CONCLUSION

American cyberpunk, as is evident from the preceding chapters, has undergone major shifts in its approach to envisioning the future. From a counterculture, upbeat magnification of the class conflict between a radically estranged future city owned by corporations and outlawed hacker heroes, it gradually shifted its focus from the celebratory relinquishing of the material body for immaterial existence to an exploration of the renegotiation of gendered lives and racialized bodies and architecture in a cyberpunk future. While this shift was in no way an organic extension of the earlier approach, the critiques of classic cyberpunk soon exhorted newer writers to emerge with a renewed focus on contemporary social concerns beyond those faced by the "straight white males". And hence, while the classic cyberpunk strain cannot be said to have disappeared entirely, cyberpunk, as understood by its readers and critics, has been substantially altered to accommodate alternative perspectives on gender, sexuality and race, so far pushed into the peripheries by a selective discourse.

Hence, while authors such as William Gibson, Neal Stephenson and Bruce Sterling have continued to write cyberpunk fiction that does not offer a reading of gender, sexuality and/or race as its primary focus, new authors, such as Maureen F. McHugh, Melissa Scott, Linda Nagata, Paolo Bacigalupi, among many others, have attempted to make address their intricate re-inscribing into a technologized future.

The resulting shift in focus has had a major stylistic impact on the subgenre. Previously infatuated with a noir, leather-clad, punk-neon washed Oriental architecture that focused on straight, white men battling *zaibatsus* on their computers, postcyberpunk introduced often non-white, non-male, non-straight, and non-Japanese world-building in a Second Wave of cyberpunk that emerged in the 1990s, which I choose to call Postcyberpunk. This postcyberpunk wave shifted the location of the future from a Techno-orientalist vision

of Japan to a plethora of random Third-World countries, and brought to the fore women, cyborgs, and sexual minorities as central characters. The characters, unlike the classic cyberpunk characters, were mostly not a part of the punk subculture, or in any explicit way counter-cultural elements partaking drugs or any illegal activity. Most of them had regular jobs, and were visually no different from familiar people walking the streets today. While the setting was still cyberpunk in its entrenchment of technology informed by capital, the degree of estrangement was considerably decreased.

Moreover, cultural exchanges between America and Japan in the post-World War II era, fueled by the increasing availability of cultural content through various formats such as DVDs, CDs, the ease of access to virtual content, and the possibility of profiting from the exchange through Hollywood initiatives, Japanese cyberpunk, a counterpart to American cyberpunk, gained wider recognition.

Otaku, or an obsessed fandom of manga and anime, that had so far been an entity limited to Japanese consumption, became an overnight reality among Americans, with its newfound synonymity in coolness. cyberpunk, that had once widened its literary scope to accommodate postcyberpunk even as it altered certain fundamental stylistics and assumptions that had come to define it in the first place, was now once again stretched to subsume under its wider meaning Japanese cyberpunk.

Japanese cyberpunk, unlike American cyberpunk, had never witnessed these waves, and had developed, in an ahistorical manner, simultaneously experiencing a burst of pre-cyberpunk, post-cyberpunk, classic cyberpunk, speculative fiction, and so on. Clearly, it did not fit within the well-established definitions of cyberpunk, which, by now, has already become a canon in itself.

Thus, an increased focus on Japanese cyberpunk, from literary critics, *otaku*, and American commercial interests led to another cultural inquiry into race – a comparison of Japanese identity as seen through an American lens, and Japanese lens. This enquiry is important because it causes a fundamental break in the definition of cyberpunk itself, and forces the reader to engage with the basics of any literary genre – defining its scope and limits. Japanese cyberpunk was clearly identifiable as cyberpunk, while eschewing many stylistic and cultural elements, causing a drastic shift in our perception of the very idea of cyberpunk.

These two cyberpunks, then, become contesting spaces for what should be considered cyberpunk in the first place. For a Japanese subgenre that is so identifiable in many core elements such as the engagement of the body and the mind with invasive technology, a radical degree of social breakdown owing to the changing nature of technology and human life, and the need to rearrange old ways of living to seamlessly merge into the future, it is impossible to separate Japanese cyberpunk from the general understanding of the term.

The fact that it rarely proposes a quintessential noir, dystopian backdrop, often setting the future in a familiar present-day landscape, only with taller buildings and more sophisticated machines, and with a far more complex and radical engagement of the discourses of the body with technology, inclusion of Japanese cyberpunk within the larger framework would lead to a possible reframing of the cyberpunk canon.

OPENING THE CAN(ON):

The American Heritage Dictionary, in its most relevant interpretation of the term "canon", defines it as "an authoritative list, as of the works of an author" and "a basis for judgment; standard; criterion". Toril Moi, a feminist theoretician points that according to the

canon, "the great author is great because he (occasionally even she) has managed to convey an authentic vision of life" and that "great literature" is a "representative experience" (77).

The canon therefore implies connotations of aesthetic pleasure, and authenticity of experience, hence, conferring on it an undeniable, uncontested authority by virtue of exclusion of a vast chunk of alternative narratives. This privileging of the canon also means that alternative narratives are not just excluded from the stature of possessing a higher quality, they are also rendered inauthentic, and hence, marginal in terms of value and the serious attention they deserve. Exclusion from the canon, then, is a state of illegitimacy.

While scholars have long debated the representative ability of the canon, it has long been established that the issues surrounding a canon are ideological in nature, rather than plainly pedagogical or literary (Frye 1957). While affirmative discussions on the need to revise it periodically, and the politics of canon formation, with Marxist, Feminist and Race-based critics of the formation of the canon abound, it is a curious thing that such a revision has so far not affected the American cyberpunk canon. A further remarkable fact is that while the revision of the classic cyberpunk canon to assimilate the postcyberpunk productions was fluid and smooth, the same revisioning has not been extended to Japanese cyberpunk.

As Wendell Harris (1991) observes, there are multiple definitions of 'canon', one of which is an individual or group endeavor to define a body of texts that serves a particular function, and becomes representative of its own culture. Harris opens his paper controversially:

The canonical facts about the canons of English and American literature, are, first, that there are no canons and never have been; second, that there have necessarily always been canons; and third, that canons are made up of readings not of

disembodied texts. What is contradictory in that statement results from play on different connotations of the word canon – a critical strategy that is constantly, though often more subtly, in use. As with many another critical term, the first step in understanding canon is to unpack its meanings (110).

Hence, as Harris note, the focus of canon is not so much authority as function (110), further clarifying, 'the functions a particular selection was apparently intended to perform'. (115) Lauter, moreover, locates the function of the canon in its dominant culture, noting, "the literary canon is, in short, a means by which culture validates social power". (435)

The question of the formation of the canon, then, centres around the term "representation". Who is to be represented, and thereby, who is too marginal to be worthy of representation? Who is the canon supposed to represent? And in our current study, whom does the cyberpunk canon attempt to represent? And thereby, whom does the cyberpunk refuse to represent, and why?

As to the first question, "Who is to be represented?", American cyberpunk, as discussed in the preceding chapters, represented a very conservative Western perspective on the future as a site of Oriental oppression. Considering the range of paranoid arguments centred around the idea of the ruthless Japanese present in contemporary politics, and a similarly grim future in cyberpunk imagination, or the subsequent Third-world futures that offered themselves as a foil to American greatness, it is apparent that the function of the formation of the canon was to sustain a paranoid stance on the non-Western traditions capable of surpassing the USA in the future. While I do not wish to imply that the canonization of cyberpunk was a conspiracy or a deliberate attempt to marginalize the Asians, I assume the power of cultural influences that led to the writing and popularity of the

texts in the first place, created an internalization of the sentiment, and led to the contribution of such a sentiment in the formation of the canon.

While analyzing the conspicuous absence of Afro-American writers in most American literary canons, Lauter observes that "fundamental organizing principles have seldom been altered to accommodate the fact that the significant literary work of African Americans cannot be understood as an expression of "European culture" in an "American environment" – to use Norman Foester's formulation" (Foester 678) (Lauter 438). The same argument can also be extended to Japanese cyberpunk, which, barring the superficial elements of cyberpunk texts, shares barely any ideological premises on which American cyberpunk is built, and which is generally accepted as "cyberpunk". My contention is that American cyberpunk being understood and accepted as cyberpunk is problematic, as it not only overlooks other cyberpunk literature produced by other cultures, but also denies the existence of a variant that is consumed profusely in the US itself, and which has been the basis of so many of its inspired works, or plain rip-offs.

It is in fact curious to note that cyberpunk, in its essence, was a counter-cultural disruption in what was considered the canonical Science Fiction writing, and it was only with a wide readership combined with its popularity in critical leadership as "representative of current times" that it became a canon in itself. Postmodern in its roots, in that it "favours bricolage or pastiche to original production, the mixing of styles and genres, and the juxtaposition of 'low' with high culture", and its postmodern characteristics of "playful and ironic" rather than the modernist "sincere or earnest" (2), cyberpunk was, in fact, a fertile open ground for all countercultures speculating on the future.

Postmodernism can be seen, as Cornel West states, as "a product of significant First World reflections upon the decentring of Europe that take such forms as the demystification

of European cultural predominance and the deconstruction of European philosophical edifices" (391).

The exclusion of Japanese cyberpunk, then, points to a number of assumptions: one, the Japanese outlook on life (influenced by war-time images, Shinto and Buddhist practices), their production style (the counter-clockwise reading of manga, the 2D hand-sketches as the basis of anime as against Disney's 3D models, the congruence between the visuals of manga and anime) and their media (manga and anime across demographic categories) provided no alignment with dominant Western modes of narration (novel, Disney, and paranoid outlook on the Orient), and in fact, disrupted the Western imagination of not just the future, but also of themselves and the Orient.

While Techno-orientalism as a conscious, or perhaps subconscious part of their literary efforts has already been proven, and also repeated in most postcyberpunk texts despite the removal of Japan, it is highly unlikely that the same nation that is an object of fear and hatred would be included in the canon.

Apart from the US and Japan, the output of cyberpunk by other cultures is almost nil. The third most prolific form of Science Fiction is Afro-futurism, which again has barely produced any cyberpunk work of consequence. Other countries, despite their own Science Fiction traditions, have hardly entered cyberpunk as a subgenre. Given the paucity of other productions, it is natural that with Japanese cyberpunk being cast aside, American cyberpunk is bound to become representative of "cyberpunk" in general, which I find enormously problematic, as it comes across as another form of Saidian Othering.

The research questions that I had begun my study with, were to examine cyberpunk for the following ideas: one, to examine how cyberpunk was distinct from other modes of

Science Fiction, in its approach towards technology, and the fate of human life in a world where fast-paced changes in technology have altered social and political systems within a span of less than a decade. While the cyberpunk futures, irrespective of their engagements with race or gender, seem very far away, one only needs to look at certain technologies that have altered our ways of thinking in a very short time – such as the internet, reproductive and medical advances, and telecommunication.

Within the textual frame of cyberpunk, however, it was remarkable that classic cyberpunk died a natural death, followed by a revival in a stunningly different postcyberpunk avatar exploding with multiple marginalized identities as the core of these narratives. Hence, another question I wanted to address was to explain the transition from classic to postcyberpunk in a matter of less than a decade, and to trace the impact of burgeoning social movements on the way the narratives restructured themselves.

This also prompted me to ask what the genre meant by feminist cyberpunk, and whether there was a specific feminist slant to the term, in view of the expanding meanings of the term to include non-Western feminism, gender studies, ecocriticism, and the like. Hence, another endeavor, or research question, was to tease out the implications of the word 'feminist' in what was formerly known as 'feminist cyberpunk'.

Along with a critique of eschewing an examination of gender, classic cyberpunk was also accused of being a vehicle for Techno-orientalist leanings in its portrayal of Japan, a facet that I have examined in the subgenre, while also extending the same analysis to postcyberpunk works that apparently seem to have left Japan alone.

While Japan was the location of a conservative American future as well as contemporary paranoia, I was compelled to seek Japanese impressions of themselves in their

own cyberpunk works. Self-reflection, in contrast with the reflection of a colonial and future enemy, I assumed, ought to have a vastly different narrative to tell about themselves, a point that I have explored through the imagination of Japan as the location of the future in Japanese manga and anime, and other forms of popular cyberpunk culture, i.e. cyberpunk games.

The prolific output of Japanese cyberpunk and the vast popularity it enjoys in USA, coupled with this vast difference in the way Japan has been imagined in these two cultural spaces, i.e. American and Japanese cyberpunk, despite the fact that they have a common understanding of what cyberpunk is – a near-future earth where embedded technology would radically alter human life in all its aspects – led me to question the exclusion of Japanese cyberpunk entirely from the canon of cyberpunk. The question I am compelled to ask, is whether the exclusion amounts to another covert form of Othering, whereby differing voices, representations and ideas are silenced and rendered invisible.

The formation of canon, as has been widely debated, is far from an academic exercise, and the exclusion of such a widely available form is suspicious.

Also, given that most postcyberpunk authors are female (their sexual orientation is unknown), and white, another question that needs to be addressed is whether their place as White American women have shaped postcyberpunk the way it has – in its radical transformation in its engagement with gender and sexuality, while reiterating the Techno-orientalist stance on other Third-World countries. With the exception of Paola Bacigalupi, a White American male author, none of the authors studied here have moved beyond traditional Orientalist representations of their non-Western locations.

This thesis, therefore, undertakes a two-fold research perspective: on one hand, American and Japanese cyberpunk, in their more prominent, popular forms of cultural media

(novels, manga, anime and video games) are read to understand and analyze their widely different perceptions of gender and cultural identity; on the other hand, a naturally visible comparison of American and Japanese representations and envisionings of gender and cultural identity are studied within their historical, political and economic contexts, aligning them with mainstream literary perspectives on these issues.

The result of this attempt is two-fold – one, on the internal changing landscape of the American classic cyberpunk tradition from the 1980s to a postcyberpunk shift after the 1990s, to the present, and an asynchronous non-linear Japanese tradition of cyberpunk that, right from the 1980s, falls in the Western connotation of postcyberpunk; second, on a comparative look at American and Japanese cyberpunk reading their representations of gender, sexuality and race, embedded within the classic themes of posthumanity, postmodernism, and individual identity crisis.

Ultimately, the thesis emerges to have a three-pronged approach – one, to study American and Japanese cyberpunk from the perspective of gender and cultural identity, in their available forms within their own histories; two, to examine the possible political-economic-cultural contexts to the emerging differences/similarities in a comparative attempt; and three, to examine if the common canonical understanding of the subgenre *cyberpunk*, is challenged in a significant way, owing to these differences – if so, to further examine the causes of the formation of the canon, and offering a more inclusive alternative to it.

While some answers, in the form of new patterns, have emerged, it is also evident that more research can be done in the examination of cyberpunk in games, anime, and literature, for a deeper understanding of these cultural forces that shape our understanding of widely-debated categories, such as gender, and race. No comprehensive, systematic research on cyberpunk games has been carried out so far to analyse the representations of gender and

race. Discourses on the representation of gender is also far easier to come by than discourses of cultural identity in cyberpunk, and while there are substantially powerful yardsticks like the Bechdel and Mako Mori tests to signify the role of female characters, no such test has been built so far to put race or cultural identity in such a context.

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