited.

Thus, it stands to reason that in order for one to self-marginalize one must, generally speaking, manage to become out of place via some tactic designed to bring the individual into conflict with a given place's "in place" or normal meaning structure. Cresswell recounts a piece of performance art in which an artist enters a restaurant in Argentina and orders a meal, then, when given the check, cites a law that states that no one in Argentina shall go hungry (provided the food they order conforms to certain specifications, which of course the artist's order did). "By behaving out of place the actor drew attention to the function of the restaurant and to the legitimacy of a law. . . . [and] forced them [the diners] to confront a political issue that would otherwise have been far from their minds" (*In Place* 7), but this act also highlighted the artist as an outsider, since a restaurant is coded not as a place of charity but as one of capitalism.



Cresswell's concern is with how such "transgressive acts . . . [mark] the shift from the unspoken unquestioned power of place over taken-for-granted behavior to an official orthodoxy concerning what is proper as opposed to what is not proper--that which is in place to that which is out of place" (10), and while the picaresque is certainly concerned with the questioning of social assumptions about normalcy and orthodoxy, the relevant lesson here lies in describing a particular method of transgression by which one can become an outsider, tangential or marginal to normal or natural meanings of place. Spray-painting graffiti thus becomes a marginalizing "'tactic' of the dispossessed" because it allows for the insertion of "a mobile and temporary set of meanings . . . into the interstices of the formal spatial structures (roads, doors, wall, subways, and so on) of the city" (47), breaking the scripting of the social environment and making the graffiti artist abnormal and unnatural. Similarly, drive-thru pranks, such as those practiced by Rahat the Magician in his series of YouTube videos, also marginalize by breaking scripts and derationalizing the predictable rational systems at work. Rahat, for example, will construct a suit that resembles a car seat so that he may pull up to a drive-thru window sans any apparent consumer to receive the order, much to the confusion of the workers. Like graffiti, such a prank recontextualizes space (employees and witnesses will not take the scripted drive-thru encounter for granted again), and of course the individual who thinks up such pranks clearly adopts an outsider position, not knowing "the rules of engagement" required by the drive-thru – or, more precisely, being knowledgeable enough of the rules of engagement to violate them. Tactics of marginalization thus highlight/foreground via defamiliarization the scripted nature of our own spatial experience before violating these boundaries by both redefining the picaro or picara as outsider in relation to the space *and* by redefining the space itself as something different from its

socially-approved meaning/use. The following sections will examine several tactics by which picaros and picaras can achieve marginalization.

### Abnormalizing Space: Spatial Transgressions

#### Walking the City and Parkour

"Mobility as a way of life involves being permanently out of place. Mobility resists forces of discipline imposed by boundaries and territories."

- Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place* (1992)

If urban space can be defined by "natural" patterns of movement - sidewalks are for walking, bike paths for biking, roads for driving, etc. - then it stands to reason that a prime tactic of marginalization would involve the intentional violation of expected patterns through "unnatural" movement. There is great precedence for spatial approaches to cultural resistance; the Situationist International advocated similar strategies in the 50s and 60s. The Situationists, for instance, argued that the urban environment (dominated as it was by the interests of capital) was inherently restrictive on its inhabitants, and proposed as a way of combating this tendency the field of psychogeography, which "sets for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Bauder 23). The mapping proposed by the Situationists serves "not only defamiliarize standard representations of space through disrupting the coherent and continuous order of maps, but also reveals the fractures and incoherences of socially produced

space through their basis in urban explorations" (Pinder 390), thus carving out marginal spaces within the dominant interpretation of a space. The primary mechanism by which their spatial defamiliarizations occur, the *dérive* or drift, involves a very subjective engagement with an urban environment characterized by a distinct break with one's typical movements and, more critically, motivations for movement.

A better (and largely more influential) formulation of the Situationist *dérive* can be found in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which Certeau first proposes the distinction between strategies (practices of power associated with producers) and tactics (practices associated with consumers) I have been making liberal use of throughout this chapter. Certeau proposes that the grand narrative of the city or, rather, its influence on the individual, can be subverted by a "challenging mobility that does not respect places" (130) in the full, *strategic* sense of place discussed above. In short, by engaging in "contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power" (95), a - let's call them drifters, since the term fits so well a discussion of the picaresque - drifter can insert a secondary "migrational, or metaphorical, city . . . into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93), an outcome which, expressed differently, might be called carving out a marginal space from an otherwise totalized space, or creating a nonrationalized niche by recontextualizing rationalized space. Certeau's specific method for accomplishing this outcome is much the same as that proposed by the Situationist International: street-level drifts free of rationalized motivations that "open up detours and rework understandings of cities along different lines from those scripted according to the dominant terms of the 'Concept City'" (Pinder 401). David Pinder, in his article "Arts of Urban Exploration," expresses the marginalizing aspect (along with the extended composition metaphor) of Certeau's work a bit better than Certeau does; Pinder

explains that drifters "compose their own paths in the manner of turning phrases; their detours and 'poems' of walking manipulate spaces and create 'shadows and ambiguities within them'" (401) in contrast to the "view from on high, providing a perspective that is administrative, surveillant and voyeuristic" (401).

While Michel de Certeau and Situationist International discussions of 'Parisian Drifting' are useful theoretical models, they are undoubtedly both slightly dated and somewhat elitist. Interestingly, Paris has produced yet another response to urban rationalization in the form of a philosophy of athleticism and movement known as *le parkour*, one that provides a slightly better model, as it is (largely) ideology-free and far more expressive of both of the crucial aspects of tactics of marginalization as discussed above: movement allows space to be recontextualized in the mind of both practitioner and viewer to allow an outside where one did not exist before and simultaneously causes the practitioner to be clearly marked as an outsider or out of place by virtue of his or her movement. Parkour traces its origins to 1988 and one David Belle, "son of a prominent fitness instructor in the French military [who] began to use the skills he had gained through martial arts, gymnastics and his job as a fire fighter to begin 'tracing' . . . through the suburbs, overcoming any physical objects via athleticism and flexibility, usually jumping, climbing and running"<sup>48</sup> (Mould 739). Videos of parkour practitioners, or "traceurs" (738), in action are really quite amazing; anyone who watched the opening sequence of the Bond film

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<sup>48</sup> A distinction must be made between parkour and free running, a commercialized version of parkour that carries none of the philosophy and is the antithesis of my discussion. Whereas parkour serves to recontextualize space by creating fluid and elegant solutions to problems of movement (such as the negotiation of a barrier like a fence or wall), freerunning uses barriers as platforms for flashy stunts. Not uncommon are videos of freerunners doing backflips from the tops of vending machines; I would argue that such stunts do anything but recontextualize space. Aside from the flashy, stunt-informed nature of freerunning making what was initially a populist idea into an elitist one, when one changes the focus from efficiently overcoming obstacles to performing tricks upon them one has foregrounded the obstacles (and thus their strategic meanings) rather than reinterpreted and thus negated that preexisting meaning.

*Casino Royale* and marveled when Mollaka, the bomb-maker Bond chases to the Nambutu Embassy (and summarily executes on the front lawn), performs some incredible feats of agility to escape the significantly less agile agent might be surprised to learn that Mollaka was played by one Sébastien Foucan, who is among the founders of parkour and can, in fact, do most everything shown in *Casino Royale's* opening sequence. Of course, the opening sequence in question was done for sensational purposes, but parkour in practice is not much different: it involves rethinking the strategic design of a city and developing tactics of movement that overcome rational planning. If a person wishes to get from point A to point B, but between A and B reside several walls, unidirectional walkways, and other obstacles designed to control movement, then the parkour practitioner employs methods of movement such as the "cat leap" or the "kong vault" to overcome, as efficiently as possible, each obstacle, charting a new, straight-line path where one did not exist before.

Obviously, such actions redefine space far more directly than drifting; Oli Mould, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's 1987 discussion of urban space, has argued that "the movement of Belle . . . reappropriates the urban built environment from a striated space to a more fluid smooth space" (741), striated space being "enforced by the State" (741) and marked by "constraining movement" and capital flow (741). Mould observes that, in the videos posted of Belle practicing his art, his movement "across the rooftops is depicted in stark contrast to the urban space below, with intermittent shots of traffic, pedestrian crossing lights flashing red and the general mundane processes of traversing the city in the conventional (i.e. capitalist) way" (741), thus "enacting smooth space in the most striated of all spaces" (741). Mould notes that "the usage and functionality of the buildings and the built environment . . . has been almost exclusively for capitalist use, with alternative modes of architectural functionality finding

themselves marginalized by laws or brought into mainstream capitalism through commercialisation [sic]" (738-39), so parkour's transgressions of "normal" capitalist use create an alternative meaning - a nonrationalized niche, in other words. Like Certeau's drifting, parkour's transgressions are non-violent acts; they operate by reinterpreting the possibilities of a space without destroying or damaging said space. Thus, parkour can be said to carve out marginal, open areas directly in the heart of areas that are otherwise closed. Similarly, those who practice parkour and come to occupy these new marginal spaces are marked as other by viewers, as the traceurs become "unnatural" through movements that ignore standard capitalist/rationalized uses of space (thus calling into question their normality).

Moreover, more than espousing a political philosophy, which it only does incidentally, parkour more properly represents the reaction of our evolutionary heritage to rationalized and constraining, rationally planned modern environments. Far from being defined by rootedness, as Heidegger wished to believe, humans are defined by mobility - it would be ludicrous to believe otherwise, considering that humans evolved from arboreal and, hence, mobile ancestors and now occupy every habitable inch (and a few not-so-habitable inches) of the earth due to a Diaspora from Sub-Saharan Africa driven by highly-mobile hunter-gatherers who managed, between 50,000 BCE and 15,000 BCE (give or take), to colonize every habitable continent, Australia included. Mobility is in our very DNA, as Ötzi the Iceman would attest had he not died five millennia ago while crossing the Alps<sup>49</sup>. Rootedness, by contrast, seems a cultural artifact, a top-down strategy serving to support agrarian communities which, after all, tended to fall apart when

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<sup>49</sup> I feel compelled to point out that the research on the Alps mummy is still under debate and even my statement that he died while crossing the Alps amounts to pure conjecture: the Neolithic "traveler" may have been a sacrifice, for all we know, placed in the Alps not unlike the so-called ice mummies of the Incas, found in the mountains of Chile. Regardless, the iceman's presence proves high mobility on the part of *somebody*.

the otherwise productive laborers tired of the endless toil and wandered off to pursue the far less demanding hunter-gatherer lifestyle (a common occurrence, historically). Parkour seems akin to this same impulse, and the incredible popularity of parkour and other, similar systems of transgressive mobility - examples of parkour can be found in everything from film and television shows such as *Casino Royale* and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (the season four episode "Mac and Dennis: Manhunters" features Rickety Cricket using parkour to escape capture) to video games such as *Mirror's Edge* and *Dying Light*, not to mention the *Prince of Persia* series of games and movies - demonstrate the need people have for derationalizing transgressions, if only through vicarious movement.

When applied to Movement SF (more specifically, Rucker's Transrealism), the approach of Certeau and the Situationists yields a tactic that can be called "algorithmic walking" (Pinder 397). Pinder explains that "more complex attempts to incorporate ideas from computer science and open source programming . . . namely, that the generative logic removes questions of goals, choice and habit in terms of route and in so doing opens space for surprise and the discovery of hidden significance" (397) has resulted in an interesting updating of the Situationist *dérive*, and interestingly this very technique appears in Rudy Rucker's 2011 novel *Jim and the Flims*. *Jim and the Flims* is more than a little picaresque, being Rucker's transrealist reinterpretation of the Orpheus myth. Jim's wife, Val, dies as a result of an accident involving an electron microscope, a bolt of lightning, and a hole ripped into a bizarre version of the afterlife. Like Orpheus, Jim eventually travels to the other side in search of his wife, but, like a picaro, Jim takes a very meandering, unhurried path, giving the reader a full view of Rucker's version of the afterlife. Important to this discussion is how Jim manages to cross over for the first time. Jim, factoring in alleys, footpaths, and other terrain oddities, calculates that there must be "millions of ways to get

to the ice-cream parlor from my cottage--without going very far out of the way . . . [and] planned never to use the same route twice" (Rucker 25). Jim's "Infinite Paths project" was for him a kind of psychological escape from the sorrow caused by the death of his wife, a fantasy of finding a "way out of [his] dull labyrinth of woe" (25), but it nevertheless leads to interesting results, allowing him to find a hidden, run-down Victorian just blocks from his house that he had never before seen. As far as the narrative is concerned, Jim's success had been due to a "border snail," an extra-dimensional mollusk that bridged realities (Rucker, after all, is a transrealist), planting the twisting route into his head, but the source is immaterial; in order to truly get "outside" the city (in this case, quite literally - Jim goes to the land of the dead, a la Orpheus) Jim must reject the instrumental view of city walking and adopt a transgressive attitude. Jim's drifting thus breaks the grand narrative of the city (which, for the novel's purposes, could be understood as a monist worldview) and carves out a nonrational (as opposed to nonrationalized) space in which Jim truly becomes other - a living person in the land of the dead.

Whereas the drifting tactic foregrounds the reconfiguration of space, parkour foregrounds the violation of boundaries, thus resulting in more radical spatial transgressions. Space, obviously, is arranged in "narratives," insofar as rational planning is intended to convey specific behavioral "meanings" to individuals: Ritzer provides the example of "[s]upermarkets . . . [that] control shoppers with food placement. . . . strategic placement in the store profoundly affects what is purchased" (*McDonaldization* 116). Anyone who has visited a mega-store will have grumbled at the placement of electronics and milk at the back of stores, forcing the consumer to walk, usually with screaming, greedy children, past aisle after aisle of colorful, attractive, often useless impulse buy opportunities. Clearly, a drifting *dérive* isn't going to be very successful in overcoming our evolutionary heritage of snagging the low hanging fruit, since a drift is still in



the service of the store's planned environment. What is required, if one really wishes to avoid the carefully designed narrative of consumption, is a direct spatial violation. Admittedly, executing a wall run and leaping from display to display would be difficult, what with the inevitable hail of bullets one would shortly face, but the philosophy of movement alone would suggest that, rather than drifting aimlessly through the store, one could make a bee-line for the electronics, going through check-out lanes backwards, through the clothing sections, through an employee area, etc., thus breaking the store's narrative.

The key lies in mobility, which, according to Cresswell, is "a kind of superdeviance. It is not just 'out of place,' but disturbs the whole notion that the world can be segmented into clearly defined places. Because the easiest way to establish order is through the division of space, mobility becomes a basic form of disorder and chaos . . . It is no accident, then that the control of mobility is foremost in the minds of those who have an interest in maintaining their own definition of order" (*In Place* 87). Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* ran sixty issues and two specials over a five-year period, so consequently there are dozens of distinct examples of spatial violations found within the graphic novel's pages. However, one particular spatial violation stands out, largely because of its repetition: boundary-defying city drifts. Spider Jerusalem, the outlaw journalist of *Transmetropolitan*, makes great use of a mobility that lies somewhere between parkour and algorithmic walking to escape the numbing grand narrative of his City so that, objective and marginal, he might properly understand and report on its hidden nature. A cursory survey shows that, over the course of the series, at least eight distinct drifts are given prominent page time, such that Jerusalem is actively shown violating spatial boundaries and/or discussing the act of walking the city before/while doing it. The first instance of Jerusalem's drift occurs fifteen pages into the first issue: Jerusalem, shortly after returning to the City is stuck in

traffic, decides he needs to "walk the rest of the way . . . [and] get the city under . . . [his] feet" (1.15). Jerusalem proceeds to abandon his car and walk the rest of the way to The Word's offices (where his editor awaits) on top of the gridlocked vehicles<sup>50</sup>. This behavior combines elements of drifting, in that he seeks a more authentic engagement with the city, but it is a *motivated* drift with a clear destination and objective, and thus carries elements of parkour. Clearly, Jerusalem's reinterpretation of a line of gridlocked traffic as a path marks Jerusalem's walk as something closer to parkour: Jerusalem recontextualizes the gridlocked street, which, according to socially-accepted meanings, is for driving only (thus meaning that it becomes a barrier when gridlocked), and converts it into a new space, one of mobility. He is also clearly marked as an outsider/other when doing this, as people point at him and yell "Get off my fucking car!" (1.15). Ellis's intent is clearly to make Jerusalem's difference in perspective clear to the reader. While "[t]he middle class, true to its name, moves horizontally and overlooks most of what doesn't" (Garrett 187), Jerusalem moves vertically as well, up onto the cars, and begins to narrate to the reader the details of the city fabric one might easily overlook: "A troupe of Tuvan throat-singers stopping to make steppes music. . . . Dissenting lovers on the run from a Chinese cultural reservation, kissing their way to a new revolution. . . . This city never allowed itself to decay or degrade. It's wildly, intensely growing" (1.16). By violating the normal expectations of movement, Jerusalem is marked as other and rewarded with a different perspective than that enjoyed by those behaving "naturally."

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<sup>50</sup> Walking on top of cars becomes something of a motif in *Transmetropolitan*: Jerusalem walks across vehicles on at least three separate occasions. Issue 38, second of the "Back to Basics" story arc, features a car walk similar to that found in the first issue, while issue 49, "Here Comes the Sun," features Jerusalem and his filthy assistants running across the roofs of many gridlocked vehicles, much to the annoyance of the drivers. Ellis even draws attention to the act by preceding it with Jerusalem declaring "There's something I haven't done in a while" (9.20) - a "while" being a standard unit of measurement exactly eleven issues long (assuming I didn't miss any other vehicular violation sessions).

Consider a few other examples of Jerusalem's drift. The drift in issue 20, "New City," ties Jerusalem's spatial violations to his efficacy as a journalist - not surprising, considering that, according to his editor, Jerusalem needs to be hated in order to write (who is more marginal than one universally loathed?). Wandering through the crowds, Jerusalem states the following: "Just drifting through the City, wandering through its veins and arteries like an infection looking for a dodgy appendix to latch onto. Looking for stories . . . before I scuttle back into my little fucking luxury hole" (4.26). And indeed Jerusalem finds a story when he comes across an alley in which a group of "rechristians" are stoning a man to death for visiting a porn theatre (he rescues the man after shooting the group with a bowel disruptor weapon); Jerusalem finds many such stories, as the issue is devoted to the various interesting encounters he has on his drift. By "drifting through the City," Jerusalem manages to tease out a narrative space not on offer by the media monoculture. Jerusalem's drifting is also used when he feels as if he is becoming too "in place," losing his marginality. Issue 32, tellingly titled "The Walk," sees Jerusalem lament that the media has rendered him "a defanged, tamed thing that they can put on television and on toy store shelves" (6.30) - a product, in other words, and you can't really get more "inside" than that. Spider's solution is to "Do what I always do. / Get the City under my feet. / Become alive again<sup>51</sup>" (6.33). Jerusalem's drift revolves around panels featuring spatial violations (crossing against traffic) and disrespectful behavior (pushing what appears to be a Buddhist into traffic) in addition to moments of genuine interaction, all of which ultimately lead Jerusalem to a discovery discussed in the next section (and a beautiful panel featuring Jerusalem writing in the diner from Hopper's *Nighthawks* painting, which is actually named "Hopper's" in Ellis's City). Thus,

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<sup>51</sup> This, incidentally, is presented as poetry in the text, the lines centered and spaced (hence the slashes). The three lines create a 6/8/6 haiku, a fact which strengthens an assertion made in the previous chapter concerning Hunter S. Thompson and the creation of a postmodern, picaresque haibun.

Jerusalem's odd combination of algorithmic walking<sup>52</sup> and parkour allow Jerusalem to reinforce his otherness while retrieving the space of the city from whatever consumerist/political narrative that has hijacked it.

### Working the Edge

Spatial transgressions need not be thought of exclusively in terms of travel; the same philosophies of mobility that allow traveling around a city to become an exercise in redefining space and creating marginality can be applied to aspects of life typically conceived of as static such as one's place of work or one's home. Ritzer discusses a professor whose "work time is almost totally nonrationalized" (*McDonaldization* 197), arguing that while the professor might be engaged in the information production industry (something that is sadly becoming rationalized), she yet retains control: "how, when, and what she writes is totally nonrationalized: in the middle or the night or early in the morning; on a word processor, a yellow pad, or even a stone tablet; about McDonaldization or the latest demographic trends" (197). Most important for our purposes, her behavior while working is similarly free: "She can write clad in a business suit or in her bathrobe" (197). Two distinct themes can be seen in Ritzer's discussion of the nonrationalized professor. First, mobility serves to derationalize work by uncoupling it from socially-approved "work space." Ritzer explains that the professor can write *whenever* she wishes, but implicit in this temporal freedom is also a spatial freedom: a professor is free to produce information at home, at a park, at a restaurant, or wherever her own muse demands,

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<sup>52</sup> Jerusalem even speaks of learning "to read her [the City's] every strange dance step" (6.35), casting the city as a text (insofar as a dance can be regarded a text) and thus further strengthening the connection to Certeau and Situationist drifting.

unlike the controlled experience a factory worker (or, since we are discussing information production, cubicle-bound coders). Second, the professor is free to take whatever steps she feels necessary to derationalize or, in my terminology, self-marginalize. Ritzer's seemingly off-hand comment about the professor's ability to write in whatever attire she pleased holds a key to self-marginalization, but to understand this we must examine how work is derationalized in Ellis's *Transmetropolitan*<sup>53</sup>.

Jerusalem's work - specifically, the composition aspect of profession - is, like the professor described by Ritzer, entirely decoupled from a traditional place of work. *Transmetropolitan* does, of course, take place in the future, so higher mobility (significant or otherwise) consistent with technological change is expected, but Ellis and Robertson go out of their way to emphasize the unconventional, *unnatural* mobility of Jerusalem's composition process. For instance, issue three sees Jerusalem cover the Angels 8 Riot while sitting on the edge of a strip club's roof, overlooking the event. While being fed smokes by the strippers (who, tellingly, are a bit hesitant to touch *him*), he broadcasts his column live, circumventing the traditional (and, arguably, more rationalized) compositional process that involves multiple drafts and revisions all allowing for editorial (or corporate or political) intervention. This example was used in a slightly different context in the previous chapter, but *Transmetropolitan* is overflowing with images of Jerusalem writing in bizarre and unnatural locations. Issue 38, for example, features a full panel of Jerusalem sitting nude on what appears to be the cornice of a skyscraper, typing away at his laptop, much to the distress of people on balconies across the way (7.51). Jerusalem's locations always stress the marginal, outsider aspect of his profession, of course, but

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<sup>53</sup> Work is obviously derationalized in the other three representative works I have chosen for this study, but as the professions found in *Angel Station*, *Schismatrix*, and *Saturn's Children* aren't exactly standard (freelance space truckers, secret agents, etc.), Jerusalem's traditional profession as writer serves as a better example.

his mobility is also serving to create his marginal perspective. Jameson once argued that SF was a spatial genre concerned with totalizing perspectives: Jerusalem's marginal perches would qualify. Moreover, Jerusalem, like Ritzer's professor example, embraces a nonrationalized approach to suitable workplace attire: he likes to write in the nude. Actually, to say that Jerusalem writes naked is a slight overstatement; during the series Jerusalem can be seen writing while wearing bizarre costumes such as Abraham Lincoln hats/beards and fake plastic breasts (without pants, naturally). By choosing such "unnatural" attire while composing Jerusalem very effectively self-marginalizes, making sure that he is recognized as an outsider by others and by himself. The aesthetic parallel between Jerusalem composing naked on the cornice like a perverted gargoyle and a differently-kinky Batman playing voyeur on Gotham only reinforces Jerusalem's self-marginalization.

#### Unspeakable Love Amongst the Ruins: Transgressive Tourism and Urban Exploration

"Part of finding exploration sites involves casting off a certain restrained mindset, in the manner of the protagonists of movies like *They Live*, *The Matrix* and *Fight Club*, and realizing that many of your boundaries are self-imposed, voluntary and, ultimately, illusory"

- Ninjalicious, *Access All Areas: The Art of Urban Exploration* (2005)

"Urban explorers work within the spectacle (since there is no longer an 'outside' of the spectacle)"

- Bradley Garrett, "Place Hacking: Tales of Urban Exploration" (2012)

Algorithmic walking and parkour have many merits as a system of spatial- and self-redefinition, but I believe it is fair to suggest that both are largely surface activities, insofar as they both deal with space at a very direct level. Algorithmic walking (or the earlier drifting) seeks to interact with the immediate cityscape in unique or unexpected ways, while parkour takes that immediate cityscape and attempts to rewrite the spatial rules. The operative word is *immediate* - neither approach tends to drift very far from the commonly accepted spaces defining "city," such as heavily trafficked streets, neighborhoods, parks, etc<sup>54</sup>. The sister phenomenon of urban exploration addresses this lacuna, taking as its object of interest sewers and drains, (mostly) abandoned factories and other such buildings, decommissioned military facilities, and other such spaces that exist on the periphery of common space of the city's narrative, if I may be permitted a further reference to Certeau. While urban exploration is treated as something of a recent phenomenon - and, indeed, its popularity has reached very high levels, largely due to the internet bringing together hobbyists who would otherwise have operated in isolation - it has existed in various forms for as long as abandoned or otherwise hidden spaces have existed alongside public space. I am reminded immediately of Robert Browning's 1855 poem "Love Among the Ruins," which frames itself around the contrast between the dead ambitions of a past empire and the live love between the author and his significant other; lines such as the following demonstrate the fascination of the Romantic poets with ruins (particularly those of the Gothic type): "While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks / Through the chinks- / Marks the

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<sup>54</sup> Parkour practitioners might disagree with this statement, as some (though hardly all) regularly seek out the same targets as urban explorers in the hunt for ever greater challenges. Even so, the majority of freerunners and parkour practitioners tend to stick to the common spaces. These are, after all, philosophies of movement aimed at fluid navigation: exploring catacombs or abandoned nuclear silos doesn't exactly call for the same skill set (unless, of course, one is being chased by security dogs or needs to chart an efficient path to the nearest oncology center to treat incipient radiation sickness).

basement whence a tower in ancient time / Sprang sublime" (41-44). Rose Macaulay's 1953 *Pleasure of Ruins* is merely an extension of this impulse; her study of the attraction of urban decay is, from a certain perspective, a kind of urban exploration found in a less rationally planned and securitized society. Regardless, the current popularity of the practice is driven partly by individuals' desire to explore places they are not intended to see, thus regaining a little agency through defying the powers-that-be. One of urban exploration's great popularizers, the mysterious (not really - his real name is Jeff Chapman) Ninjalicious, writes that "urban exploration . . . [is] a sort of interior tourism that allows the curious-minded to discover a world of behind-the-scenes sights like forgotten subbasements, engine rooms, rooftops, abandoned mineshafts, secret tunnels, abandoned factories and other places not designed for public usage" (3), making clear that those who "recreationally trespass" (Garrett 1) do it partly to defy what constitutes "public use." One urban explorer, youliveandyouburn, states that "[a]dventure has become a packaged commodity. . . . The danger has been minimized for the convenience of the consumer; the difficult planning already done. These adventures are not adventures at all. They are vacuum packed, sanitized bastardizations of an original independent spirit" (qtd. in Garrett 8), a comment which seemingly highlights the danger of the experience (which is certainly present) but really supports the theme of transgression, in that practitioners desire to leap the safety rails into the "unapproved" spaces.

Therefore, it is safe to say that urban exploration's objective is to avoid scripted existence by locating and exploring/experiencing interstitial areas, be they hidden or forgotten pieces of history (such as a derelict hospital) or overly-securitized modern buildings (the exploration of "live" or occupied building is common). Ritzer offers an interesting piece of derationalizing advice for readers of *The McDonaldization of Society*: "On your next vacation, go to only one



locale and get to know it and its inhabitants well" (*McDonaldization* 201). This advice is interesting because one could easily replace "inhabitants" with "place" and get a similar result, since most environments, particularly the rationally planned environments (like Disney World) most tourists gravitate towards, are just as scripted as the interpersonal experiences Ritzer's advice is meant to combat. A McDonald's restaurant likely has no unique history, depth, or personality with which to engage; this is, after all, the point of a rationally planned society, and certainly a Modernist one. All human spaces decay, however, and by getting to know intimately those cracks in the facade of otherwise McDonaldized societies one can find the hints of authenticity and chaos lurking behind the stark, rationalized surface. Pynchon's Fangoso Lagoons might be entirely false, but some places really do have sunken galleons with dark secrets to explore. Urban exploration is, like parkour, a descendant of de Certeau's tactics of walking the city: "urban exploration . . . creates alternative placial narratives and counter-spectacles . . . that undermine dominant capitalist narratives through playfully unproductive, pointless, or at the least largely uncommodifiable action" (Garrett 14) in its "quest for a de commodified sense of the past" (4), but it does it by a different mechanism, transgressing lines of history and power (read: ownership) and discovering interstitial spaces of which none were previously aware. Even those less than stellar explorers who crack no new sites but rather count coup on previously explored places still participate in the process, for any explorer who seeks out "glitches" or interstitial zones in otherwise total space creates "cracks in spatial and temporal structures [that] can be exploited to build alternative associations" (70) and "shatter illusions about control over urban environs through temporary spatial reappropriation" (4). So, through knowledge and discovery rather than randomizing routine or defiant movement can urban explorers create nonrational spaces from which new perspectives are possible and, in the process, self-marginalize, becoming

outsiders who know of and occupy the underside of the city - postmodern Morlocks, sans the stupidity.

Urban exploration's connection to Movement picaresque is a surprisingly straightforward and natural one, especially when one considers that Movement SF proper has always had an interest in interstitial areas - in fact, this is one of the defining characteristics identified in the first chapter. Gibson, in an interview with Larry McCaffery, is famously quoted as saying "I was going to use a quote from an old Velvet Underground song - 'Watch out for worlds behind you' (from 'Sunday Morning') - as an epigraph for *Neuromancer*" (132). Sterling, in his own McCaffery interview, made a similar statement: "I prefer the stuff that comes from interzones. . . . Give me the fucked-up, hybrid-weird monstrous stuff" (215). Both, in other words were from the early days concerned with spaces (and the subcultures they contained) that were overlooked and tangential to mainstream, officially-sanctioned spaces, and this is reflected at every turn in the earliest Movement SF (and the latest, for the fascination has never worn away). Sabine Heuser, in her aesthetic analysis of the geography of cyberpunk fiction, notes that

[c]oncrete in cyberpunk texts is all-pervasive and frequently described as crumbled, cracked, or in ruins - quite unlike the myth of longevity which it was supposed to embody in modern architecture. Instead, organic matter is growing through the cracks, breaking up the rigid geometry of blocks and cubes. Squatters have subverted its anonymity by covering it with their signature graffiti. Similarly, steel is frequently revealed as rusted and decayed; it has not lived up to its structural expectations either. The geometrical, box-shaped buildings, which once represented a factory esthetic . . . have now been converted into new habitats appropriated by diverse subcultures and street gangs, with only the scraps of modernity left as raw materials. (52)

Heuser frames her discussion around the criticism of Modernity implicit in cyberpunk, but these aesthetic features also demonstrate cyberpunk's foregrounding of interstitial, nonrationalized space lurking behind the facade formed from crystalline arcologies and corporate towers. Early Movement SF clearly telegraphs that even totalized modern spaces have cracks and interstitial

areas for marginal activity, provided one goes looking; in fact, the inherent failures of modern and, similarly, postmodern scientific management and rationalization ensure that these places will exist. When Gibson selects as a setting for *Virtual Light* and *All Tomorrow's Parties* an organically developing gypsy-esque community on the decommissioned San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, he is expressing this fascination. Heuser concludes that "Cyberpunks are thus forced to operate in the interstitial spaces or gray zones between legal and illegal, black and white magic, the city and the fringe, earth and outer space colonies" (57), but this isn't really accurate; no cyberpunk was forced into the gray zones - they chose to do so, for the same reasons enjoyed by urban explorers and parkour practitioners. The very fine distinction, assuming one needs to be made regarding the depiction of interstitial spaces, between Movement picaresques and Movement SF proper is that the vanilla genre tends to be set in interstitial areas while the picaresque variation tends to explore interstitial areas, even going so far as to discover/create them out of the fabric of otherwise totalized spaces.

Urban exploration offers a loose model of the latter, and as such is unsurprisingly featured in a number of Movement SF works. Sterling's short story "Taklamakan" features urban explorers as picaro surrogates - surrogates who would, doubtless, be actual picaros if Sterling had slotted them into a novel - who are only slightly defamiliarized by the futuristic setting. "Taklamakan" follows "two urban intrusion freaks" (232), Spider Pete and Katrinko, as they conduct a surveillance operation in the Taklamakan desert of China. Sterling's future sees the world divided into three competing political/economic forces - NAFTA, the "Asian Cooperation Sphere," and the EU - and the two intrusion freaks are working as freelance espionage agents for NAFTA. Intrusion freak seems to be code for urban explorer: Katrinko is "one of the world's top technical climbers . . . [and] a great connoisseur of pointless displays of dangerous physical skill"

(232), a description that sums up a good many UrbEx types, and Spider Pete, the "City Spider" (235) is apparently a name amongst names of urban infiltration, associated with many high-profile explorations/infiltrations. Indeed, both the rhetoric and attitude are derived from urban exploration: the pair is ecstatic when they believe they have "scored a first intrusion" (241), recalling the numerous urban exploration discussions of who was first to explore or crack a tough site. The pair even use the term "hack" (253) to describe infiltration, clearly demonstrating their profession's provenance - the earliest urban explorers, who operated on college campuses exploring steam tunnels, referred to their hobby as "hacking" or "building hacking" long before the term came to be popularly associated with programming.

Their goal is to document what they are told is potentially a secret base where starships are (or were) being built, but when they reach the abandoned facility and break in, they find something a bit unexpected. Inside the walls of the base they find the frozen, mummified bodies of several people dressed in primitive clothing and armed with primitive climbing equipment who were trying to get *out* of the abandoned facility; this discovery prompts the pair to fully investigate the site, leading to the discovery of a manhole which leads to a tunnel system which leads to a massive underground cave, either hollowed out or expanded using nuclear explosives. This giant cavern features black walls studded with man-sized lights emulating a star-field, a "lake of way-hot, way-illegal, self-assembling goo" (247) at the bottom, and "three great glowing lozenges, three vertical cylinders the size of urban highrises" (246) dangling from the ceiling - fake starships, in other words.

The full details of the story are immaterial to this argument, but two observations are pertinent. First, the urban explorer intrusion freaks are outsiders, truly marginal figures. Sterling makes this plain: Katrinko is a neuter, a gender-free individual who receives an "eight percent

metabolic advantage" (251) by not having to divert resources to any form of genitals, and Spider Pete is a man who preferred "the company of seriously twisted people . . . who looked for more out of life than mommy, daddy, money, and the grave" (236). They are marginal figures by dint of the transgressive mobility (and concomitant parkour-esque philosophy of movement) that defines all professional "intrusion freaks," and it is this very marginality that allows them to penetrate into the hidden heart of the base and make their discovery, which is the second pertinent observation. As previously stated, the cave contains an illegal "self-assembling goo," which is essentially a self-evolving technology like that of the little saw-bladed killer bots in Philip K. Dick's "Second Variety," the malware in Peter Watts's *Maelstrom*, the mimints of Richard K. Morgan's excellent *Woken Furies*, etc.; this goo, the pair discovers, is "an entire new means of industrial production" (256) designed to give birth to an evolving race of robots from which the Chinese can source cheap technology to sell on the open market. As the robots evolve, they develop cheap (though kludged and thus redundantly designed, just like anything mother nature births) solutions to complex problems: Pete remarks on the "Chinese circuitry chips they've been dumping in the NAFTA markets . . . [that] are dirt cheap and work fine, but . . . [are] full of all this crazy leftover wiring which doubles back and gets all snarled up" (255). Such practices are treated as illegal for numerous reasons, safety and economic destabilization being the two most important, so transgressive urban exploration has allowed the pair to discover a hidden economic truth.

However, the goo factory producing autonomous, bizarre bots was actually serving double-duty: the bots were also policing the fake spaceships, which contained . . . farming communities. Pete speculates (likely accurately) that the Chinese government had decided to solve several problems at once. They wished to test the feasibility of colony ships, since the trip

to the nearest star would take a good four centuries, but also wanted to solve a problem involving violent ethnic separatist groups at the same time. The people on the fake ships were the descendants (only by a generation or two) of the tribals who had been led to believe they were actually flying to another world. As is expected, things go sour: one ship is full of dead people, while another is full of people who saw through the lie and have been trying, non-stop, to escape, etc. The story even ends with a kind of return of the repressed, in that the evolving robots, having tasted the climbing gear of the explorers, figure out a way to get out of the cave; the last scene involves the lone survivor, Pete, preparing to give an interview as a war is breaking out on the surface. Regardless, the crucial realization is that the cave, which is representative of any abandoned or underground target of urban explorers, holds those dark, hidden histories that are seemingly absent from McDonaldized societies; Spider Pete and Katrinko have discovered both a "big, big money" (256) secret and what amounts to unapologetic genocide. In fact, Pete wonders "[h]ow many forgotten holes were there, relic pockets punched below the hide of the twenty-first century" (275) in various, far-flung corners of the world, holding similar secrets and atrocities - a very UrbEx sentiment. By transgressing space - in this case, the "sullen trash-heaps where no one would ever want to look" (275), the explorers have genuinely recontextualized space, both in their own perceptions and the perceptions of the world: Sterling clearly intends the latter interpretation at the very least, as he concludes the story with the image of "a mechanical civilian journalist" (278) robot "[spitting] out every marvel it had witnessed, up into the sky and out into the seething depths of the global web" (279). Spatial perception (measured here by what secrets lie beneath the rationalized social facade) is forever altered by transgression.

"Taklamakan" may not be proper Movement picaresque, but every text studied here contains some variation on the themes found in Sterling's short story. Briefly, Sterling's

*Schismatrix* culminates with Lindsay transgressing the boundary of the Interdict (220) in order to count coup on old Earth and, in the process, gather biological data on extremophile life-forms living in deep ocean volcanic vents for his Europa project (discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter). *Angel Station* revolves around a similar plot involving the discovery of alien life after a clear transgression of lines of authority. Examples abound, but again

*Transmetropolitan* provides a plentitude of examples of urban exploration acts foregrounding both the marginalization of the practitioner and the derationalization of space by uncovering hidden, narrative-breaking information, though examining one single example is enough to prove the point, as the example features Jerusalem leading a crowd of reporters through something very similar to the process described above. Issue 16, fourth of the "Year of the Bastard" story arc and titled "Hate," sees Jerusalem go trolling through the more well-known spaces of the city, picking up feedsite journalists (individuals strapped with mics and cameras who do "stories" - hyperbolized versions of the empty reporting seen on most televised news programs) as he wanders. Jerusalem is intentionally capitalizing on one of the byproducts of both his drift and his total identity: "you can see it in all of them: 'Spider Jerusalem's a nut . . . let's go see what the crazy man's doing" (3.81). Though there are certainly other factors at play, it is at least partially his tendency to wander the City behaving "bizarrely" (largely understandable episodes of outrage) that in this case marks him as "out of place" and thus good for a lark. Jerusalem, however, understands the minds of those he is capturing, explaining that they tend to "[f]ollow anyone with the right smile, the right coverage, the right image" (3.82); thus, he is able to hook them in by exploiting the very spectacle they have been scripted to follow and, once hooked, *marginalize* them somewhat by forcing them to see what he wishes them to see (3.83) and thus lead them out of the City's grand narrative via a motivated act of spatial/narrative transgression.

The transgression? Jerusalem leads the mob of reporters to "[t]he bit of Redchurch no one ever goes to. The bit they'd never have gone to, if they hadn't been blindly following [him]" (3.83). Redchurch is a housing project "designed specifically for families in poverty, meaning families who traditionally voted for the party now in Opposition [democrats, or their future equivalent]" (3.84), the kind of place that the popular consciousness tends to ignore and the national narrative tends to write out of existence. Jerusalem delivers an impromptu lecture to his crowd explaining the housing project's history, which is similar to any public housing project, in that the poorest were intentionally relocated there, into buildings constructed "so cheaply that in the event of a gunfight, bullets have been known to plow right through nine apartments' worth of walls before stopping" (3.85), so that they would not inconvenience development and property values in other areas - pigeonholed rather than assisted, in short. An immediate connection to Pruitt-Igoe, Cabrini Green, and other such housing developments is made by attentive readers, for those high-density, high-poverty projects were launched for similar reasons. Ellis, through Jerusalem's reporting, proceeds to foreground the spatial shift, the clear boundary transgression, that has occurred during Jerusalem's drift by drawing attention to the third-world poverty of an area situated in the heart of the modern world. Jerusalem shows to the crowd a boy being eaten alive by disease called "the grazer," mentioned in previous chapter, only found in undeveloped nations; when asked by a feedsite reporter who clearly doesn't get it yet what the child wishes to be when he grows up, the child replies, quite literally, "nothing." Jerusalem has thus infected his crowd with the beginnings of a marginal, outsider perspective by virtue of showing them an anomalous (by their previous standards) space within the dominant space with which they are familiar, one which is far more than a simple, nonrational space. Jerusalem explains, building on the child's depressing answer, that "[t]here's nothing to *be* on Cluny Square. It's fallen off the



world. And they can't find their way back on their own. You're not supposed to say that in America, are you? The land of can-do, the American Dream of grab all you can and fuck the other guy" (3.87), and by doing so he highlights the real transgression that has taken place.

Jerusalem has lead his followers into an interstitial zone, true, but by violating a boundary of poverty, a condition sadly perceived by many to be "natural" to the third world but "out of place" in America, Jerusalem has effectively taught his followers how to violate the grand narrative of the American Dream, that fantasy demolished by Thompson which nevertheless, in a McDonaldized society, is coded into our very sense of place. Our consumerist narrative, which masks both the poverty resulting from its failures and the invisible ceilings waiting for both those too poor to consume and those who do and yet will never escape debt, is coded spatially, and if one doubts this, one need only have driven out of Miami International in the 90s, paying close attention to the "Follow the Sun" signs. These signs, posted on all the major roads, were intended to lead people to the upscale areas, tourist spots, and other commercial centers and *away* from the poor areas that would break the fantasy<sup>55</sup>. Insiders do not recognize this, but by walking the crowd through a modified version of the urban explorer's experience<sup>56</sup> Jerusalem forces them to recognize the existence of an alternate narrative or alternate space - an outside - to the otherwise totalizing spatial narrative of the City, and by virtue of their transgression and the newfound spatial knowledge, the crowd can gain, however briefly, a taste of Jerusalem's own marginal positioning. Sadly, this proves largely ineffective: the pogrom leveled against the homeless and

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<sup>55</sup> I should point out that these signs were first implemented due to a high-profile incident involving tourists who had driven into a ghetto by mistake. Several German tourists were carjacked and (inadvertently, in the case of Barbara Jensen) killed, so there was a legitimate danger addressed by the signs. Even so, the signs were deemed discriminatory and eventually removed.

<sup>56</sup> Urban exploration forums and texts are littered with shocking images of poverty. Common are photos of the remains of homeless individuals' homes found in unlikely and even contaminated places, such as abandoned military facilities or factories.

other undesirable elements culminates in issue 32, "The Walk," when Jerusalem sees a notice of eviction citing "[d]issidence and other behavior inimical to the preservation of mainstream American life and national security" (6.36) placed on the Fairmead apartment block, which is similar to the Redchurch projects mentioned above. A short time later riot tanks roll up and, without announcing their intentions, begin to demolish the buildings, forcing out the squatters. Jerusalem notes that "[t]ime was, there'd be press here, bystanders, witnesses" (6.40), but as popular consciousness has been scripted not to care, he stands alone as witness.

#### Picaro Banzai: Transgressive Adventures Across the 4th Dimension

"Urban explorers, while searching for ghosts, also become spectres on the margins"

- Bradley Garrett, "Place Hacking: Tales of Urban Exploration" (2012)

"Don't look for it, Taylor. You may not like what you find."

- Dr. Zaius, *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

A curious consequence of the spatial strategies of self-marginalization described above is the transgression of *temporal* lines as well as strictly spatial ones. Both modernist and postmodernist societies are, as many have suggested, marked by space-time compression and the erasure of history (a development urban exploration combats), so it stands to reason that any effort to marginalize oneself by creating nonrational niches might involve the transgression of compressed time - historicizing represented spatially, in effect. Kirsten Moana Thompson, in her work *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, explores the way a space

can carry the memory of trauma, despite efforts by the dominant culture to erase the space's history. Thompson attaches this idea to the 1992 horror film *Candyman*, which features Helen, a grad student played by Virginia Madsen, investigating the legend of the Candyman, a hook-handed ghost who can be summoned by chanting his name five times. Thompson's discussion of *Candyman* illustrates a point about the relationship between history and place that bears on the spatial tactics of marginalization discussed here: as places bear not simply norms regarding behavior but also fraudulent or misleading histories, marginalization sometimes requires a form of temporal transgression if a picaro or picara has any hope of authentically engaging with a place.

Thompson argues that "*Candyman* foregrounds how uncanny space bears the memorial trace of repressed historical traumas rooted in an American history of racial violence and murder . . . [and] foregrounds the ways in which memorial dread erupts in the topographical and mythological circulation of an urban legend" (59). Specifically, the Candyman legend is tied to Cabrini-Green, a project in Chicago similar to Pruitt-Igoe, called by Thompson "an overdetermined microcosm of the history of American racial politics and segregated urban space" (67). As the preceding discussion has shown, such spaces tend to be erased from the dominant narrative of a city, either by spatial methods (people avoid them) or rhetorical ones (the people there are lazy, etc.), leaving these vast lacunae in the spatial fabric of a city, practices that can be seen mirrored in novels like Paul Theroux's *Ozone* or in films like *The Planet of the Apes* and *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. *The Planet of the Apes* and its sequel revolve around the lacuna of the "forbidden zone," a place made socially taboo and thus outside of popular knowledge. Of course, any fan of the series knows that the stigmatized space contains information about the human civilization that preceded the ape civilization, information that

counters and effectively destroys the popular narrative of exceptionalism that ape society has been built upon, and a similar point can be made about projects like Cabrini-Green, since those spaces of extreme poverty tend to poke inconvenient holes in the popular narrative that hard work and an independent spirit can lead to wealth and success. Thompson's argument about *Candyman* rests upon this spatial realization: Candyman was the artist son of a freed slave who worked his way up to wealth - an actual American Dream in a time when such social escalation was all but impossible - who, after falling in love with a white woman, was lynched by an angry mob. That the Candyman legend, a legend arguing that upward mobility is impossible because one's work be actively fought against rather than welcomed, is set in a rotting housing project implicates the space designed for use by the poor in the same history of frustrated expectations. For this reason, Thompson suggests that Candyman represents the deployment of the "return of the repressed as national allegory, for the monstrous hookman brings with him a history of racism, miscegenation, slavery, and lynching" (64).

In order for such an unwelcome history to be confronted, one must transgress boundaries both physical and psychological. Indeed, *Candyman* is structured around a series of transgressions designed to emphasize the sharp distinction between popular narrative and actual history. Most obvious is the "*voluntary* yet transgressive aspect of the ritual of invocation . . . [that] is central to the urban legend" (61); to summon the Candyman one must face oneself in a mirror and recite his name five times, clearly telegraphing a confrontation with both self and history. More important, however, is the clear transgression needed to actually reach Cabrini-Green, which is located across a "border . . . dividing Chicago into north and south in a de facto line of racial segregation" (70). Interestingly, Cabrini-Green is oddly positioned, bulging into the Caucasian side of the border and surrounded by upscale areas, further reinforcing the idea of an

ignored historical trauma hiding in plain sight. This border is further reinforced by a strange parallel between "Cabrini-Green and Helen's expensive condominium, the slyly named Lincoln Village, which Helen discovers is a mirror image of Cabrini-Green . . . [and] just like Cabrini-Green, her bathroom mirror has a secret passage behind it that leads into the adjoining apartment" (71). This parallel hides more than just a separate-but-equal joke (for the identically-planned buildings are anything but equal); the secret passage(s) hint at a hidden and challenging history one can only access through a spatial transgression, which in this case means going down the rabbit hole (if I may invoke the Wachowskis).

Helen does just this, travelling to Cabrini-Green to research the legend, itself an interesting transgression for "Helen never questions her own sense of entitlement to go where she wants" (72), cocooned initially by white privilege. Indeed, Helen's initial goal is one in service of the popular narrative: "as a white academic, Helen colonizes a figure from African American folklore--the boogeyman--and turns it into a sociological reading of crime, class, and race . . . Helen threatens Candyman's discursive authority through her academic research and by instilling doubt in the Cabrini community" (78). In short, her academic work is an effort to convert a living figure (insofar as the community regards its own history as living and present) into a myth that can be "programmed, categorized [and] easily referenced," to steal a line from 1998's *The X-Files* (as long as I am borrowing from films with narrative-based control mechanisms). Only after her series of transgressions does Helen learn the far bleaker truth of both the Candyman and his legend, one that challenges both the academic and economic narratives that work to exclude Cabrini-Green and its inhabitants. Her new knowledge couldn't have been acquired otherwise, for it was her spatio-temporal transgressions that granted her the marginality to recognize the flaws in the social narrative. Indeed, her marginality is made explicit

at the film's close: Helen, who dies rescuing a child from a fire intended by the residents of the project to kill the Candyman, returns as a ghost herself, murdering her husband (who had been having an affair with a student) and thus moving "from writing about and photographing the myth to becoming a new chapter in the legend - as Candywoman" (80).

*Candyman* is not picaresque by any measure, yet the technique used parallels that seen in the pages of *Transmetropolitan* (sans vengeful ghost, of course). Consider the pattern of spatio-temporal marginalization Helen follows. 1. Helen is a product of the dominant narrative (hence her assumption of white privilege) who encounters, as do all at one point or another, a fragment of an alternate narrative. 2. The alternate narrative belonging to the fragment is being progressively erased, partially by spatial strategies (Cabrini-Green has essentially been cordoned-off and ignored by polite society) and partially by epistemological strategies (Helen's academic work undermines the power of the myth and, consequently, the history that created it). 3. Helen chooses to transgress the borders between both the two spaces and their narratives, becoming intimately familiar with the largely erased alternate narrative. 4. Helen's mobility makes her marginal (since it is "unnatural" for a white academic to enter Cabrini-Green) and her marginality creates a fertile mind now receptive to the decidedly non-rational Candyman history. 5. This knowledge completes her marginality (she is institutionalized in the film) as she sees a reality different from the reality permitted by society. Is the process through which Jerusalem attempts to lead the feedsite reporters any different from the process followed by Helen? Helen historicizes (or, more accurately, demythologizes) by transgressing boundaries of memorial dread, or rather historical trauma, in order to more fully engage with hidden (though authentic) history and escape the scripted grand narratives of the dominant, "in place" culture. Jerusalem does precisely the same by moving both himself and others into forgotten projects in order to

reveal hidden histories; he marginalizes himself by violating the spatially-defined official history that conspires to erase projects like Redchurch from public awareness. David Pinder discusses the "radical geographer Bill Bunge [who] provided different perspectives through his attempts to turn around the capitalist and colonialist language of exploration during the late 1960s and early 1970s" (388). Bunge, who explored the inner city, practiced a kind of "community mapping that addressed spaces of violence and safety, of poverty and wealth, and of starvation and abundance" (388), and this approach sums up both method and goal of contemporary picaros and picaras who must transgress artificial, McDonaldized histories (such as nostalgia) or the non-histories of make-it-new Modernist spaces in order to marginalize themselves enough to map the spaces and histories ignored by the dominant narrative.

#### Shopping on the Edge: Transgressive Economics

While marginalization can be achieved through spatio-temporal transgressions, it can also be achieved through a transgressive tactic that deals less with space and time than with exchange. Geography can easily be regarded in terms of capital; much of geographer David Harvey's later work, such as *Spaces of Global Capitalism* and *Social Justice and the City*, is concerned with the ways in which space has become defined by monetary lines and the social impacts of this development. For the purposes of this argument, however, all that one need accept is that the association between commercialization and space is all but total, and complex arguments are not required to carry the point that almost all spaces are associated with consumption and exchange, public space has all but vanished, and most spaces' are defined by who or what owns them. This is considered by most to be the natural order; spaces practicing alternative economic systems

(such as barter, thievery, black market exchange, etc.) are seen as unnatural and to be avoided. Moreover, as many an urban explorer has lamented, spaces that have no obvious capitalist use (such as the ruins and abandoned spaces loved by the explorers, though the disdain applies to any undeveloped area) are considered valueless and, assuming the spaces cannot be developed, are simply pushed out of the culture's narrative. Movement SF has long foregrounded the rampant commodification of society through its various visions of the future. No more than thirteen pages pass in *Schismatrix*, for example, before Sterling makes it clear that nearly every aspect of life has become commodified. Shortly after Lindsay arrives at the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Circumlunar Zaibatsu and finishes being processed, he emerges onto a landing pad containing "a dozen man-powered" aircraft, the standard mode of conveyance in the habitat. Lindsay proceeds to whip out his "gold-trimmed black plastic" (13) credit card and feed the meter, so to speak, so that he may leave customs. This exchange is handled rather matter-of-factly, just as any similar exchange would be in contemporary America, so it is easy to overlook the exchange's significance. The exchange shows that such micro-transactions are the norm and, since the primary mode of exchange in the Zaibatsu is hours of sexual service with the Geisha Bank, the suggestion seems to be that the economy has managed to commodify every hour of one's life. This kind of all-pervasive commercialization can easily be regarded as a kind of space, the "in place" kind of space discussed previously by Cresswell. Eternal micro-transactions are regarded as the norm and are thus natural; thus, to marginalize, picaros and picaras must develop methods by which they can transgress monetary/behavioral boundaries if they wish to position themselves tangentially to the presumably total economic space.

The picaresque genre has a long history of positioning picaros and picaras outside dominant economic practices, but because the genre long predates thoroughly consumer society,



this is less instructive than it is axiomatic of the genre. Lazarillo was sold to a blind beggar. Huck roughed it on the river. Neither is really a very radical change, considering the historical context framing the stories. Today, however, the tactics of marginalization take on a much greater significance than they might once have done, even if the specific avenues by which the picaro or picara moves to the outside of society aren't much different. Ritzer makes a number of suggestions concerning how one might avoid nonrational space, though the vast majority of Ritzer's suggestions fall into the simple category of hiring/buying local in an effort to avoid supporting McDonaldized systems, such as advising the reader to use "a local barber" or "use cash rather than your credit card" (*McDonaldization* 200). While seemingly trivial, these suggestions do draw attention to the major difference of economic transgression: while Huck and Lazarillo can simply opt out by travelling to non-consumer space, the ubiquity of consumer culture means that modern picaros and picaras must recreate the space from within. Sherrill discusses two related practices traditional to picaros and picaras that build from this difference: haggling and hustling.

Sherrill explains that "[h]aggling in its pure form between complete strangers involves complex labors of self-concealment and self-revelation . . . as the parties anonymous to one another attempt to pierce each other's deceptions" (159); unlike a McDonaldized transaction, this process is entirely dependent on theory of mind, since one must be capable of fully conceiving of the Other in terms of motive and perspective in order to "bring the unknown other into the realm of the personally known" (159). Hustling, though perhaps a bit more predatory, functions roughly in the same way: the hustler must learn the mark very thoroughly. Therefore, both are regarded as "out of place" because exchange in McDonaldized societies is not dictated by the individuals who actually do the exchange but rather by a faceless corporate entity which sets

prices and pater (not the "invisible hand" of the economy, which has been hands-off for quite a while). Despite "corporate personhood," developing a theory of mind for a corporation is pointless - there is no mind with which one can interact. Haggling and hustling, by contrast, require one to enter into a complex game with the other party, the success of which is based entirely on the capacity of one party to successfully understand the other. In other words, haggling and hustling are active forms of consumption, compared to the docile passivity of McDonaldized exchange, where everything from exchange value to the rules of interaction are set from above. One is not marginal when one haggles in a Medieval marketplace (something that can happen in fantasy and science fiction), however when one haggles in a McDonaldized society of "rationally" set prices, one becomes immediately marginal, as one is intentionally stepping outside of the dominant economic/behavioral system. Thus, one could generalize and argue that *any* attempt to take an active, let alone outright transgressive, part in the exchange process can be considered a tactic of marginalization.

Obviously, countless examples of the more traditional examples of economic transgressions can be found in Movement picaresques and in Movement SF proper, considering the genre's fascination with underworlds. *Schismatrix* follows the more traditionally criminal pattern: the initial reinforcement of the micro-transactional nature of Zaibatsu life is followed almost immediately by Lindsay's efforts to hustle the Geisha Bank and several other major players through his theatre scheme (described in the previous chapter), a hustle itself followed by a life of outright piracy with the Red Consensus. *Angel Station* also features its share of criminal hustles, ranging from Ubu and Maria's attempts to scam a casino to the flouting of their debt (and the economic authority of their creditors) by stealing their repossessed ship and eluding pursuit. *Transmetropolitan*, however, offers an example of the more critical form of economic

transgression, clearly telegraphing marginality through active rather than passive consumption. The previous chapter, discussing the picaresque's demythologization of religion, examined *Transmetropolitan's* sixth issue, titled "God Riding Shotgun," which featured Jerusalem attending the New Religious Movement Convention and very aggressively revealing them all to be driven by pure greed. The intended connection between religion (organized or otherwise) and crass consumerism is further foregrounded when one considers that the preceding issue, titled "What Spider Watches on TV," explores Jerusalem's active rather than passive engagement with puerile, viral consumerism in the form television programming.

Jerusalem decides to spend a day watching television out of professional interest: "You don't know how TV works on the minds of the people in this city. I don't know. We *can't* know until we've immersed ourselves the same way other people do" (2.27), thus linking his agenda with the construction of a theory of mind. Interestingly, during the initial stages of his journey he consumes the programming entirely passively, thus mirroring the state of the average consumer. Jerusalem watches an episode of "Anthrax Cat" in nostalgic bliss, reminiscing about his childhood and wondering, "Who'd've thought I'd even remember it?" (2.31). Significantly, Jerusalem chooses to buy pointless merchandise during the initial, passive stage of his journey: he declares that "I am so incredibly bored that I will buy a pair of your ridiculous shoes" (2.33) and purchases the pair of "Air Jesus" sneakers mentioned in the previous chapter. Ellis makes it very clear that uncritical, judgment-free consumption is the "natural" state when Jerusalem fails to avoid some genuine viral marketing that infects him with "Buybombs [designed to] load your brain with compressed ads that unreel in your dreams" (2.47). The conclusion is clear: proper consumers are passive, programmable beings. This passivity takes a toll on Jerusalem, as the

next four pages and 24 panels of television see Jerusalem slowly drifting down the couch and onto the floor . . . then the ceiling, thanks to the Air Jesus sneakers he bought.

Jerusalem only begins to come out of his stupor when he decides to critique a political talk show called "Head Mining" featuring "distinguished political lecturer Lorraine Krosh" (2.38) - distinguished in the same way that homeopathy peddlers are introduced as distinguished doctors on news programs, I assume. The journalist phones in and deliberately outs the supposedly objective guest as a member of the president's "reelection squad," also mentioning where viewers can go to find a photo of the guest "giving the vice president a handjob" (2.39). Jerusalem's *active* consumption of the infotainment results in his destroying the authority of Krosh, thus impeding her ability to sell a political position. Jerusalem's critical engagement can be viewed as a modified form of either the haggle or the hustle; either way, he is developing a complex theory of mind for his subject and actively engaging with it rather than letting himself be scripted. He continues this pattern for the rest of the day, holding detailed discussions with many hosts and outing supposed authorities as frauds. Rather than passively consuming, Jerusalem has become a "cathode vigilante" (2.41) effective enough to drive a TV cooking personality who, according to Jerusalem, "can't cook for shit" (2.40) and apparently has an alarmingly weak "grasp of New Zealand Cuisine" (2.42), to suicide<sup>57</sup>. Jerusalem's intentions are clear enough: by violating the expected behavior of consumption, which is to remain passive and uncritical, Jerusalem hopes to carve out a nonrationalized, noncommodified niche from which he can operate. That this should be his intention is revealed via the depth of his disappointment when he realizes that the news media has taken notice of his activities and incorporated him into the infotainment sphere: one television talking head declares that "[t]his, and the other terrible

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<sup>57</sup> Sadly, this is not a prescient critique of Paula Deen; her cooking shows started the year *Transmetropolitan* ended.

results of the writer's assaults, simply add to the Spider Jerusalem legend" (2.42), prompting Jerusalem to immediately lament, "Oh my god. I have become television" (2.42). Jerusalem has been co-opted by the economic system he sought to transgress, a comment on capitalism's ability to engulf and profit from criticisms, and is thus stripped of his edge, or, rather, his marginal position. Recognizing his failure, Jerusalem begins to go catatonic (again), however this issue leads to the previously mentioned follow-up issue in which Jerusalem revises his tactics and actively destroys (in person) a marketplace of religions. By moving through the various religious organizations' booths and discrediting each by savagely critiquing the creed's logic (followed by savagely beating the followers), Jerusalem reasserts his role as an active and hence marginal consumer.

#### Becoming Out of Place: Transgressive Behaviors

Thus far, we have seen that potential picaros and picaras can attain a marginal position through violations of boundaries associated with space, history, and economics. A final category of potential tactics of marginalization involves social transgressions, exploiting assumptions about normal, natural behavior in order to get the picaro or picara into an outside space. Cresswell, in *Tramp in America*, explains that the most common metaphor by which society sought to understand the "tramp" was that of illness and contagion: "Tramps were pests, a disease" (10). Tramps - which is to say any highly mobile individual who operated outside of the standard social hierarchies - were regarded as threats to the social fabric, carriers of diseases, inheritors of criminal genes, etc. Cresswell theorizes that the primary mechanism behind the demonization of tramps, hobos, Gypsies, Okies, and other mobile types is, in fact, a spatial

mechanism tied to ideas of purity and naturalness. Examining the social meaning of dirt, Cresswell explains that it "is something in the wrong place or wrong time. Dirt disgusts us because it appears where it shouldn't be" (*In Place* 38), and it is social custom that determines the dividing line between "should be" and "shouldn't be." Examples abound, many of which have already been discussed, but suffice it to say that graffiti, which clearly does not respect the capitalist belief in property ownership, is regarded as "out of place" when seen in a subway or an upscale neighborhood, yet is regarded as a "natural" part of poor neighborhoods which, being poor, are typically regarded as not properly participating in the capitalist project and, thus, as a kind of third-world Other (43). The lesson to take away from Cresswell's observation that "[t]hings that transgress become dirt--they are in the wrong place" (39) is that, if someone wanted or needed to become out of place, then that person would need to intentionally become "dirt" as compared with whatever social norms are dominant at the time - a tactic any glam rocker or punk rocker knows intimately. By a simple violation of "normality," an idea which could rightly be regarded as a heuristically-derived strategy for maintaining and enforcing social homogeneity, a picaro or picara can instantly gain an outsider position by calling attention to those assumptions of normality that typically enjoy an unquestionable authority and, thus, redefining static social spaces into places of possibility. Moreover, those picaros and picaras who violate norms can become like those sun-staring visionaries, "the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws" described by Sterling in his preface to the *Mirrorshades* anthology, all of whom occupy liminal spaces due to their abnormal and even dirty natures (the mirrorshades are a marker of this separation).

Looking Out of Place

"He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith"

- Ecclesiasticus 13:1, *KJV*

"Now, go out and get yourself some big black frames /  
With the glass so dark, they won't even know your name"

- ZZ Top, "Cheap Sunglasses" (1979)

"I look foul and feel fair"

- Aragorn, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954)

The first and most obvious tactic by which a picaro or picara can transgress social norms involves the violation of those subtle visual cues that mark a person as "in place" or "in group" - looking like shit, in other words. McSocieties are as controlled by appearance as any other time in human history; gray flannel suits need not be gray in order to scream conformity as long as they bear the proper brand. Ritzer observes that "Disney has developed detailed guidelines about what Disney employees should look like (the 'Disney' look) and how they should act. . . . female 'cast members' . . . must not wear jeans, clinging fabrics, athletic shoes, socks of any kind . . . [while] [m]ustaches and beards are unacceptable for male hosts" (*McDonaldization* 92). Aside from the obvious point that such detailed instructions regarding appearance create employee predictability, standardized appearances also play upon ideas of "natural" conceptions of moral virtues. The presence or absence of a beard seems ridiculous, until one realizes that facial hair, in some spaces, is associated with dishonesty - or, at the very least, a lack of openness and

inscrutability. A beard in spaces coded for youth activity has been, at least since the Fifties, associated with degeneracy, while beards in the legal profession are often associated with shiftiness. Ironically, beards worn by older men in positions of power tend to be associated with trustworthiness and paternalism, but that simply reinforces the spatial dimension. So, as the Disney environment markets itself by projecting the impression of wholesome, family space, appearance takes on an odd moral dimension. Interestingly, this moral dimension serves as the basis for a form of audience resistance. Bryan recounts an interesting phenomenon occurring at Disney World illustrative of how strategic decisions to *moralize space* can be reversed to create tactics of marginalization. Apparently, one of the methods by which disgruntled guests express "Disney disdain . . . is to wear merchandise associated with Disney villains, although since it involves the purchase of precisely what is scorned, as a form of resistance it is more symbolic than practical" (*Disneyization* 150). Bryman is correct in surmising that such a tactic is utterly worthless as a form of economic resistance, but from the standpoint of self-marginalization this is surprisingly effective, as the villainous attire suddenly marks a person as abnormal, liking what one should "naturally" hate (similar to walking into a Liverpool pub whilst wearing a Manchester United shirt).

The history of the tramp is one of concerted efforts to demonize the mobile body in an effort to discredit the lifestyle. Cresswell observes that the "body of the tramp was seen as one of the clearest indicators of his or her reprehensible nature. Classification schemes constantly referred to the various bodily deficiencies of the tramp in addition to ideas surrounding mobility and work" (*Tramp* 111). Tramps, or rather their bodies, regardless of their general state of fitness or work history, were characterized "as pathological, as diseased and genetically unsound . . . [and as a metaphorical] pathology in the wider social body" (114). The crucial realization here is



that the demonization occurs at the level of rhetoric; whether tramps, gypsies, hobos, and other travelling types really were more syphilitic or lazy than other groups was immaterial. In other words, a static society might seek strategically to demonize via rhetoric mobile individuals as a kind of immune reaction against those whose values might conflict or call into question those of the society at large. Cresswell's discussion of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp proves enlightening on this point. Cresswell observes that an oft-remarked "signifier of the women's displaced character is their clothing" (*In Place* 113), pointing out that the media tended to focus on their attire, which, at least according to the press, was somehow abnormal. The women of the camp tended to wear very practical gear, such as boots and fatigues - fashion decisions that are perfectly consistent with camping. However, the press, Cresswell notes, spent an inordinate amount of time discussing the women's choice of attire in very negative terms, dancing around the implication that the women had violated a code of behavior by failing to dress in socially acceptable female garb. Thus, the strategy of mainstream British society was to depict the peace protesters as unfeminine and as lesbians (as if the two terms were somehow equivalent), thus undermining a moral stance challenging to patriarchal and militaristic values. The peace protesters, at least from a picaresque perspective, benefited from the strategic reaction. A twofold lesson can thus be drawn from these examples: one can self-marginalize by consciously violating normal standards of appearance associated with a given place, but one can also benefit from the strategic attempts to marginalize through rhetoric those who violate more insubstantial values.

Jerusalem provides a wealth of examples of both approaches to marginalization, for not only does he self-marginalize by odd fashion choices and occasionally vile personal habits, he also behaves out of place morally, resulting in his body being coded as diseased (and likely to

infect others, just as his writing is likely to infect others). As previously discussed, Jerusalem does go out of his way to appear socially malcontent, from railing at people on the street to wearing bizarre costumes when covering stories. He typically dresses in black, sporting an open-shirt showing off his undeveloped chest and numerous tattoos. He also practices habits which, in contemporary America at any rate, are considered vulgar: "I smoke Carcinoma Angels. Make sure we have five gross" (2.9) - even Jerusalem's cat "smokes unfiltered Black Russian cigarettes" (2.9) and apparently requires a gross on hand (or paw) at any time. Intentional vileness is part of his character, and it serves the obvious function: he keeps himself marginal, unpredictable, and thus able to catch people off-guard and better cover the story. However, there is clearly more at work than just his appearance and habits, since it is clear that he really isn't much different from any other character in the series (as regards appearance and hygiene, of course). Whether it is Jerusalem's collection of body art or his unrestrained drug consumption, few pages pass before one character or another match him. Channon's boyfriend (who later becomes a sentient colony of nanotech) is, like Jerusalem, skinny and tattooed, as are most inhabitants of the future. Channon herself is an ex-stripper - hardly the model of purity. More is at play than just his own attempts to self-marginalize.

Like the tramps that Cresswell discusses, there is nothing *inherent* in Jerusalem that would mark him as a degenerate (relatively speaking, at least). He is depicted as compassionate, regularly rescuing children from pedophilic priests, revivals from future shock, etc. He is depicted as ethical to a fault, constantly railing against the general failures of society to, for example, provide compassionate care and opportunities for the homeless, as examined above. These qualities, however, are actually the problem, for in a thoroughly capitalist, spectacle-fueled society, a sense of fair-play and responsibility for society's less fortunate are qualities that

challenge the social agenda. Cresswell points out that "[o]ne way in which tramps and hobos were defined as dangerous was the association of the tramp's mobility with syphilis and its spread. Diseases and plagues through history have implied a number of disturbing social characteristics that combine to suggest a radical out-of-placeness" (*Tramp* 122). Obviously, by associating the body of the tramp with a dangerous STD the grand narrative protects itself; tramps are rendered both immoral and unapproachable, undermining any possible challenge they might present to the idea that one wasn't bound to the economic system into which one was born.

Interestingly, the strategic depiction of tramps as diseased is mirrored in the strategic depiction of Jerusalem as an outsider, especially when one considers that the demonizing rhetoric typically leveled against him highlights *sexual* unwholesomeness, something no sane man (or Jerusalem) would wish. A running joke in the series is Jerusalem's failure with women; the series is repeatedly punctuated by Jerusalem striking out when trying to pick up girls who are always ready with a rejection: "Sorry, no. I'm married, not hungry, infected with seven unknown diseases, gay, pregnant with lizards and clinically dead" (2.129). Of course, he could simply be too edgy for the straights, but it is rather telling when even *strippers* are reluctant to retrieve a cigarette from Jerusalem's pocket while he reports on the Angels 8 riot; one asks "who wants to touch the fuckhead?" (1.61). Even those who know him well naturally assume Jerusalem has something deeply wrong with his plumbing: when a headless child turns up looking for his long-lost father (the "child" is actually an assassination device set to explode Jerusalem), even Jerusalem's editor confesses, "Let me say now that with your history of drug abuse, it was conceivable that you could produce a child with no head" (2.202). In fact, it would appear that the entire plan hinged upon the realization that people would naturally assume a headless kid would belong to Jerusalem - why else send one sans head? Jerusalem's "filthy assistants" (and

they are that, emphasized repeatedly by Ellis) also share this attitude towards the journalist's body. After a combination of drink and drugs cause Yelena to accidentally sleep with Jerusalem, Channon rides her mercilessly with quips such as the following: "I always figured that with Spider you'd feel it. . . . It'd be like this hail of birdshit drenching the neck of your womb" (4.43). Like the presumably syphilitic tramps Cresswell describes, Jerusalem is the target of a rather elaborate and certainly unplanned smear campaign, an immune system reaction intended to rob his message of potency. If proof of this is needed, one need only recognize that the truly marginal, such as Mary the Revival or the various children Jerusalem assists, seem to have no negative reaction to Jerusalem at all. Moreover, by the close of the series, the filthy assistants, who both take care of a presumably sickly Jerusalem at his mountain retreat, seem to have no negative reactions at all, happily consuming the fruits and vegetables Jerusalem grows in his garden (and from which his editor initially recoils as if they were radioactive). Both assistants are now journalists themselves, marginal, and no longer part of the system that seeks to marginalize its antagonists.

### Speaking Out of Place

If one of the defining features of McDonaldized or Disneyized society is scripted, programmed interaction, then the goal of the picaro must be to regularly violate these scripts in order to achieve some degree of marginal distance, a goal that, in this case, means authentic engagement with the subject. Ritzer explains that a crucial tactic for derationalizing a McDonaldized environment is to humanize both the environment and those individuals the efficient system would have a patron treat as robots: "If you are a regular at McDonald's, try to

get to know the counterpeople. Also, do what else you can to humanize [the *experience*]" (*McDonaldization* 200), going on to explain that people, largely the elderly, have, in fact, formed subversive "breakfast clubs" (201) that humanize the experience by actively resisting the assembly line, eat-then-scoot "internalized" code of behavior with their own set of rules. By transgressing the programmed boundaries of interaction, both employees and environments can become less robotic and more authentic.

Humanization is, in fact, the primary agenda behind almost all of Jerusalem's stories, including the story done on Mary the Revival, mentioned in the previous chapter. Mary's revival (her head had been cryogenically preserved) is a purely McDonaldized process. Her revival doesn't merit the efficient cleanliness of a clinical environment: a miner is simply rammed into her severed head "to excavate a physical template memory" (2.100), and when that fails because the head is too damaged she is given a "repair infection" (2.100) of nanomachines that gives the disinterested workers time to grab coffee. Ellis, through Jerusalem, describes the wonder of the revival juxtaposed with descriptions of the workers taking exactly no interest in the process and instead playing around, "taking a piss into Mary's empty suspension can" (2.102) and other juvenile behavior. When she is finally decanted, the counselor (after briefly considering trying to seduce her) rushes her out the door as fast as possible, "not sounding bothered whether she was listening or not" (2.105). The end result is that Mary is shoved out onto the street where the ride supposed to take her to a revival hostel is "double-parked" (2.105) and immediately collapses from future shock. The hostel is the same: "She wasn't wanted [there]. She was Revived out of a sense of begrudged duty" (2.109). Mary's experience is one of disinterested abuse, not dissimilar from any other product of a McDonaldized system. Had she been a UPS package she could at least have looked forward to being punted by a delivery boy; instead, Mary is entirely

dehumanized. The future "honored the contracts with the past" (2.110) and no more: predictable, efficient, calculable honor. Jerusalem, however, breaks this pattern both by writing about her history - a rich career in photojournalism - and by interacting with her in an authentic way. "New Streets" sees Jerusalem perform several good works, one of which is providing Mary with a camera. By listening to the stories she rambled while hiding from the future in an alley, Jerusalem learned her history as a photojournalist who covered some of the 20th century's greatest moments. This knowledge allows him to select for her a gift that will resonate with her talents and allow her to make sense of the future in an understandable and controllable way, something only possible because he avoided the script that said revivals were useless and insane and instead worked to humanize her.

However, simply stating that picaros and picaras seek to humanize their subjects ignores the difficulty inherent in this goal; in a McDonaldized society where scripted interaction is the norm, escaping the scripts becomes a challenge. Successful picaros and picaras manage to invent creative methods and techniques for interrupting the script and eliciting authentic moments of interaction. Sherrill argues that "picaros and picaras . . . bring their own natural abilities of innocent openness, sustaining insouciance, eager alertness to moment, intricate attentiveness to situation, and even occasional traces of mildly roguish charm, traits that might allow the strangers to open to them" (147), an overly romanticized depiction of the picaresque character (innocence being an act), perhaps, but true nonetheless: the nature of the picaro and picara, their heightened capacity for theory of mind discussed in the previous chapter, allows them to perceive interesting solutions to interactional barriers. Sherrill presents a number of tactics of engagement "designed to trick the other stranger out of his or her shell and into some fuller presence to the picaro" (148), and at least a few of these tactics can be repurposed (or at the least,

reinterpreted) as clever methods by which a picaro or picara can avoid scripted encounters and conversations.

Sherrill discuss, among other things, the engineering of a "social 'accident'" (147), a fortuitous event, itself something of a "transgression" of the expected, that allows a picaro to bypass scripts and engage more fully with a subject. An example from a familiar mainstream picaresque (and one that bears on *Transmetropolitan*) might be Duke's strange driving habits in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Duke, when he notices the lights of a California Highway Patrol vehicle flash him, decides to gun the engine and, after making the cop chase him, throws his vehicle into a controlled drift around an exit ramp. This clearly inadvisable action, in the logic of the novel, allows Duke to have a moment of genuine interaction with the officer, one free of the scripts associated with the officer's profession. He even lets Duke go with a warning, concerned for the drunken reporter's well-being (Gilliam's film emphasizes this humanization further, by having the officer, played by Gary Busey, kiss Duke passionately on the mouth . . . assuming that wasn't all Busey, of course). Sherrill also mentions several gimmicks, such as Steinbeck's dog in *Travels with Charley* or Least Heat Moon's trick of photographing blank walls in *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*<sup>58</sup> (147-48), unknowingly offering a plausible explanation for both the indispensability of Dr. Gonzo and Duke's obsession with acquiring a circus ape. Another, similar technique involves asking an off-script question rather than performing an off-script action. "Taking a chance, Steinbeck asks a weary and obviously

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, a permutation of the technique of photographing blank walls to draw people in was used in the partially picaresque, partially SF film *Blast from the Past* (1999). The protagonist, Adam, who has lived in a bomb shelter for 35 years, is sent up to the surface to find supplies. Believing the world to have been destroyed in a 1962 nuclear war, Adam is periodically amazed by various things that he sees. His gape-jawed wonderment regularly draws people in, bypassing scripted, shallow interaction for more meaningful engagement. Most importantly, his wonder clearly marks him as marginal in jaded 90s Los Angeles.

unhappy waitress 'How soon you going to Florida?'" (148): Sherrill doesn't dwell on this example, nor does he delve deeply into it, but it holds a key to self-marginalization in a McDonaldized society. The question Steinbeck asks is both off-script (past "natural" interaction, though a diner is hardly McDonaldized in the full sense) and dependent on his ability to both construct a theory of her incorporating emotional state and thus construct a disarming question. One could even argue that the diner scene in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, in which Dr. Gonzo slips the waitress a note reading "Backdoor beauty?" and, upon her insulted rejection, threatens her and destroys the phone, is built around a disarming question. The potential violence makes the scene tense, but it certainly allows Duke, through his perceptive description, to humanize the otherwise background character of the waitress. Ultimately, these examples make it apparent that the shape of the tactic doesn't really matter, as long as it allows picaros and picaras to "send their own messages as obviously as possible, for the others to decode" (154) and respond to or react against more authentically than scripts permit.

But, as Sherrill says, picaros and picaras must "play the human scene as the scene presents itself, instead of surrendering to egotism or succumbing to a preformulated script" (164), suggesting that the most important element of escaping scripts is flexibility and an ability to engage with a situation as needed. *Schismatrix* sees a revealing example of this, in which Lindsay, reading a conversation as a dead end, performs an off-script action to change the nature of the social landscape, resulting in a more human and less scripted (and also less populated) environment. Lindsay finds himself in an involved discussion of the benefits of terraforming that rapidly degenerates into a fruitless dance of stale ideologies. Wellspring, Lindsay's friend and advocate of terraforming other planets, argues the merits of making the creation of new worlds and habitats: "For the first time, humanity would be bigger than life: a living world would owe



its existence to humankind, and not vice versa. Wellspring saw it as a moral obligation, a repayment of debt. The cost was irrelevant. Money was symbolic" (199). Navarre, a specialist in membrane chemistry, argues against what he sees as a boondoggle, wondering "[w]here's the appeal to greed?" (199). The pattern is like the locked orbits of binary stars: conservative ideology concerned with cost and stasis eternally circling the progressive ideology concerned with action and change. Unlike Navarre, Lindsay recognizes that survival in a posthuman future demands a floating utopian perspective: dreams such as terraforming may well fail, but, like any utopian possibility, the possibility itself is vastly more important than the execution. Movement fiction demands just that, and those who remain fixed in static, unevolving ideologies (and their adherents) are doomed to extinction. When the conversation turns to Lindsay, he realizes that "[t]here had been a time when he might have twisted the conversation to his advantage. But now his skill was gone. . . . Words were useless" (199), long since having lost the Shaper diplomatic talents that allowed him to manipulate. Instead, Lindsay, having read the situation as endless and static - scripted, in other words - invents an off-script action: "he knew he had to step outside the rules. He floated out of his chair and began stripping off his clothes" (199). The result is immediate and effective: "[t]he crowd's nervous laughter died down into puzzled unease. They moved away . . . and muttered together in disconcerted awe" (200) before eventually clearing the room. Navarre and even Wellspring depart, leaving only Abelard Gomez, a forward-thinking boy Lindsay had brought back from the Neotenic Cultural Republic (once the Mare Serenitatis Circumlunar Corporate Republic of Lindsay's birth). Gomez is drawn out by this gesture, engaging in a long discussion with Lindsay, doing all of the talking himself. Gomez, after wondering how he can "find any joy in a single day when the specters of centuries loom over" (200) him, a question core to both the posthuman experience and the long-term dream of

terraforming, is drawn by Lindsay's off-script action to eventually conclude that the answer "isn't something that words can capture . . . It can only be grasped all at once" (201). Lindsay read the situation correctly: the off-script act draws authentic, script-less (and mask-less, for Gomez realizes Lindsay's true identity) engagement with Gomez.

Cresswell observes that "[c]onstant transgression is permanent chaos. Yet within transgression lie the seeds of new spatial orderings" (*In Place* 166). The point of picaresque transgressions is not, strictly speaking, utopian: as the previous chapter demonstrates, the picaresque is geared to catalogue and demythologize. Nevertheless, the transgressions by which picaros and picaras gain enough marginality to perform their cataloguing and demythologizing tasks are "desperate *responses* to the power-laden imposition of norms and boundaries that they did not create" (166), and as such carry a definite utopian energy. Movement fiction's worlds are McDonaldized, securitized, and thoroughly commodified; the very fact that picaros and picaras can create alternative, marginal spaces from which to work, either by transgressing spatial, historical, economic, or social boundaries, makes a clear statement the worlds found in Movement fiction are anything but natural and unquestionable. Picaresque narratives do not provide answers: there are no blueprints for better societies contained within a picaro or picara's social criticisms. Still, like Lindsay's dream of terraforming in *Schismatrix*, all that matters is that one has space enough to form such dreams. Creating this space is a crucial part of the picaresque project.

## Thinking Back to the Center

"But how does it happen," I said with admiration, "that you were able to solve the mystery of the library looking at it from the outside, and you were unable to solve it when you were inside?"

"Thus God knows the world, because He conceived it in His mind, as if from the outside, before it was created, and we do not know its rule, because we live inside it, having found it already made."

-Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (1980)

Claudio Guillén argues that "one of the most significant achievements of the picaresque, and perhaps its most substantial contribution to the thematics of the modern novel" is the genre's "shattering of the unity of 'dual man'" (89), basing this assertion upon the observation that, as the picaro or picara takes on masks and roles, "a process of 'interiorization'" occurs in which the "inner man (embracing all the richness and subtlety of one's private thoughts and judgments) affirms his independence from an outer man (the patterns of behavior, the simplicity of the social role" (89). It is alarming, then, that the contemporary picaro finds not only the spaces of the external environment thoroughly conquered and homogenized, the margins eliminated by various colonizing forces, but also the spaces of the internal environment - one's identity, or inner self - similarly conquered and homogenized. Every waking moment of a contemporary man or woman's life is bombarded by television shows selling lifestyles, advertisements selling a sense of belonging, political talk shows selling critical thinking by proxy, etc. Joe Bageant, the late journalist responsible for *Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War*, provides a far more palatable updating of the false consciousness concept which summarizes the

threats contemporary picaros and picaras face. Bageant's *American Hologram*, itself akin to Hunter Thompson's dead *American Dream* exemplified by casino owners with licenses to steal, is built upon premeditated, consumable images - lifestyles glimpsed on television, persecution narratives aimed at religious fundamentalists, outrage at "entitlements" and the enshrinement of self-reliance, etc. - all designed to create a population happy and eager in its own exploitation. In this, Bageant is just offering another version of the various theories of hegemony proposed over the years and, like all of his predecessors, the primary vector of infection is the image. Crucially, Bageant's variation foregrounds the peculiar development of the scripted identity: "The hologram generates tens of thousands of . . . social identity keys. Having mixed and matched his newly purchased identity to his satisfaction, that kid photodigitizes it into yet another simulacrum on a camera phone and shoots it into the ionosphere to be downloaded by a similar creature gazing at the same hologram" (254). There is a circular quality to this "preselected array of possible selves based solely on what [someone likes] to eat, see, wear, hear, and drive" (254): a person consumes an identity and then willingly becomes a walking advertisement, selling themselves via Facebook and other forms of social media, reinforcing the purchased identity in the process. From a psychological standpoint, one could easily argue that this self-reinforcing identity cycle isn't at all different from the cloistered communities of a Medieval monastery; monks chose their isolation from the secular world and reinforced their identities via close-knit communities, just as, say, a social conservative chooses to consume only talk radio, Fox News, and other media sources while using social media to solidify his or her identity as a consumer of such right-wing sources by "selling" his or her image to friends (and, of course, the political inverse is also possible). Bageant's *Hologram*, like the walls of a monastery, is intended to be inviolate, a boundary *one should not wish* to see beyond. Suffice it to say that monasteries produced

remarkably few picaros throughout the years . . . When a picaro or picara's inner self becomes thoroughly colonized and commodified, robbing him or her of both authenticity and agency, the prospects for the picaresque project become grim. This section will examine the various avenues by which the inner self of picaros and picaras comes under assault and the steps they must take to regain the autonomy necessary to meaningfully engage with the social and geographical landscape.

### Social Diseases: Picaros and Picaras as Carriers of a Culture's Ills

Rowland Sherrill provides a useful model by which the inner-space dilemma faced by contemporary picaros and picaras can be understood. Sherrill suggests that contemporary picaros tend to be carriers (either as direct victims or indirect representatives) of the psychological barriers impeding picaresque engagement, and through the exile and subsequent "road work" (85) of picaresque travel they manage to overcome the psychological barriers from which they initially suffer. According to Sherrill,

Certain obstacles confronting selfhood in recent America . . . conspire severely against the ability of any 'self' in the arenas of experience and interpretation and, as it frequently happens, the new American picaro or picara begins his or her road career as a 'carrier' of the ills that beset contemporary selfhood. In fact, the figure's alienation, his or her sense of exile, psychic dislocation, and marginality, all of which can erode the integrity of self, often prompt or require the mobile life, send the figure out to accomplish the road work that could also prove to be a form of self-recovery or -discovery. (84)

Admittedly, Sherrill's own conclusions regarding *exactly* what constitutes a threat to the self are somewhat problematic. Sherrill, who served as the chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis, takes a particularly modernist stance regarding the essential, individual unity of the self, believing that the general populating of the

self with exterior voices (a position derived from Kenneth Gergen's *The Saturated Self*, discussed below) is a danger to picaresque engagement - a tenuous position, considering humanity's relational nature and the picaro/picara's protean self, which Stuart Miller and others saw as fundamentally chaotic and perpetually in flux. Decoupled from his conclusions about the specific nature of the social malady, however, Sherrill's model of illness carrier/road cure in analyzing the challenges faced by the protagonists of Movement SF picaresques.

Consider an example drawn from that sister genre of SF, Horror - specifically, that of the zombie flick *Zombieland*. Ruben Fleischer's *Zombieland*, originally intended to be an episodic serial, features a first-person narrative told by Columbus, a zombie apocalypse survivor played by Jesse Eisenberg. Columbus confesses that, prior to the zombie apocalypse, he was a shut-in from a long line of shut-ins: flashbacks show him in his apartment, surrounded by pizza boxes and soft drinks, playing *World of Warcraft* on his computer. In lieu of friends he has an internet connection, and in lieu of a life he has quests; in a very real sense, he was a zombie long before the apocalypse took place, spending long hours staring vacantly into a monitor, repeating the same tasks with nary a Leeroy Jenkins-esque moment of unique self-expression to be seen. Columbus is hardly unique, serving as a representative sample of any given college student in the United States, and in this he can be understood as a carrier of one of contemporary society's greatest ills: (social) media addiction, what Alvin Toffler described in the 80s as "blip culture" and what Scott Bukatman labeled "terminal identity" in the 90s. Regardless of the term used to describe the disease, the symptoms are the same: a person's identity and experience of the social/environmental landscape is entirely mediated by media, whether it is as simple as a GPS device mediating one's experience of space or as complex as a game world mediating one's experience of community or a Facebook page or dating site profile mediating one's experience of

selfhood. Columbus is a symptom of at least one of our social ills, and it takes a zombie apocalypse (and the resultant elimination of the mediating technology) for him to find, through his picaresque travels, a genuine sense of self and sense of community via the relationships he builds on the road.

While Sherrill's position is problematic, it is certainly true that for any "road cure" to work, or for any picaresque demythologization to occur at all, the picaro or picara must have an *authentic* self, however that slippery term "self" might be defined, for otherwise it proves impossible to practice the picaresque trade. Sherrill asserts that "the active and mobile and experiential *vida picaresca* requires not just a road stretching ahead; it needs as well an experiencing 'self' fully authorized to meet it, a self both responsive and integral that can engage, search, and sift American life, that can receive experience and revive it under the aegis of potent imagination and interpretation" (85). The crucial terms are "imagination" and "interpretation": a picaro who stumbles into, say, the Seminole Tribal Headquarters in Hollywood, Florida, burdened by firmly-held preexisting notions, such as a deeply-held racism or an internalized diet of Native American images taken from *Family Guy* and *South Park*, would be no more capable of meaningful engagement with the people and the culture than would a tourist in a Disneyized vacation spot. I use the example of Florida's Seminole Tribe, the only tribe that never signed a peace treaty with the U.S. government, because popular media, in a surprisingly racist turn, tends to portray the Seminoles and other tribes who have used their autonomy to open casinos as entirely inauthentic. A picaro or picara, whose inner self is largely kludged together from *Adult Swim* marathons, would not be able to objectively view the Seminoles, who collectively<sup>59</sup> own and operate a number of casinos in South Florida, including the successful Hard Rock Hotel and

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<sup>59</sup> Collectively, in that each registered member of the tribe receives monthly dividends based on the revenue generated by the casinos and resorts.

Casino in Hollywood, due to preconceptions drawn from such *Family Guy* episodes as "The Son Also Draws" and such *South Park* episodes as "Red Man's Greed." It is ironic that such a pop-culturally populated person would view the Seminoles as inauthentic, believing an "authentic" Seminole culture should be primitive, and would thus fail to recognize the very authentic cultural distinctiveness of the present-day Seminole tribe, for the true inauthenticity exists in the *Adult Swim* consumer, whose capacity to interpret reality had been dictated by an external source.

If a Native American tribe that no longer resembles the version of itself that existed during the Seminole Wars can be considered authentic but a person whose inner self has been co-opted by bad pastiches of Native American culture can be considered inauthentic, how then does one define authenticity? Charles Lindholm, in *Culture and Authenticity*, provides a workable definition: "there are two overlapping modes for characterizing any entity as authentic: genealogical or historical (*origin*) and identity or correspondence (*content*). Authentic objects, persons, and collectives are original, real, and pure; they are what they purport to be, their roots are known and verified, and their essence and appearance are one" (2). This definition is quite functional, though a bit of teasing is required to account for the conclusions of the Seminole thought experiment. In tracing the evolution of modern conceptions of authenticity, Lindholm notes that, during the Reformation, "Protestants throughout Europe began to declare that they were not obliged to follow whatever rules were handed down from above; instead, one's duty was to make a personal judgment as to whether those rules were moral and equitable" (6-7). In this attitude one can see the beginnings of the Enlightenment "belief in a sacred and universal moral self" (6), a debatable conclusion, but for the purposes of this argument the crucial point resides not in the nature of the inner self but rather in that "above" from which the rules were handed down. Lindholm taps Rousseau as "the earliest and most potent spokesman for the



predominant modern belief that the cultural/social surface represses the expression of the authentic natural self" (8); while Rousseau's conclusions about humanity's inner self (sometimes wrongly connected with the noble savage myth) are beside the point, his recognition that external social pressures could interfere with and overwrite whatever inner self may have existed is very relevant to the problem of authenticity. In short, I would propose that authenticity is defined less by one's internal fidelity to some mythical standard (*pure* culture, *natural* soul, etc.) and more by one's relative freedom from the influence of external agencies seeking, intentionally or otherwise, to make of individuals proxy extensions of the foreign agency in question. Thus, the child of *Adult Swim*, who does not draw from multiple data points (or voices) to make a conclusion but rather from the single "authoritative" external voice of the network's programming block, is inauthentic in the truest sense. The Seminoles, however, only appear inauthentic if one insists that they be "original, real, and pure" (2) concurrent with centuries-old standards. Indeed, one might easily argue that a Seminole (or anyone in similar circumstances) who actively sought to emulate the lifestyle of his or her ancestors would be far more inauthentic than the casino operators ever could be, for such an individual's mind would be entirely colonized by the voice of a past whose time had come and gone. Is a person authentically "Country" if they consume thousands of hours of *Country Music Television* and internalize its "voice"? One has but to drive into any rural area to find individuals who might once have been authentic but are now thoroughly colonized by monolithic voice of a corporation selling an authoritative but false version of the culture back to the communities. Authenticity is not the absence of such voices, which is impossible; rather, authenticity is the agency to operate independently.

Walker Percy, writing in *The Message in the Bottle*, speaks of precisely this dilemma, suggesting that individuals are losing the capacity for authentic engagement due to the colonization of the mind by expert voices and cultural packaging. Using the profound experience of explorer Garcia Lopez de Cardenas who, with no mediating knowledge to speak of, viewed the Grand Canyon clean for the first time, Percy argues that the contemporary "sightseer measures his satisfaction by the degree to which the canyon conforms to the preformed complex" (47) provided by tourism brochures, television travel shows, adventure films, etc. Tourists whose minds have been colonized by such voices are thus condemned to judge "present experience . . . by a prototype, the 'it' of their dreams" (53), accessing not, for example, the Canyon itself, but rather the simulacrum of the Canyon sung into existence by the media chorus. Percy contends that this barrier exists at all levels of our culture: even a "student who has the desire to get at a dogfish or a Shakespeare sonnet may have the greatest difficulty in salvaging the creature itself from the educational package in which it is presented" (57), a package that highlights everything deemed worth knowing about the object in question, doing an end-run around the student's own interpretations and imaginations in the process. The issue is that "sovereignty is surrendered to a class of privileged knowers, whether these be theorists or artists" (54), and therefore the potentially authentic engagement is diluted by the voices of those experts in the know. Returning to the thought experiment featuring the child of *Adult Swim*, one can see that the viewer ceded authority - in this case, his understanding of Native American culture - to a collection of postmodern pastiches that, like all postmodern pastiche, appear erudite and penetrating but that nevertheless lack, as Jameson suggests, any objective standards upon which to base their critique. Of course, the viewer does not realize this - such a realization would indicate authenticity - and must therefore experience the Seminoles via a very demanding external

mediator. Guy Debord, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, noted that "[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images" (9), and indeed, in this sense, the spectacle captures quite perfectly the intercessory danger posed to authentic engagement.

Kenneth Gergen argues that a similar condition marks the boundary between postmodernism and all that came before: "[t]he postmodern condition . . . is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality" (7). The expansion of communications technology has granted people unprecedented access, Gergen suggests, to other the thoughts and opinions of other individuals and institutions, replacing the several dozen to a few hundred insistent voices telling a person living less than a century ago what ideas were true and what choices meaningful with many thousands, all making different and potentially contradictory demands. These competing voices provide "a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self" (6), a situation threatening to stable versions of the self provided by, say, one's religion or one's tribe. Gergen believes that the "*populating of the self*, reflecting the infusion of partial identities through social saturation" (49) tends to lead to a "*multiphrenic* condition, in which one begins to experience the vertigo of unlimited multiplicity" (49), both of which "are significant preludes to postmodern consciousness" (49). This is not, however, an inherently bad thing: Gergen makes it plain that it is the sharp contrast between the far more unified romantic and modernist views of identity and the slippery postmodern self that generates friction. Nevertheless, it is this condition, *multiphrenia*, that Sherrill identifies as the postmodern picaro and/or picara's definitive "ill." Sherrill believes that the "multiphrenic condition that saturates the self to the point of its overpopulation by the urging voices of others . . . thus debilitates any distinctive self-identity" (90), basing his reasoning on the assumption that a picaro or picara

needs a "distinctive self-identity" to perform their task. As an example, Sherrill offers Pynchon's Oedipa Maas, of *The Crying of Lot 49* fame, noting that "she 'moves' not so much as herself but as the executrix of the legacy of the wealthy and powerful Pierce Iverarity, whose commanding 'voice' continues posthumously to compel her" (91), and as she discovers the various differing truth claims about Iverarity and history, "other voices come increasingly to populate her [Oedipa's] 'self'" (91).

There is, however, a small problem in Sherrill's reasoning - not a crippling one, mind, but it does seem that Sherrill has taken a strong position where a weaker, more flexible one would be more appropriate, considering the inherent "instability" of the picaresque hero. Sherrill suggests that for the picaro or picara "[t]o relent to the expertise of any one or more of the 'voices' is, in one form, also to put a mediating filter between the self and experience" (92), and this is certainly true, but Sherrill seems to want an individual who aspires to be either a tabula rasa or, perhaps, a fully self-actualized being who knows all and need never draw on other voices at all. Either position is unrealistic, especially for a character type whose identity was eternally mutating, at least insofar as theorists like Guillén and Miller were concerned. Instead, I would propose a weaker version of Sherrill's position: picaros and picaras are threatened by a *negative* form of multiphrenia, in which the self is not simply populated by diverse voices and stories but rather colonized or infected by them and left to serve as an agency-compromised host. Moreover, such individuals are not really multiphrenic at all, or at least not in the sense intended by Gergen, which implies contradictions and conflicts - good things, inherently, as they inspire debate. Rather, these individuals, who might well be populated by thousands of voices, find themselves populated by thousands of voices who all *shout the same things*, drowning out the competition like any successful mind virus must. The issue is not simply the population of the self - that is,

after all, merely another way of expressing the picaresque project; the issue is *ethnic cleansing* of the self.

Naomi Klein explains that the evolution of corporate America and branded products has led not to a choice-paralyzing overabundance of goods and services but rather "to a loss of meaningful choices. The real question is not 'Where do you want to go today?' but 'How best can I steer you into the synergized maze of where I want you to go today?'" (141). This process, known in the industry as "brand cocooning," is the perfect practical example of the negative multiphrenia impeding authentic engagement. Brand cocooning, which is just the consumer incarnation of selective exposure theory, operates by channeling consumers' consumption habits in ways beneficial to the owners of a particular brand, or, more commonly now, a particular cluster of brands. Disney, for example, owns (in addition to a horrifyingly large number of resort properties) Pixar, Marvel Comics, and Lucasfilm, along with its ancillary properties like Skywalker Sound and ILM. Through this diversification a certain illusion of choice is created: a child who has tired of Goofy and Brer Bear (and not yet graduated to fondling or stabbing them) will no doubt have been exposed, either through the theme parks or advertisements found alongside traditional Disney fare, to the X-Men and the Skywalkers, and will thus be likely to shift consumption to those properties. Moreover, the "synergy" between brand properties ensures that the specific products share a certain harmony of values, meaning that none will outright undermine the others (or, if one does, it is a carefully calculated move to capture an neglected demographic). No anti-sweatshop polemics directed at Disney are likely to issue from the mind of Charles Xavier in the near future<sup>60</sup>. In brief, the child who rejects *The Little Mermaid* for

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<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting that Disney has taken an unusually hands-off approach to handling such acquisitions as Marvel and Pixar, likely to avoid alienating pre-existing fan bases, so this point could prove wrong.

Admiral Ackbar has not in any way escaped the trap, for he or she is still the product of Disney culture, being populated by Disney-benefiting voices telling Disney-approved narratives.

The old concept of brand loyalty isn't exactly required by brand cocooning, either, though there are certainly individuals who actively choose not to proceed very far outside of a brand cocoon. Nowhere is this selective exposure more apparent than in politics. Chris Mooney, writing in *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science - and Reality*, discusses selective exposure theory in terms of media cocooning as a tentative explanation for public, particularly conservative (at least as regards most science issues) ignorance and misunderstanding of numerous hot-button issues. Mooney reasons that as "political conservatives tend to have a higher need for closure . . . [this] suggests they should also be more likely to select themselves into belief-affirming information streams, like Fox News or right-wing talk radio" (146). One can, if one so chooses, populate one's mind with an entire army of ultraconservative voices providing scripted responses to all possible subjects and experiences. Charles Pierce (the author of *Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*, not the Arkansas filmmaker responsible for *Boggy Creek II: And The Legend Continues*) succinctly explains the problem of talk radio: "Debate no longer consists of thesis and antithesis, moving forward to synthesis; it is now a matter of choosing up sides, finding someone on your team to sally forth, and then laying the wood to each other in between commercials for male-enhancement products" (113). Debate requires measured evaluations of multiple subtle positions, something not inconsistent with a *wisely* populated self, but, when one can simply abandon interpretation in favor of a team to root for, then whatever positive benefits one might derive from having internalized competing voices vanish beneath the booming chorus of "authority." Indeed, Pierce notes this very irony, stating that talk radio "has created a demand for inexpertise

- or, more accurately, anexpertise - whereby the host is deemed more of an authority the less he is demonstrably polluted by actual knowledge" (113), for what person who has actively sought out a cocoon wishes to hear measured reflections? Negative multiphrenia, or an homogenously populated self, is the psychological equivalent of the spatial impediments described previously, and while versions of negative multiphrenia and the compromising of authenticity can be found in all representative texts used thus far, *Angel Station* and *Transmetropolitan* provide the two most interpreting expressions of this phenomenon, *Angel Station* providing a kind of allegory for negative multiphrenia and *Transmetropolitan* offering an hilariously defamiliarized instance of corporate branding.

#### *Angel Station*: Consolidating Your Multiphrenia

As previously mentioned, the Runaway, Ubu and Maria's ship in *Angel Station*, is "haunted" by the digital ghost of their deceased father, Pasco. Pasco suicides at the novel's opening, leaving semi-sentient recordings of himself randomly distributed through the ship's mainframe to pop unexpectedly into existence in order to deliver non-sequitur lectures or windows into the past. His decision is driven largely by the background economic situation of *Angel Station*'s universe and, along with the rest of the extended shooter family, his lack of a place within it. As discussed in Part 2, *Angel Station* is set in a future in which faster-than-light travel is accomplished by the use of contained singularities, a trope repeated in series like *Battlestar Galactica* or films like *Event Horizon*, and this innovation allowed for an accelerated expansion into space. The frontier areas, much like third-world areas on Earth when transportation advances made them conveniently accessible, became rich sources of unlimited

resources that came to threaten the older core of human habitation: "Waves of wealth generated at the frontier were impacting on the center of human space with a suddenness and force that had been undreamt-of in previous centuries. . . . Billions thrown out of work! Lives disrupted! Investments made worthless overnight" (20). Obviously, such a situation was disadvantageous to the older centers of wealth which desired "stability. Continuity. . . . an end to the uncontrolled growth that was wrecking their lives" (21), so the traditional center of capital pushed for a "planned expansion, guaranteed not to stress the system" (21) and, obviously, keep the wealth at the center. If this sounds familiar, it is because *Angel Station's* consolidation is virtually identical to the contemporary globalization process: "[t]he consolidation of the emergent world market . . . is really what is at stake in so-called globalization" (Jameson xii). Unlimited economic growth in, say, Bangladesh, is hardly to the benefit of the apparel industry, for if an industrial base truly developed there (fuelling, one would hope, the rise of collective bargaining and a middle class), then, at the least, the Gap might be forced to pay more than two bits for an hour of labor. Indeed, if economic development continued unchecked, Bangladesh might suddenly be producing products and resources competing with Western markets, thus shifting the locus of capital. Thus, just as it is in the interest of Western markets to work against "all the welfare measures, the safety net, the right to unionization, industrial and ecological regulatory laws, . . . [and to] dismantle whatever stands in the way of the free market" (xii), so too does *Angel Station's* process of Consolidations seek to remake the Fringe economies into a controllable, "globalized" third world.

Consolidation, like globalization, creates broken, cut-throat communities governed by the desperate need to generate profits, all under the certain knowledge that their traditional way of life (in this case, the unique shooter culture described previously) is doomed. Shooters, as Ubu



and Maria explain, before Consolidation operated as a loosely-knit family, supporting each other while competing, but after the process of globalization has taken hold, creating artificial scarcity, no such compassion is possible. If a shooter family fails to keep the profits flowing, then the result is extinction. For Ubu and Maria, this rings especially true, since, being engineered for the shooter lifestyle, they are unsuited both psychologically and physically for a terrestrial life where, due to their ages, they would be considered minors. Ubu reflects on the stress this unnatural competition has brought to the shooter communities; he recalls Cole Redwing, a shooter who "killed his family, then himself" (8) after a bank "confiscated his drive" (9), thus ending his lifestyle and all but ensuring the breakup of his group. Ubu notes that "[i]t used to be years before you'd ever hear of a murder on a shooter ship . . . now there's two or three a year" (9), foregrounding the problem consolidation is causing in the psychology of his community. Pasco is just another victim of Consolidation, terminally depressed due to the recognition of his community's obsolescence (many shooters, who once operated independently, are being forced into long-term contract work or, worse, are resorting to taking salaried jobs) and his own inability to do anything about it.

And therein lies the key: Pasco's "ghost," the *vox ex machina* he has become after death, becomes a veritable chorus of one, singing songs of doom, failure, and ineffectuality to his children (and, in fact, Williams stresses this obliquely by including a scene in which General Volitional Twelve, who is distressed after viewing *The Libation Bearers*, needs Greek drama explained to him). Pasco's ghost, then, is positioned as a colonizing voice, a negative form of multiphrenia for his children (and Pasco is many voices, as the recordings cover decades of his life), preventing his children from authentic engagement by blinding them to possible alternatives. Fredric Jameson, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, observes that "[w]hat is crippling

is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency [globalization] is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available" (xii). Ubu and Maria are accompanied by this belief literalized and cast as a disembodied technological voice ready to populate their identities. Indeed, Pasco's various rants and apologies all carry this fatalistic tinge: Pasco's first lines are "I know what's coming . . . I know I can't stop it. Can't change. I'm sorry" (1), followed by "If I stay around, I'll fail. . . . I'll go down, and you'll just go down with me. I'm not strong enough" (2), and many similar lines follow, all of which stress powerlessness against Consolidation. Even Pasco's economic lectures, ostensibly designed to help his children understand the shape of the problem, bear the same fatalism. Pasco's holographic ghost concludes one lecture by asking, "But what did Consolidation do to the Edge economies, when they were based on unlimited growth? When the best economic units for carrying out what growth was permitted were the large stable corporate haulers rather than the small entrepreneurial shooter families?" (21), and answering with the bleak "We die . . . We die a slow death" (21). Pasco, unable to imagine any alternatives, inadvertently colonizes Ubu and Maria's minds with the same dead-end line of reasoning. Moreover, Pasco's recordings also contain, in addition to his direct personal messages, lectures, and thoughts, what amounts to a narrativized version of his defeated worldview operating like a demotivational Disney movie for children. Ubu and Maria are confronted with recordings of Pasco from happier times, saying hopeful things like "I was getting worried, with Consolidation setting in. But now we'll have a long contract. Years. Lots of money. . . . Looks like our worries are over" (115), knowing full well that his hopes were unfounded. Subsequent recordings play

out the failures and betrayals that led to his own pathetic dénouement, further reinforcing this voice's conclusions in Ubu and Maria's minds.

Despite hating the sorrow the recordings bring them, regularly telling the holographic ghost to shut up (to no avail, of course), Ubu and Maria inevitably internalize Pasco's voice and his conclusions. Maria, for instance, while walking through the Fringe area of a space station, begins to reflect that "[t]his was all going to be destroyed, she knew, destroyed as totally as if it were sucked into a singularity on the wrong tangent and crushed into black condensed matter where nothing, not even the tiniest particle, had room to breathe" (236). The singularity metaphor is apt, especially when one considers the oppressive effect that globalization has on its victims; Maria sees her culture destined for subsistence-level wage slavery, and wonders "if this was where Pasco had been, if he had looked into that same great swallowing singularity until he could see nothing else, until he had no option but madness" (236). Her response to the effects of Consolidation is an echo of her father's, an outcome to be expected after having been colonized by his voice. Pasco, too, recognizes this same tendency: while digging around in Pasco's recordings Ubu uncovers a failed plan Pasco had to sell specially-adapted trees to outlying colonies and realizes that "Pasco's plans for the conifers was the same scheme as Ubu's purchase of the mining equipment for Dig Angel. Somehow Ubu hadn't remembered. . . . He, Ubu, with the mind that never forgot anything?" (347-48). This realization leads Ubu, who possesses an eidetic memory, to conclude that something "had kept him from remembering, Something had wanted him to repeat Pasco's mistakes" (348). The answer, of course, is the colonizing voice of Pasco, who unwisely "programmed himself as a ghost, so that his children would see it all happen again, again, again . . . Programmed, Ubu thought" (348), just like Ubu had been by Pasco's failure of imagination. Ubu "had mourned Pasco by imitating him, by trying to complete

the pattern, failure echoed by failure, loss by loss. Pasco had never taught him anything but that" (348). Both Ubu and Maria are de-authenticated by Pasco's voice, inadvertently trapped in the same patterns of thought reinforced by the literalized free-floating traumatic memory Pasco had become. In fact, Pasco is so deeply "internalized" in the memory banks of the ship - a clear surrogate for the identities of the children, who are nothing without Runaway - that Maria must use her near-supernatural abilities to manipulate electrons to actually dislodge him: she "[l]ocated him, glitched the program that hid and relocated him after each random appearance, unraveled his software like a skein of wool, stuffed him in a file piled high with security. The galaxy's first holographic ghost had been cornered and slammed into a cage" (235), and even then he is still there, just less insistent. Pasco is multiphrenia/monophrenia literalized, an inescapable voice in both Ubu and Maria's minds that takes control of them, mediating their interpretations of reality and crippling their abilities to imagine alternatives to Consolidation.

*Transmetropolitan: Branding Your Consumers*

"Gathering tips from the graffiti artists of old, the superbrands have tagged everyone - including the graffiti writers themselves. No space has been left unbranded."

-Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (1999)

While *Angel Station* takes a conservative path and offers up a single, powerful example of a colonizing voice, *Transmetropolitan* offers up hundreds or thousands, offering a detailed look at the way in which the "expert" voices of advertising conquer identity. Crammed prose leading naturally to information-rich environments, all Movement SF, and Movement

picaresques in particular, tend to be set against a backdrop of runaway commercialized media. Bukatman, writing of Howard Chaykin's classic graphic novel *American Flagg!*, notes that the "[s]pace is hardly empty, it is instead filled with all the signs and signals of the social system" (59), referring to the ceaseless broadcast noise of the city: billboards, commercials, television programming, etc. Neal Stephenson's Movement picaresque novel *The Diamond Age* offers up an excellent example of this wall of commercialized sound, if I may borrow a term from Phil Spector, in the form of "loglo," a logical extrapolation of advertising trends that renders "street[s] . . . into a luminescent tunnel of mediatronic billboards" (211). Stephenson explains that the arms race of advertising eventually resulted in immense billboards, and "[o]nce all the mediatrons were a hundred feet high and filled with tits, the only competitive strategy that hadn't already been pushed to the redline was technical tricks: painfully bright flashes, jump-cuts, and simulated 3-D phantoms that made bluff charges towards specific viewers who didn't seem to be paying enough attention" (212), making the colonization efforts rather blatant - inescapable repetition is the keystone of brainwashing. (Of course, "[u]nremitting exposure to this kind of thing produced mediatron burnout among the target audience" (212), but that's just the cost of doing business.) It is into one of these spectacular tunnels that the protagonist and picara-in-training Princess Nell and her brother Harv stumble, "the messages on the billboards pursued them like starving wolves" (211). Naturally, they panic and escape via a spatial violation, leaping the barrier at the street's edge and running into a "public" park. In a revealing twist, the pair are assaulted, only moments after entering the park, by an aerostat security device. It boldly proclaims, "Visitors are welcome to stroll through this park at any time. We hope you have enjoyed your stay. Please inquire if you need directions, and this unit will assist you" (214), and, when the pair don't beat cheeks rapidly enough, it hits them with a painful burst of light,

presumably to keep the park free of homeless people. Regardless, the narrative offers clear sequence: enter overwhelming ad space, escape to presumably public space, be forced from public space back to ad space. Clearly, the spatial confinement described above also has a spectacular component.

Practicing a visual version of cyberpunk's famous crammed prose, the backgrounds of *Transmetropolitan*, drawn primarily by Darick Robertson, are littered with ads not much different than those found in *The Diamond Age*. Interesting as these ads are, they don't provide much context for analysis; fortunately, the *foreground* of *Transmetropolitan* is littered with just as many ads, since Jerusalem enjoys examining advertisements of all forms (including the religious advertisements discussed in Part 2) in his columns. Let's consider a single ad, found in the issue "21 Days in the City," which features nearly all of the themes under discussion here. The ad is for "COK," "The original UL approved servo-phallic device" (5.34), which appears, judging by the box art, to be a upscale prosthetic penis similar to the vibrating members found in Mike Nichols and Garry Shandling's *What Planet Are You From?* or Stuart Gordon's *Space Truckers*. Jerusalem's commentary is as follows:

Matteo bought himself a new set of genitals today. He's very proud of them. They were made by a Uruguayan firm known for the reliability and sensitivity of their product. They're also known for having their products built by children working in dangerous conditions earning less than a dollar a month, but that doesn't bother Matteo. Oh no. Matteo's got the genitals he always wanted now. They're exactly like the genitals he used to have. Only with a MiniDisc player. (5.34)

Matteo, as Jerusalem notes, has been sold a prosthetic identity, one preying upon the compromised sense of masculinity that has slowly been whittled away by exaggerated media depictions of action hero cocksmanhood (the male version of the same compromising of integrity women have experienced through advertising since its inception). Moreover, his identity is a branded commodity, one with a dark labor history that concerns Matteo not at all. Matteo is an

individual colonized by a branded worldview, unable to objectively or independently interpret his own worth (let alone that of the exploited laborers) or to imagine a solution other than purchasing a sense of self in the form of a proxy penis.

The COK example is representative of the larger trend of branding and its impact on identity. Joseph Davis, in "The Commodification of Self," argues that "people now put less emphasis on institutional roles in their self-definitions and more weight on internal criteria or 'impulse'" (42), consistent with Lindholm's own point that contemporary attitudes concerning authenticity privilege personal emotion and desire. However, Davis doesn't locate this development in the Romantic worldview; rather, he sees it as a direct result of consumerism itself: "[c]onsumerism and the commodification process . . . [destabilized] the older institutions of identity formation (family, school, church, and so on) . . . [and] created a vacuum of normative expectations and bonds" (44), and, as consumerism abhors a vacuum, it promptly addressed the existential crisis it had created by providing "'scripts,' to use Louis Zurcher's apt term, . . . written to channel those inner impulses into intentional consumer choices" (44). Branding, Davis notes, is the most ubiquitous expression of this development, as name brands seek to provide "new marketing scripts [that] incorporate the language of self-determination and transformation, and build on the knowledge that being true to our unique inner selves is a powerful moral ideal. Indeed, authenticity has been so thoroughly appropriated and packaged in the metaphorical stories of the mass marketers that we barely notice anymore" (45). Matteo's "unique" inner self is, of course, an alpha male - never mind that he is depicted as a very average, forgettable denizen of the city - so by purchasing a product that allows him to commune with what he regards as his "true" self (one consistent, fortunately, with media standards), he can

regard himself as authentic, fulfilled, and proud. Matteo is also thoroughly colonized by a branded identity.

The evolution of brands and branded identities is quite fascinating, examined in detail by Naomi Klein in *No Logo*. Klein explains that, contrary to public perception of giant corporate behemoths, "merged companies are actually shrinking. Their apparent bigness is simply the most effective route toward their real goal: divestment of the world of things" (26). Like a mendicant monastic order from Superman's bizarro world, the most successful corporations have worked quite diligently to eliminate the manufacturing side of their business models (and most of the workforce) and market what amounts to pure spectacle. Klein explains that, with the rise of industrial production methods in the early 1900s, the market became "flooded with uniform mass-produced products that were virtually indistinguishable from one another. Competitive branding became a necessity of the machine age - within a context of manufactured sameness; image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product" (28). The logical end of this is to eliminate the product almost entirely - if they are all ultimately the same, there is little point in retaining in-house manufacturing. Instead, successful businesses developed their image, attempting to create bonds of trust between their brands and potential consumers. Of course, trust is a very unreliable basis upon which to form a relationship: *dependency* is a far superior bond, thus "every company with a powerful brand is attempting to develop a relationship with consumers that resonates so completely with their sense of self that they will aspire, or at least consent, to be serfs under these feudal brandlords" (160). Klein points to Nike's success in inner cities; it takes a powerful identity dependency to kill for footwear. William Burroughs used the wrong metaphor in his fiction, apparently.



It is difficult to see such brand loyalty (which, in the case of Nike's marketing to inner city youths, plays upon imagery of wealth and success designed to appeal addictively to America's most marginal and powerless individuals) as anything other than a mind virus, a spectacular meme that infiltrates the host's personality and replaces autonomy and meaningful engagement with servitude and virus-benefiting decisions. Indeed, the artificial desires generated by the spectacle of advertising piggy-back on consumers' innocent belief in authenticity: a person who feels that he or she is authentic when expressing his or her inner desires is unlikely to ever suspect that those desires were engineered elsewhere and acquired via the multiphrenic chorus. Gergen uses an Eastern concept to explain this problem: "as Buddhists have long been aware, to desire is simultaneously to become a slave of the desirable. To 'want' reduces one's choice to 'want not.' Thus, as others are incorporated into the self, and their desires become one's own, there is an expansion of goals - of 'musts,' wants, and needs. Attention is necessitated, effort is exerted, frustrations are encountered. Each new desire places its demands and reduces one's liberties" (74-75). Bukatman says much the same of the spectacle, which, "in its role as advertisement, . . . generates the conditions for consumption, and therefore for production as well. . . . [by stimulating] the desire to consume (the only permissible participation in the social process), a desire continually displaced onto the next product and the next" (37). Thus it is that the trap of engineered desires ensures that those whose minds have been populated by the voices of consumer society will seek authenticity by purchasing identity after inauthentic identity.

Debord argued that "[t]he first phase of the domination of the economy over social life had brought into the definition of all human realization an obvious degradation of *being* into *having*" (12); would it be unreasonable to say that the current, media-saturated phase has further degraded being into selling? Not only do selves saturated by consumer culture buy pre-packaged

identities, the revolutionary advances in communications technology Gergen only speculated on in 1991's *The Saturated Self* have created an environment in which selves also brand and package themselves. Klein summarizes the reasoning of self-help author Tom Peters and his belief in personal branding, saying "[s]uccess in the job market will only come when we retrofit ourselves as consultants and service providers, identify our own Brand You equities and lease ourselves out to targeted projects that will in turn increase our individual portfolio of 'braggables'" (258), or, as Davis explains, "[t]o self-brand . . . individuals must get in touch with their skills, the 'selling parts' of their personality, and any and every accomplishment they can take credit for" (47). This, of course, is the *raison d'être* of such professional networking sites as LinkedIn, but Peters envisions personal empowerment through self-commodification in a far wider application . . . but, is this not what Twitter, Facebook, and a host of clones already do?

The purpose of a Facebook page, a Twitter account, or a personal webpage is to sell the self, to generate buzz, and/or to legitimize one's own identity, not simply to keep in touch with friends (or generate advertising revenue for the host). Consider the process of setting up a Facebook page: one selects from the most flattering and interesting facts about one's life in order to construct an idealized (by typically consumer culture standards) "self" to sell to one's friends and acquaintances (a more apt term). A page declares that a person loves Hemingway novels, adventure cinema, and (sigh) urban exploration; it features photos of the person in question climbing a cliff, kayaking a river, and poking around an old Radio Flyer factory (a piece of Americana now produced exclusively in China). What is strategically left out and tactfully ignored by the patrons of the page is the fact that the person in question has climbed but a single cliff, been kayaking on a single occasion, and only poked around the abandoned factory because it was next door, and, worse, the individual actively sought out the cliff, river, and factory with

the ambition of creating good copy for the page. This person has worked to create an interesting identity, specifically an identity of interest to others. This, as Davis says, "is an exercise in self-commodification, because people are asked, in essence, to relate to themselves as a commodity, a product" (48). The goal of such people is obviously not honest engagement with one's cultural milieu. Even the author of Matthew recognized the problem of public life and authenticity: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matthew 6.5, *KJV*). One might even say that the higher one's online *presence* becomes, the less authentic is that person's engagement with their culture, as every tweet, Facebook post, or LinkedIn connection is designed to create a marketable (or palatable) self, rather than to provoke a revealing response out of other people. Picaros and picaras are not, as a rule, so self-absorbed.

It should go without saying that self-commodification is nothing new - celebrities such as Michael Jordan and the Kardashians are living brands themselves - but it is significant that almost all individuals participate in self-commodification to some extent, thanks to the runaway expansion of social media toys. Moreover, commodification of the self, whether it is something a person seeks out or, like many celebrities, has forced on them, destroys the authentic cultural engagement upon which picaresque activity depends. Davis rightly points out that "[c]ommodifying and marketing ourselves . . . implies a change in our social relations. Relentless self-promotion, even if carried off without appearing to be self-absorbed and self-aggrandizing . . . requires a carefully controlled and utilitarian way of relating to others. They too must be objectified in the interest of the bottom line" (49). The racist Air Force officer Bone draws out in *Rule of the Bone* isn't a demythologization of the noble military, he is a potential tweet. The time Bone spends at the Mothership, mingling with his drug dealer father's upper-class friends and

their pet Jamaicans isn't a revealing engagement with class inequality, it is fodder for a much-viewed Facebook status update, replete with meaningless words like *amazing*. The instant Bone becomes a participant in social media is the instant both Bone and the Mothership cease to exist: Bone becomes the physical proxy of the identity he is attempting to create and the Mothership (or the Air Force officer, or I-Man, etc.) become exploitable resources. Could Percy's Garcia Lopez de Cardenas have "seen" the Grand Canyon (or anything else, for that matter) if his first thought was how cool a self-shot of him with the canyon in the background might look as his Facebook profile pic?

*Transmetropolitan*, interestingly, offers up a fascinating examination of the negative multiphrenia borne by both the branding of lifestyles and the branding of the self and its impact on marginality and the potential for engagement. Ritzer asserts, somewhat obviously, that television is a "key element of a McDonaldized society" (*McDonaldization* 99), so it comes as little surprise that Jerusalem's co-optation is televised. The seeds of Jerusalem's brush with branding are planted in the issue "21 Days in the City," in which Jerusalem is forced by his editor to attend a "Media Exploitation meeting" and is shown a number of potential commercializations of his journalism, such as "Magical Truthsaying Bastard Spidey, animated versions of [his] columns in the manner of Japanese cartoons" (5.37). The background art of the panels also reveals other branding concepts; one can also see promotional material for a talk show called "I *love* it here!" featuring a far more TV-friendly version of Jerusalem holding a microphone. A table is also covered with t-shirts, action figures (such as a Jerusalem figure sitting on a toilet and composing on his laptop), and other cheap marketing cash-ins. Though plied with "wads of royalty money" (5.37), Jerusalem nevertheless objects violently, but as we shall see his objections meant nothing.

Obviously, the point of the "Media Exploitation meeting" was to create a profitable brand by converting Jerusalem into a branded identity, much like Michael Jordan or the Olsen Twins. Of course, Jordan and the Olsens desired and actively pursued self-commodification, whereas Jerusalem rejects the very concept . . . but does this distinction really matter? Klein, describing the business practices of successful brands, explains that "many of today's best-known manufacturers no longer produce products and advertise them, but rather buy products and 'brand' them, [and thus] these companies are forever on the prowl for creative new ways to build and strengthen their brand images" (26). If companies hunt for successful products and ideas to absorb and thus "brand" as their own, is it that much of a leap to suggest that companies would seek to brand people for the same purpose? The common perception is that individuals, whether celebrities like Jordan or lowly aspiring models such as the Jameson girls selling desire (and Jameson) at bars, are willing participants in the process of self-commodification; Jameson's models, no less than Jordan, hope to make of their lives a "precious, precious commodity," to borrow a line from *Zoolander*. However, there is no shortage of individuals who are branded unwillingly, forced to participate in the process of self-commodification without intention or consent.

Consider the peculiar case of the "Blind Date Concert" marketing phenomenon. Klein discusses the Molson corporation's use in the mid 90s of this concept: the promotion was to "hold a contest in which winners get to attend an exclusive concert staged by Molson and Miller in a small club - much smaller than the venues where one would otherwise see these megastars. And here's the clincher: keep the name of the band secret until it steps on stage" (66). For Molson, this proved an elegant solution to the problem all brands face when attempting to harness the power of celebrities: the celebrity's identity (or, more likely in these days of

engineered bands, the celebrity's own brand) tends to overshadow the sponsoring brand. By promoting a Molson concert without needing to promote a group of musicians, Molson "invented a way to equate their brands with extremely popular musicians, while still maintaining their competitive edge over the stars" (66). Flatly, Molson found a way to brand bands like Hole and Rush without the musicians' consent, since the acts had been recontextualized as a product offered by Molson. Klein observes that "[t]he rock stars . . . continued to find sad little ways to rebel. . . . Courtney Love told a reporter, 'God bless Molson. . . . I douche with it'" (66), but such small acts of resistance meant very little and "were all incidental to the main event, in which Molson and Miller were the real rock stars and it didn't really matter how those petulant rent-a-bands behaved" (66). The consequences of such backdoor branding to the celebrity are not explored by Klein, and certainly not in a sustained environment of co-optation: the likelihood of anyone associating Geddy Lee (even while performing at the Molson Canadian Amphitheatre) with Molson for long is remote. Consider, however, the effects if the branding was sustained: how could Courtney Love continue to operate if she were unwillingly perceived as a Molson's interpretation of an Oktoberfest Bavarian beer girl?

Such is the danger of "Magical Truthsaying Bastard Spidey." A Jerusalem who has been rendered into a cartoon, willingly or otherwise, must, at least at some level, begin to view himself as cartoonish (ironic, considering the medium). Debord speaks of an interesting feedback loop generated by one's contemplation of the products of the spectacle:

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. (18)

Surely this effect is intensified when the images being consumed are images of oneself, expertly ground by focus groups and PR propagandists to reflect a self beneficial to whatever brand did the adopting. If the standby trope of gazing into the shattered mirror is the standard for representing uncertain identity, it is only because there are not enough SF authors: did not Howard Chaykin, in *American Flagg!*, give us the first action series "[p]roduced entirely by Tromplography," in which Reuben Flagg, the star of "Mark Thrust: Sexus Ranger" could get cancelled yet the show itself get renewed, the new Thrust being entirely digitized (Chaykin 5-6)? What hope has one of authenticity when his or her mind is being populated by the authoritative voices of fake versions of himself or herself? Is this not schizophrenia's definition? And what of the prospects for engaging with others, the bread the picaresque genre exists to butter? A picaro or picara, ideally, walks into engagements cold; a branded individual, by contrast, walks into new situations not only struggling with a parasitical proxy sense of self (or selves, as the case may be) but also facing individuals fully familiar with that proxy self and thus overflowing with expectations, like Percy's media-saturated tourist at the Grand Canyon. Branding, particularly the branding of the self, makes doubly impossible authentic picaresque engagement.

It goes without saying that this is what happens - or almost happens - to Jerusalem. The issue "Nobody Loves Me," which followed five issues after "21 Days in the City," reveals that "Magical Truthsaying Bastard Spidey!" (which is "Freely Adapted From the Work of Spider Jerusalem" (6.7)) and several other exploitation shows have been created without Jerusalem's knowledge or consent. In "Magical Truthsaying Bastard Spidey!" Jerusalem is depicted as a cutsey-edgy version of himself, guzzling "Scrotal Rot Whiskey" and making declarations like "Drinking is fun! It makes me feel horrible and sexy!" (6.8) and "Prostitutes are good!" In short, the caricature of Jerusalem has a pseudo-edge that proves appealing and excellent for plugging

product - this is, after all, a future in which children's programming like "The Sex Puppets," a version of Sesame Street with strap-ons, is regarded as acceptable family entertainment. The caricature of Jerusalem also provides helpful messages to viewers: "People who sell drugs can be bad! You must check the drugs very carefully! Use your feedsite reader to confirm current prices! Remember to do your gums with the residue! Waste not, want not!" (6.8) Helpful messages such as these contain sentiments similar to those found in educational shorts like 1972's "Magical Disappearing Money," which featured a baffling grocery witch who took unusual interest in whether or not one chose to purchase pre-sugared cereals. Like Jerusalem, her advice was sensible - rubbing one's gums with residue *is* quite thrifty, as is purchasing plain cereal and applying the sugar yourself - but it is hardly subversive, as the advice encourages the consumption of products and popular media all the same. Moreover, the "telepathic whore-nun" (6.9) whom the cartoon Jerusalem is preparing to ravage (for "two thousand bucks and a decontamination fee" (6.9)) offers an apologia for religion that clearly undercuts Jerusalem's usual efforts at theological demythologization: after the anime Jerusalem declares (and all of his advice comes in the form of short, blurb-worthy declarative sentences) "I don't like churches! Religion is for stupid people!" (6.9) - a straw man simplification if ever there was one - the whore-nun explains that "Billions of people believe otherwise! And most churches have officially apologized or things like hate crimes, institutionalized lying, and the fabricated nature of the Bible!" (6.9). Of course, Ellis puts his own authorial spin on her response, ironizing it, but the point still stands that, like the drug consumption advice, anime Jerusalem is hardly threatening to business (and religion is huge business in *Transmetropolitan's* future, as it is now). The insincerity of Jerusalem's message is driven home by the commercial bumper: "More wrong fun after these commercial messages for things you don't want!" (6.9), capturing the same level



of hipster irony that has driven Pabst Blue Ribbon into a sales renaissance. If I recognize that the commercials are trying to exploit me, it's okay to impulse shop, right? Just as capitalism has the ability to absorb criticism into itself and exploit it, branding Jerusalem, an opponent of greed and exploitation, benefits the corporate concern just as the "branding" of tramps as degenerate vectors of disease benefited local owners of industry. In this sense, the involuntary branding of Jerusalem need not even be thought of as an intentional strategy; rather, it is an immune reaction of that which is "in place" against Jerusalem's foreign body. By branding and thus incorporating Jerusalem, he can be made complicit with or without his leave<sup>61</sup>.

Each of the three branded bastardizations of Jerusalem follow a similar pattern. In "From the Mountain to the City: The Life and Work of Spider Jerusalem" (6.11), an action-adventure biopic that gets greenlit when Yelena "might have accidentally sold the rights to . . . [Jerusalem's] life story" (6.11), Jerusalem is depicted as a goateed journalistic action hero covering the Angels 8 riot that begins the series. All possible clichés are deployed when creating the fictionalized Jerusalem, robbing him of as much authenticity as is possible. Exchanges such as the following are common:

"We can stop the riot, Channon!"

"But how?"

"With this. [Holding up laptop.] Give me some space. I'm back now - and I can write the story that will stop it all." (6.11)

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<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that Jerusalem's rage and vile behavior is not itself a form of self-branding. Our culture is, of course, full of examples of individuals who have exploited "edginess" as a marketing gimmick, but Jerusalem, as the previous sections have explained, practices unpleasant personal habits for the purpose of marginalization rather than commodification. Arguing that Jerusalem's behavior is a form of self-branding is as weak as arguing that atheism is another form of faith or religion - atheism is the absence thereof, the default position prior to the addition of belief; Jerusalem's behavior operates as the absence commodification in order to be perceived as "out of place," rather than "in place" and thus purchasable.

Predictably, Channon, being a typical Hollywood heroine, offers to sleep with Jerusalem, an offer he "nobly" rejects because he claims to be "married to my work" (6.13), thus saving her "from a life of sin!" (6.13). The biopic even features a cameo from Jerusalem's headless son (further reinforcing the marginal body strategy discussed previously) and a teary "If I die, who will love my children?" from the noble Jerusalem. Thus, the image of Jerusalem is drawn into accord with standard Hollywood tropes of masculinity; even his message is simplified in the retelling. Rather than a complex, thoughtful column, the actor playing Jerusalem simply sums up his message for the viewer: "I'm telling them that it's . . . Wrong!" (6.14), helpfully holding up a divinely glowing laptop in what seems like a loose parody of the original *Star Wars* poster pose while declaring that "It's the Truth!" (6.14). Again, a caricature of the individual is created which, first, attempts to create a marketable identity capable of selling a lifestyle and the products associated with it while simultaneously stripping the original message of any authenticity and recasting it as a pitch for some product or another. The porn version of Jerusalem is really the apotheosis of the effort to create a branded human capable of selling toys and other stuff while appealing to a broad demographic. Played by one Dick Stone, the porn version of *Transmetropolitan*, titled, with typical porn industry wit, "I Hump It Here" (6.16), centers around an absurd (and rather transparent, almost impish) conversion of the otherwise marginal Jerusalem into a famous, desirable version of himself. Stone delivers such monologues as "I am a gentleman of letters and cannot accept bribes! But if you want my hard press just because I'm incredibly famous and rich, that's cool!" (6.17), and the retinue of sex partners (including his assistants and a female version of his editor) offer what can only be verbal versions of the thumbing of one's nose: "We can't understand why no one will have sex with you and women turn you down even on live citywide feeds!" (6.18). Thus, Jerusalem's identity is

thrice branded against his will; his self now commodified, Jerusalem becomes eminently consumable and represents all things to all people . . . and is thus unable to perform his original picaresque function.

While the prospect of encountering individuals who have been populated with fake versions of Jerusalem himself clearly poses a problem, Jerusalem himself has to contend with the same danger of multiphrenia (monophrenia?). Indeed, Jerusalem's consciousness is affected by these media representations, forcing him, as Debord suggests, to relate to himself through his images: Jerusalem's very understandable drug-induced revenge dream is constructed entirely film and television tropes. After a "drugbreak" resulting from his horror and outrage at having been so thoroughly co-opted, Jerusalem drops into a coma fantasy which stars a oversized (somewhere between 18 and 70 feet, if the *King Kong* reference featured later means anything) and heavily muscled (drawn by Frank Quitely) version of the journalist going on a rampage throughout the City. Jerusalem crushes the head of Royce, his editor, stomps on all of the women who have rejected his "charming sexual advances in the last two and a half years" (6.21) - the large crowd crushed beneath his foot argues for a 70-foot plus version - and unleashes a rain of bullets on the public that failed to actually read his column. The fantasy ends with Jerusalem, having scaled the facade of an Empire State lookalike, preparing to use the president as a suppository. Is a revenge fantasy really that liberating or empowering if it is forced to use building blocks purchased from the oppressor?

Road Cures: Social Remedies for Social Diseases

Ubu, Maria, and Jerusalem, then, are "carriers" of the only social disease that really matters to the picaro or picara: compromised authenticity. Ubu and Maria, populated by the monophrenic voice of their father, can't experience success or imagine alternatives to their present circumstances. Jerusalem, branded unwillingly and populated by bastardized versions of himself, is in danger of losing his own identity to the chorus while simultaneously experiencing difficulty drawing out those who have also been infected by Jerusalem's media progeny. But, "just as the new American picaresque appears as a diagnostic tool, it also presents the prescription of the road for the picaro and picara in need of recovery" (Sherrill 100): through a combination of mobility and positive multiphrenia it produces, picaros and picaras can repair compromised authenticity and once again engage positively with (and properly critique and demythologize) their cultural beats.

It should go without saying that one comfortable with negative multiphrenia, which I have defined as pseudo-varied mass of voices all originating from or participating in a single, limited point of view, stands little chance of escaping the trap. As Part 2 explained, picaros and picaras must have chaotic or, more to the point, *flexible* minds and personalities; selves that are rigid, uncomfortable with ambiguity, are not able to combat negative multiphrenia, too comfortable are they with the alternative. Chris Mooney, writing in *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science - and Reality*, cites Dan Kahan, Hank Jenkins-Smith, and Donald Braman's work on "Cultural Cognition of Scientific Consensus", a rather controversial paper that attempts to provide a cognitive model explaining why individuals reject otherwise solid scientific (or otherwise) information. Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, and Braman's study classified individuals, "based on their political and moral values, as either *individualists* or *communitarians*, and as either *hierarchical* in outlook or *egalitarian*" (43), with the hierarchical

outlook "believing that society should be highly structured and ordered, including based on gender, class, and racial differences" (43) and the individualistic "believing that we are all responsible for our own fates in life and people should be rewarded for their choices and punished for their faults" (43), the counterparts obviously believing the opposite. In short, individualist/hierarch worldviews tends to be very rigid, black and white, and inflexible. More to the point, such minds are unlikely to expose themselves to alternative points of view or competing streams of information. Bukatman, speaking in *Terminal Identity* of television's culpability in social control, points out that despite vast bodies of programming "the range of choice is illusory" (39). Bukatman, of course, makes something of an overstatement, but for individualist/hierarchs programming choice is very much illusory, as the worldview argues strongly against the consumption of variety. Of course, cultural cognition theory is far from criticism free, but a growing body of research suggests that the cognitive information is solid. Solid or not, it provides a helpful lens for thinking about successful picaros and picaras, who must be comfortable with abstracts and with a lack of absolutes, with relative positions, to combat negative multiphrenia<sup>62</sup>.

One might assume that solution is simply to take back these colonized mental spaces through direct guerilla action against the colonizing forces; indeed, this is common in fiction, however this is not a technique proper to picaro observers, who demythologize and catalogue rather than operate as footsoldiers (though picaresque methods can and do result in the changing

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<sup>62</sup> One notable consequence of this line of reasoning is that one of the "social ills" picaros and picaras might find themselves carrying and, hopefully, be cured of during their travels is the individualist/hierarch worldview itself. None of the SF picaros and picaras found in the four example texts find themselves with this particular malady, something not surprising considering that SF is a genre that does not tend to attract conservative thinkers either as authors or readers. (Abelard Lindsay comes close, but as his "conservative" phase lasts maybe three pages at the novel's beginning, it hardly seems significant enough to explore.) Regardless, picaros and picaras who begin victimized by conservative worldviews are guaranteed by the genre.

nature of space, as *Angel Station's* ending shows and as Jerusalem's activities show).

*Transmetropolitan* does, in fact, feature just such a guerilla action and, tellingly, it is not launched by a picaro or picara. Issue 20, "New City," features what is either a revolutionary group or performance art troupe (not that there is much difference anymore) who attempt to recontextualize a part of the City temporarily as a "technology-free zone" (4.33), similar to the Reclaim the Streets "impromptu street parties whose organizers are determined to briefly liberate public space from its captivity by ads, cars and cops" (Klein 21). The spokesman of this action, which involves cordoning off an area of the city with a glowing barrier tape and scrambling all telecommunications technology within, explains that, along with all its benefits, technology has "also made you forget how to be human. Technology-free zones base their continued operation on human-to-human interaction" (4.33). Shutting down technological mediation forces the people within the barriers to temporarily abandon transhuman or posthuman status and re-experience simple humanity. Tellingly, however, Jerusalem goes out of his way to escape this encounter, however brief it might have been, diving over the barrier before it is turned on. Jerusalem's reasons are plain enough: his purpose is to engage with the culture, not to reject it and shut it off. The picaresque solution must work to create a marginal space tangential to the dominant space, not simply destroy the dominant space in a cool action sequence and replace it with something else.

As one might expect from previous discussions of the importance of spatial violation in picaresque narratives, the solution to negative multiphrenia begins with mobility. Mobility does not automatically mean agency, for one can still be mobile within a scripted life. Jeter's *The Glass Hammer* features a protagonist who is a entirely mobile: he anchors a reality TV shows as he races cars across a desert, dodging defense systems. While he appears to be about as

empowered as a person can be, the novel reveals that his entire profession is engineered for the purposes of ratings - his empowerment through mobility is a sham. No, for mobility to matter it must involve the spatial violations discussed above. Moreover, mobility must allow for escape from those commodified "identity spaces" that facilitate negative multiphrenia. Lindholm explains a rather obvious point about Western society that, nevertheless, often goes unexamined by most people: "in this egalitarian, individualistic, and fervently capitalistic society, there are no ascribed hierarchies of authority, no aristocracy, no ancient origins to point to. The main way for people in the United States to distinguish themselves has always been through the purchase, accumulation, and display of possessions. All this stuff furnishes what has been called an 'identity space'" (53). A useful idea, the "identity space," but it seems obvious that this concept can and should certainly be extended beyond one's purchasing habits to one's viewing/participating habits. Locations and business can be seen as similar identity spaces. Do fast food restaurants not centrally locate televisions, often tuned to politically-conscious news programming? The boundaries are fluid and hard to determine, but one could easily draw a map of the more familiar parts of one's town or city highlighting places where certain voices are inescapable.

To be meaningful, mobility must facilitate escape from identity spaces, or, in my usage, spaces colonized by monolithic perspectives, and lead to entrance into places of competing or, at least, alternative voices and perspectives. By doing so, mobility can result in *positive* multiphrenia, in which a picaro or picara's exposure to competing voices and perspectives can, if not exorcise the dominant voices outright, then at least offer the deracinating voices of Others to offset negative effect (and, importantly, inoculate the individual against future exposures, pre-armed with a peanut gallery to heckle into irrelevance any voice with monolithic aspirations).

Sherrill observes that the standard picaresque trope of "'exile' onto the solitary course can become a means of leaving the resident 'others' behind, putting one's self out of reach, and the multitude of others presented to the picaro and picara on the road, because of their continuous movements, can be, must be, left behind episode by episode" (100-101). As previously mentioned, however, Sherrill is a bit quick to insistence on the picaro/picara as arch-individualist; by what logic would a picaro or picara leave behind the voices, i.e. *stories* and *perspectives*, of those he or she encounters just because the episodic narrative marches forward? There is a reason Hunter Thompson, through the voice of Duke, constantly recalls individuals he met in other places at other times: their stories and perspectives offer critical insight into the present. The anecdote Thompson recalls about the vagrant who wandered "around the country looking for whatever it was that we all thought we'd nailed down in the Sixties - sort of an early Bob Zimmerman trip" and was nabbed for vagrancy in Vegas (and summarily booted from the city) is intended to offer insight into the blind greed of Vegas's American Dream, a greed so "grossly atavistic that a really massive crime often slips by unrecognized," such as the wealthy drug dealers who breezed out of jail on bail before the Dylan-wannabe was booted from town. Duke, populated by a wealth of "minority reports," to borrow a term from Philip K. Dick, need not be subject to the majority voice and can engage reality all the more authentically because of it. One need not escape all voices; one need only find enough variety among them to generate marginal spaces in between.

*Angel Station: Loving the Alien*

Again, Williams's *Angel Station* offers an ideal illustration of mobility's role in generating positive multiphrenia. Percy explains several strategies by which "the sightseer [can] recover the



Grand Canyon" (48) from the all-pervasive voices of authority stripping the experience of authenticity. According to Percy, the experience "may be recovered by leaving the beaten track" (48), thus escaping "the approved confrontation of the tour and the Park Service" (48), or the experience may also "be recovered by a dialectical movement which brings one back to the beaten track but at a level above it" (48), meaning that one who has already experienced the tour from a point off the beaten track can now take an "approved" tour and defamiliarize his or her previous experience by use of the "familiar" paths of others. Indeed, the plot of *Angel Station* facilitates both of these tactics. Ubu and Maria, having been forced into debt by an economic system clearly designed to disenfranchise them, are forced to head out to the fringes of known space and beyond in search of lucrative singularities which might be captured and sold as starship drives. There they encounter Beloved, an alien consciousness, and her retinue of custom-grown workers. Beloved represents a genuinely different voice, one not contaminated by any of the perspectives of human space. For all the faults of Beloved's culture, her/its perspective authorizes a radically different view of reality, one counter to that of Consolidation. Perhaps the best analogy is an expansion of Percy's: it would be as if Garcia Lopez de Cardenas and his Hopi guides had lit upon the Canyon at one of the Havasupai tribe's villages. The encounter with the Canyon itself would be the same, but it would also be augmented with the perspectives of the Havasupai who lived there. Garcia Lopez de Cardenas would begin to experience a positive multiphrenia, becoming populated by the perspectives of the Havasupai and the Hopi, along with his own, none of which claimed supreme authority but worked instead in a liberating synergy.

Ubu's liberation will be discussed below, but worth mentioning is the impact of meeting Beloved on Ubu and Maria's return to human space, for they return "at a level above it" (48), as Percy said. Upon returning Maria is struck by the tragedy of her culture's death, something she

had been aware of but, as postmodern deadening of affect might predict, had not truly felt yet (recall the discussion of the shooter pilot who had killed himself and his family, discussed by Ubu and Maria as a confusing puzzle piece or tragic fact rather than the symptom that it was). After having her culture defamiliarized by the encounter with Beloved and the expurgation of the voice of Consolidation represented by her father, Maria is capable of having an authentic engagement with the tragedy of her culture's death: "Tears blinded her. She staggered off the street . . . Pain twisted in her chest" (237). She is overwhelmed by an understanding of the slow decline of shooter culture and its absorption into "Hiline culture" (237), which is a stand-in for globalization's absorption of any independent business into corporate monopolies. Her ability to both recognize and feel this loss is a function of her encounter with Beloved: "Stupid to mourn now, when you've known all along. Then she realized it was because she was outside it now. When she and Ubu were dying along with the rest, it was pointless to mourn. Who mourns their own death? But now *Runaway* was saved, but could not keep its own context alive" (237). Ostensibly it is the rich cargo of pharmaceuticals that *Runaway* brings back that offers Maria the latitude to think about her own situation, but the wealth is just the material effect of their encounter. As Sherrill notes, "[o]ne way to skirt the predisposed response, the intercessions between self and experience, is to get off the beaten path and into those areas not overlaid with prior images and ideas that precondition the terms of the engagement" (102). The same can be said of one's *return to* the beaten path, however, and Maria's escape from the images and voices of Consolidation that had dictated her ability to think about her own culture allow her to engage with the Now, as the shooters put it, via an empathy she was previously unable to access.

Ubu, by contrast, escapes the voices of Consolidation by embracing positive multiphrenia as a solution. After recognizing that "[h]e had mourned Pasco by imitating him, by trying to

complete the pattern" (348) - having essentially been programmed by his father's voice to fail in a way beneficial to Consolidation - he decided that it is "[t]ime . . . to learn from someone else" (349), which is to say populate his consciousness with other, more beneficial voices, and this he does in a very literal fashion. As has been mentioned, Ubu's genetic code was custom-built by his father, granting him an eidetic memory significantly better than even that of Beloved's, which has evolved to encompass the consciousnesses of thousands of workers she creates. Ubu is quite literally a biological machine designed to practice theory of mind, and it is this previously unused skill that he deploys against Beloved: "Beloved's pattern encompassed all her creatures. . . . He would understand this, Ubu thought, he would encompass its existence" (369), and so he does, "constructing Beloved in his mind, measure after measure" (349). This can be read as Ubu becoming populated with her voice; Gergen explains that multiphrenia is characterized by disparate voices that carry with them their own desires, arguments, truth claims, etc., and this is what Ubu gains by encompassing Beloved, another pattern with which to think about things. As he says, "I'm contaminated now. Beloved's a part of me, and I can't get rid of her. Her responses are going to be a part of mine forever" (376), recalling the infection motif that runs through these discussions. Unlike Sherrill's dismal take on this condition, Ubu considers it incredibly liberating: "Become an alien? . . . That's almost trivial. I'm going to be something better. Something better than human, too. . . . I'm going to be *everything* . . . I'll swallow Beloved, humanity, every perception, every potential. I won't ever stop being me . . . I'll just be everything else, too" (377). Instead of being populated by a single perspective or cluster of perspectives that amount to the same thing and that render the individual as a proxy extension of their agency, Ubu is aiming to be populated by a variety of perspectives to be used as tools, a kind of cloud identity that facilitates authenticity through unlimited dissenting opinions. The fatalistic voice of

his father can simply not be dominant, as it is now one perspective amongst many in the salad bar of engagement.

Ubu's ability to envision a utopian solution to the almost assured death of shooter culture is a direct result of his decision to populate himself with a chorus of voices, including those of his enemies. Marco, the patriarch of a shooter clan in direct competition with Ubu and Maria for the right to exploit Beloved and the same individual who outmaneuvered Pasco and led to his collapse, is one of the voices Ubu chooses to make his own. Ubu realizes that, in order to explain away Runaway's initial success after meeting the aliens, Marco "invented this fantasy about shooters who went off on their own, who helped each other and formed their own settlement and got around Consolidation. He could think of it, but he wouldn't do it himself. He didn't believe in it" (382). In this, Ubu recognizes the aborted beginnings of utopian thought, the almost-belief that an alternative was at least conceivable. Of course, Marco failed to act on this line of thinking, too infiltrated by the same voices that haunted Pasco to really believe that such a thing could succeed. Ubu makes the leap, however, declaring that he and his sister were "gonna have to believe in it for him" (382), and by absorbing his fantasy (along with his patterns of thought) "Marco . . . was going to become a part of him. Just like Beloved" (384). Sherrill argues that "the picaresque course provides a means not only to evict the all-too-numerous inhabiting voices that prevent necessary self-authorizations but also to discharge any one or more of those voices whose asserting 'expertise,' compelling inordinately, precludes the self's sovereign engagement" (102), but this is only half correct. Ubu has rejected the voice of victimization for which his father operates as inadvertent, almost branded proxy, but he only regains authenticity by repopulating his inner world with voices capable of thinking around Consolidation. Thus,

positive multiphrenia lays the groundwork for Ubu and Maria's alternative to *Angel Station's* stand-in for globalization.

*Transmetropolitan: Interiorem Vox Populi*

Like Ubu and Maria, Jerusalem also finds the solution to compromised authenticity through mobility. After finding himself unwillingly branded in issue 31, Jerusalem takes little time in recognizing the violence that has been done him or, rather, his ability to perform genuine picaresque engagements with his culture. "What they've done," Jerusalem observes, "is made me safe. They've made me their fucking pet. Defanged me . . . sucked out my Goddamn venom" (6.19), reasoning that "[a]ll they had to do is make me part of the game. Who's going to be scared of someone who's been turned into a fucking porno movie? Who's going to listen to someone like that?" (6.19). And, indeed, the first line of issue 32, "The Walk," is "You're in the way, Spider Boy" (6.30), muttered by angry walker who shoves past Jerusalem on sidewalk. The media immune system has worked: Jerusalem is no longer out-of-place but is rather just "[a]nother face in the crowd" (6.31). Regardless of his own complicity, or lack thereof, his branding has led to scripted responses from those he encounters - he can no longer perform the work of a picaro. For example, the issue sees Jerusalem walk past a wino who immediately screams "Spider Jerusalem! Spider Fucking Jerusalem! Sucking that glass tit! Sucking that inky media dollar dollar cock!" (6.33). This seemingly small event recalls every other encounter Jerusalem has had with marginal figures (some of whom have similarly been sitting in alleys) in the previous thirty-one issues, encounters such as that with the cryogenic revival Mary, with whom Jerusalem had meaningful conversations. A branded individual, self-branded or otherwise,

is denied the possibility of meaningful engagement. Realistically, how could a picaro or picara perceived as a media whore have even the slightest possibility of eliciting genuine responses from other people? Mobility provides a partial solution to this problem, largely because it provides access to competing voices. Immediately after his branding, Jerusalem recites his picaro's haiku - "Do what I always do. / Get the City under my feet. / Become alive again." (6.33) - and sets out to walk his beat, stating as he often does that he "only ever experience[s] this City properly on the street" (6.33). Even so, the proper experience Jerusalem finds is the hostile response described above; mobility alone is not enough to overcome such high-profile self-commodification.

The beginnings of a solution can only be found by seeking out positive multiphrenia, multiple encounters with the other that, like Burroughs's tactic of the cut-up, allow the branded voice of authority to be interrupted. Gergen explains that the "technologies of social saturation have . . . enabled a range of new voices to be heard, voices daring to question the old and institutionalized truths" (86), creating a threat to Modernist notions of self, and yet throngs of voices questioning institutionalized truth is a fine descriptor for the picaresque genre, never much concerned with pompous, unified senses of self. It is "in light of the increasing availability of 'other voices' [that] we find an increasing range of 'other truths'" (94); for Gergen, this explains the general postmodern rejection of absolute truth (a position reflected in poorly-reasoned assaults on scientific theory by such figures as Lyotard and Luce Irigaray), but a chorus of voices offering competing truths also has a clearly empowering potential.

Gergen speaks of a "pastiche personality" capable of operating as "a social chameleon, constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation" (150). Such a chameleon possesses

a flexibility that contains "an optimistic sense of enormous possibility" (150), as the "autonomous individual . . . largely responsible for the severe stresses of multiphrenia" (156) becomes replaced by a "relational self" (156) composed of different facets of self generated by the various relationships in which the person takes part. There is much to recommend Gergen's interpretation of the postmodern self, for along with the idea of a relational self comes the idea of a *responsible* self, one that owes a shared debt to the various social relationships (including, hopefully, the general brotherhood of man) in which an individual participates. I would also submit that a relational self grants the further benefit of a hedge against inauthenticity, for if "[e]ach of the selves we acquire from others can contribute to inner dialogues, private discussions we have with ourselves about all manner of persons, events, and issues" (71), then no single external authoritative voice is likely to usurp the rest without question. The decline of monolithic religions in the last fifty years is no doubt due to this very effect, for it is in the countries with the highest potential for social saturation that the authoritative voice of the church is questioned.

Positive multiphrenia is thus capable of acting like an internal media cut-up technique, protecting the mind from pervasive mind viruses. Bukatman, in *Terminal Identity*, speaks at great length of the cut-up's importance as a tool against the media spectacle fueling image addiction, arguing that it "becomes a critical weapon against the spectacular society" (40) by "scrambling . . . language . . . [in order to defamiliarize] it, revealing its pervasiveness and operant illusions" (40). Ritzer, interestingly, also recommends a kind of cut-up technique to avoid McDonaldized institutions, exhorting readers to "watch as little television as possible. . . . If you must watch one of the networks, turn off the sound and avert your eyes during commercials" (*McDonaldization* 201). The journey undertaken by picaros and picaras, however, is itself a kind of cut-up: "the

nature of the picaresque journey - the roving eye on its bumpy course - affords opportunities for the picaro to . . . regard life without ranking or distinguishing 'high' and 'low,' to familiarize the alien and defamiliarized the common" (Sherrill 104) and to make use of picaresque "tactics of reception" (104) to populate the self with other competing voices, though of course Sherrill doesn't see it *quite* this way. Regardless, it stands to reason that a form of literature that actively seeks to collapse the social categories of high and low should also position all of the voices and their beliefs, opinions, and arguments equally in the mind of the picaro or picara, insofar as all are subject to the same reverence and criticism. If life, in a world increasingly mediated by technology, is becoming more film-like, then positive multiphrenia is like installing the cast of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* into one's interface, always on hand to undercut whatever images flash before one's eyes.

Jerusalem, more so in fact than any other character from the example texts, is massively multiphrenic, in that he, as a journalist, is populated by the countless voices and stories of people he has studied. *Transmetropolitan* follows a structure somewhat similar to that of the *X-Files*, which divided its episodes between the progressively more incoherent mytharc stories involving alien conspiracies and the far more interesting and entirely episodic monster of the week episodes, each of which introduced a one-off creature for Mulder and Scully to fiddle around with. In addition to the issues chronicling Jerusalem's attempt to unseat a sitting president, *Transmetropolitan* features issues devoted to examining slices of life in the City - exactly the sort of apropos-of-nothing encounters one expects from the picaresque. Issue 6, "God Riding Shotgun," in which Jerusalem attends and generally menaces a convention devoted to new religions, has already been discussed, as has issue 7, "My Boyfriend is a Virus," which introduces the Foglet community of digitally uploaded consciousnesses (and, in the process,



interrogated the idea of posthumanism). These encounters exist in order for Jerusalem to demythologize present society, of course, but they also serve to provide him with a wealth of instructive perspectives. For instance, issue 25, "Here to Go," features a recollection about Mad Radhu Gumbeer, a bus driver young Jerusalem considered a hero (largely because "Gumbeer was a one-man arsenal" (5.15)). Jerusalem tells this story during an interview with a feedsite; while discussing defining moments in his life, he discusses Gumbeer in counterpoint to another story about the first time he learned about death. Gumbeer had apparently flattened a nun who rode her bike into an intersection, blindly expecting God to protect her, and in this event Jerusalem learned the humor of death. Morbid, perhaps, but this recollection is important because, instead of rattling off a list of accomplishments as the defining parts of his life, he rattles off a list of encounters. In the same issue, Jerusalem tells the very detailed story of an abused girl whom he met one night in a diner. Jerusalem explains that "[s]he's eighteen years old, she's beautiful, she's smart, she's a dancer, she's essentially goddamn perfect, and she spends every day trying to tamp down hysterical terror" (5.20) because her brother, who "systematically sexually abused her over a two-year period" (5.20), committed suicide by jumping in front of a train. Jerusalem doesn't state this, but the girl is drawn lightly, insubstantial against the background, and with clear slash marks on her wrists indicating that she killed herself afterward because she loved and missed the person who abused her. The voices he internalizes are complex and contradictory and, as such, far more real than the engineered, nuance-less voices that populate, for example, Fox News. Indeed, like Ubu, Jerusalem actively attempts to populate himself: when he begins his walk(s), his expressly stated strategy is to "[j]ust let it talk, in all its languages: the migratory patterns of the cars; the scratchmix of brand names in the comet's tail of perfumes trailing the office girls headed out for lunch; the snap and crackle and teenage distort of

musics clashing like gangs in the high apartment block windows" (6.34). Like Ubu, Jerusalem is a machine for internalizing voices.

It is, in fact, his efforts to internalize the City's marginal voices that allows him to find the solution to his branding problem. As Jerusalem walks the City in "The Walk," he begins to notice growing problems in the City's conversations with itself: "There's dissonance, hurried moves, panicky missteps. The tone of the City is changing. Like we've all wandered into the wrong film" (6.36). Many things tip him off to this tonal shift, from the day-to-day conversations on the street with which he is intimately familiar to an encounter with a recently shut down "Amnesty Interplanetary" building. The organization, a clear stand-in for Amnesty International, has been shut down by the government, which cites "dissidence and other behaviors inimical to the preservation of mainstream American life and national security" (6.36). This exercise of governmental power (an example of the conservative/authoritarian administration of Gary Callahan, whom Jerusalem ultimately ruins) can be read as the overwriting of the City's pluralistic voice with a singular voice of authority, a replacement of positive multiphrenia with negative monophrenia. Shortly after, Jerusalem also witnesses riot tanks attack the Fairmead apartment block alluded to previously; the City government had moved the inhabitants in order to renovate the buildings, then reallocated the funds and left the buildings "abandoned" (but for squatters), ripe for destruction. The tanks give no notice, open no dialogue; they simply begin rolling into the buildings. In the series, this type of activity - whether it is as severe as the demolition of a block of apartments occupied by squatters or as subtle as the White House D-notice that effectively censors the media - is part of a larger effort to shut out alternative voices, depopulating the City's conversation with itself. Jerusalem realizes that this growing trend of censorship is harming not only him but the City, and, while in the Nighthawk's analogue

mentioned previously, finds a solution. A conversation with one of the Hopper's waitresses (no "backdoor beauty" tactics or resultant cut phone lines in this version of Hunter Thompson, luckily) reminds Jerusalem of the existence of The Hole, which the waitress describes as "a pirate operation . . . [who] move around a lot" (6.43) to avoid legal harassment. Jerusalem decides that he can "leak" his otherwise censored subversive columns to this site; after doing so, the lines "Get the city under my feet. / Become alive again" (6.45) are repeated, stressing the success of his action, which has begun the process of escaping the branded identity that prevented authentic engagement by decoupling his voice from that of the media apparatus that had co-opted it. Percy's technique of returning to the beaten track but at a higher level is, interestingly, used by Jerusalem during the subsequent interviews generated by his leaked columns; having his authenticity made inauthentic by branding, inauthenticity suddenly becomes jarringly authentic. When approached by feedsite journalists after his column leak, Jerusalem abandons the image of himself the branded version suggests (which, sadly, is fairly close to the mark) and, instead, behaves the perfect gentleman: "See how good I'm being? No nasty words, not too many unchecked run-on sentences, chopped conventional language. Not the Spider the media have given them, you see. Not a cartoon monster. They have to take me more seriously because I appear to be human" (6.47). Moreover, Jerusalem counteracts the monolithic voice of government authority at the same time, ensuring that the City maintains some degree of positive multiphrenia (represented by his voice and the marginal voices he proxies via his journalism) in the face of authoritarianism.

The I-Pollen subplot, largely understood as either a commentary on future shock or a representation of the effects of drug use on Hunter Thompson's mind and body (since, in *Transmetropolitan*, medicine has rendered all drugs save information harmless), can, through the

lens of multiphrenia, be seen as something of an objective correlative for the concept of authenticity itself. Much of the series' frenetic energy in the final issues is driven by Jerusalem's fear that he will succumb too soon to an information infection that approximates Bukatman's terminal identity concept. Jerusalem's doctor explains that "I-Pollen works on your mind. We can't get at it because it's a bunch of information, electrical pulses" (8.88), continuing to explain that 98 percent of those infected suffer from "[c]ontinual cognition damage. Memory loss. Intensified hallucination. Eventual motor control damage. A similar arc to Alzheimer's" (8.89). Only a slim one percent make a full recovery. While it is tempting to see I-Pollen as the unfiltered voice of the City proper, especially when one recalls that the reader's first experience of the City is a communications sphere that one enters long before one reaches the physical City, this is a mistake for several reasons. The City as Jerusalem describes it over the course of the series is not located in the media voice, which he actively fights against; rather, it is located in the plurality of voices that make up the City's streets, some disenfranchised like Mary the Revival, some quite empowered like Tico the Foglet, but few of whom find representation in the media howl. Moreover, the media voice is depicted as largely hostile to the diversity of the City, partly due to governmental repression and partly due to pure disinterest. Regardless, the media voice and the City's voice are quite separate, just as the spectacle is not society, however much it might be in the spectacle's interest for the public to mistake it for society proper. Rather, I-Pollen should be understood as an unfiltered distillation of the voice of the media, which is thus the monophrenic voice of authority so dangerous to authentic engagement. This may appear to be a bit of a stretch in understanding the Informational Pollen to which Jerusalem is first exposed during his visit to the Farsight community in issue 9, since it is cast as a futuristic drug banned for twenty years. However, when Jerusalem is first exposed to it, the Farsight community (which

is a special cultural preserve used to explore potential future societies) is using it to deliver a month's worth of news in seconds. This ties I-Pollen, at least in terms of use, to the buy-bomb first seen in issue 5, "What Spider Watches on TV." One could easily imagine the initial uses of I-Pollen: drilling information such as advertisements, "objective" news, and entertainment past one's mental defenses directly into uncritical grey matter. I-Pollen is a delivery mechanism for an overpopulated self from a single source; his triumph over it, revealed in the last issue, can be understood as a function of his positively populated brain, much as Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are thought to be staved off by mental exercise. Considering the emphasis the series places on Jerusalem's "anomalous," out-of-place brain, which is only out-of-place because he uses it, like any good picaro, to fully access the social panorama, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is this unique, positively multiphrenic mind that saves him from I-Pollen degeneration.

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Bukatman, writing on Chaykin's *American Flagg!*, argued that "Ruben Flagg is thus positioned within the society of the spectacle in three distinct ways: as victim . . . as decoder/mythologist (his ability to see the spectacle as spectacle), and as controller/producer" (57), going so far as to call Flagg "a hero for these postmodern times" (58). I would contend that Jerusalem, Ubu, Maria, Lindsay, Freya, and a host of others are picaros and picaras for these postmodern times for much the same reason. They are victims, not solely of the spectacle but of any and all social ills that threaten authenticity and meaningful engagement. They are decoders and mythologists, though perhaps it is more accurate to say that they are *demythologists*, stripping away the illusions of society while offering a minority report to counteract the negative

multiphrenia that is increasingly social ill number one. However, unlike Flagg, who captures a pirate TV station and broadcasts his own pirate signal to fight the spectacle, these picaros and picaras are not, strictly speaking, controllers or producers; like Lindsay's slippery alien friend, they tend to escape such central roles, preferring to speak from the margins (Jerusalem does, after all, end the series back at his mountain retreat). Rather, these picaros and picaras are navigators, charting the complex territory of postmodern society as Sherrill suggests, but also sniffing out escape routes from the homogenizing behemoth that our increasingly rationalized society has become. Claudio Guillén said that “[t]he picaresque would return during days of irony and discouragement—times less favorable than the nineteenth century to the plans of the bold individual. In the twentieth century, as in the Spain of Philip II and the Germany of the Thirty Year’s War, the career of the rogue would once more disclose an awareness of civilization as oppression” (105). Indeed, the SF picaresque has emerged for precisely this reason: to map the ills that oppress, to demythologize the mythos upon which the ills depend, and to chart courses to a cure . . . or at least to hint that such a cure is imaginable.

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