INTRODUCTION

Cyberpunk is defined in Encyclopaedia Britannica as "A science-fiction subgenre characterized by countercultural antiheroes trapped in a dehumanized, high-tech future"(Cyberpunk), and the Oxford dictionary defines it as "a genre of Science Fiction set in a lawless subculture of an oppressive society dominated by computer technology" (Cyberpunk). While both these definitions loosely sum up the controversial subgenre and there is a general consensus on the broad concepts that form the core ideas, there is no conclusive, comprehensive definition of what cyberpunk is.

In 1992, Frances Bonner broke down cyberpunk into four core elements that most people agree with – the "four Cs" – computers, corporations, crime and corporeality (191). While the first three can be termed plot devices, corporeality is considered the prevalent theme around which the protagonist's anxieties revolve. Taken together, the genre can be summed up as a dystopian urban technologized future assailed by mega-corporations wielding power through technology, more specifically computer/virtual reality, where marginalized anti-hero figures resort ambivalently to crime to subvert the power status-quo, and in the process, face their dilemmas of embodiment and corporeality.

The term "cyberpunk" was coined by Bruce Bethke, appearing as a title of his story in 1983. It gained popularity by Gardner Dozois, who identified a subgenre with the title "Cyberpunk" in an article published in *The Washington Post* in 1985 (Dery 75). Bruce Sterling, however, in his "Preface to Mirrorshades" elaborates better on the defining features:

> …certain central themes [that] come 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 - techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of self (346).

> …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 (348).

> … [m]any drugs, like rock and roll, are definite high-tech products (346).

Further, he mentions that cyberpunk "has little patience with borders" (xiv), a quote that has created confusion for all the wrong reasons. A more detailed dissection of the term becomes thus necessary.

The term is derived from two words, *cybernetics* and *punk*, shortened to *cyberpunk.* The "cyber" aspect refers to the invasion of high-tech technology that has upset the boundaries of flesh and machine, while the "punk" aspect, derived from "the anti-social rebel or hoodlum" (Elmer-Dewitt) hardcore rock bands of the '70s and '80s such as The Sex Pistols or The Nihilistics, is representative of the underground social rebellion, the "low-life" subversive culture that revels in the society's disapproval of them. The punk in literature, though, is more akin to a symbolic figure of "counterculture" and "street-level anarchy" (Sterling xii) and is symptomatic more of an attitude and mode of dressing – the black leather, that became a "Movement totem since the early days" (Sterling xi) - than to music. Punk music, though had been an inspiration to classic cyberpunk writers, was more of a homage than the inclusion of a musical ethos (such as the tribute Gibson pays to The Velvet Underground in *Neuromancer*) or an attribute enhancing the stylistic features of the cyberpunk architecture.

The February 1993 issue of *Time Magazine* defined cyberpunk as:

> With virtual sex, smart drugs and synthetic rock'n'roll, a new counterculture is surfing the dark edges of the computer age. …They call it cyberpunk, a late-20th century term derived from CYBERNETICS, the science of communication and control theory, and punk, an antisocial rebel or hoodlum. Within this odd pairing lurks the essence of cyberpunk's international culture - a way of looking at the world that combines infatuation with high-tech tools and disdain for conventional ways of using them. Originally applied to a school of hard-boiled science-fiction writers and then to certain semi-tough computer hackers, the word cyberpunk now covers a broad range of music, art, psychedelics, smart drugs and cutting-edge technology." (Elmer-Dewitt).

The subgenre, then, is marked by several features – a grim high-tech future where class conflicts are magnified by reckless capitalism, and where loner criminal hackers and other anti-hero figures battle capitalistic Goliaths. These corporations wield unlimited power through the use of invasive technology – a technology that does not respect the boundaries of flesh, and where the fine line between crossing these boundaries and violating them is slowly blurred. While the urban landscape becomes the location of social dissent and the melding of “meat” and “metal” (Gibson 36), the body becomes the site of conflicts and anxieties of reality and embodiment.

It is this inner conflict that is the real hero of cyberpunk, this dilemma over what reality is, and what corporeality is in a world where technology is not merely a facility, but an integral part of the body and the mind. The mechanical nature of technology, instead of reinforcing the differences between flesh and metal, subverts one’s notions about the nature of life itself. No longer confined to a state of inanimateness, technology seeks to fuse itself with life, and questions our ideas of life and death, mind and matter, and tangible reality and

virtual reality. Set in the dystopian urban crime culture, cyberpunk plots are written in a hard-boiled detective style featuring the anti-hero turn to techno-crime in order to survive, or battle with a rich, corrupt, capitalistic corporation, commenting, thus, on class conflicts as well as anxieties of embodiment.

About these specific and uniform type of characters cyberpunk depicts, Lawrence Person says:

> Classic cyberpunk characters were marginalized, alienated loners who lived on the edge of society in generally dystopic futures where daily life was impacted by rapid technological change, an ubiquitous datasphere of computerized information, and invasive modification of the human body (Person).

Originally, the term cyberpunk as envisioned by Bethke was supposed to stand for a protagonist who was "a young, technologically facile, ethically vacuous, computer-assisted vandal or criminal", a trope that has become a staple for the classic cyberpunk characters.

The uproar about class conflicts is understandable. Since the demise of socialism, everything we feared about communism – that we would lose our houses and savings and be forced to labor eternally for meager wages with no voice in the system – has come true under capitalism (Sparrow 21). The future, then, especially one in the hands of cybernetics and computers and mega-corporations, has no reason to give us hope. The only glimmer of hope might be the underground resistance, wielded by those surviving on the margins and embracing an amorality comparable to the machine's (in)sensitivity - the punks who took technology by its horns. Rather than endorsing a return to nature, cyberpunk advocates embracing technology to subvert its power structures from within, while still maintaining an

ambivalent, if not paranoid, perspective on intelligent technology. Bruce Sterling, elaborating on this odd marriage between technology and social unrest, says:

> Technical culture has gotten out of hand. The advances of the sciences are so deeply radical, so disturbing, upsetting and revolutionary, that they can no longer be contained. They are surging into culture at large; they are invasive; they are everywhere. The traditional power structure, the traditional institutions, have lost control of the pace of change.
>
> And suddenly a new alliance is becoming evident: an integration of technology and the 1980s counterculture. An unholy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized dissent – the underground world of pop culture, visionary fluidity, and street-level anarchy (Storming 345).

This "unholy alliance" that Sterling talks about has its perils, though. The melding of chrome in flesh must alter, or at least probe the fear of being robotized, losing one's uniqueness, and thus, one's humanity. Much like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it is the horror of becoming a stranger to oneself, the looming possibility of becoming a monster in the quest of resurrecting the dead parts or creating them anew. As Francisco Collado Rodriguez explains:

> Flesh and machine fuse their matters into new beings that lure readers and spectators while also generating their innermost fears of and disgust towards the posthuman results that such fusion brings about. Into this dispute postmodernism has invited that other current motif of our culture: the instability of the self, a motif that problematizes a previous one: the importance of the individual" (70).

With its emphasis on the perils of globalization, classic cyberpunk, curiously, never questions the rise of capitalism – while it attempts to subvert the power status-quo, it never

attempts to do so out of a revolutionary zeal – the intent of the hacker hero is solely to survive, and is marked by the absence of any concerns beyond those directly concerning him.

To Terence Whalen, it is symptomatic of wider American sentiments, particularly "Reagan's America":

> Emerging as it does in the context of late capitalism, cyberpunk is both inspired and stunted by the social process which enables thought to be alienated from its producer and exchanged as a commodity. The grimmest cyberpunk is haunted by the suspicion that information is not merely the socially average form of knowledge, but rather the form taken by capital in the signifying environment (79).

More critically, Roger Luckhurst situates cyberpunk within the realm of the American obsession with militaristic development and the 1980s Star Wars program, saying:

> It is important to convey that Science Fiction was as ideologically driven as any other field of cultural production in the 1980s. Whilst most critical commentary has been on the postmodern/Science Fiction convergence, cyberpunk was formulated in the way it was precisely because of the prominence of the Science Fiction megatext in the fantasy life of the American New Right (202).

Fredric Jameson too, in discussing cyberpunk's links to postmodernism and political reality, remarks that cyberpunk is "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (Cultural Logic 157). While cyberpunk draws its material from contemporary political-economic sentiments and simultaneous cultural concerns of alienation and anxiety, it is noteworthy to remember that computers were yet to reach private homes, the internet we know today was beyond most people's imagination, and AIs were but a

distant possibility. And yet, it was common knowledge, given the advancement of science in the West in general and in Japan in particular, that the future would be here soon.

What sets cyberpunk apart from its predecessors (many of which had distinct cyberpunk elements as early as the '40s and the '50s) was that it melded the distinction between "hard" and "soft" Science Fiction, or what Swanwick more appropriately calls "humanist" Science Fiction. While hard Science Fiction focused more on the kind of technology the future would produce, and weaved a thrilling story in its backdrop, it swiftly passed by social dilemmas of any kind – the society was hardly its focus. Humanist Science Fiction, on the other hand, paid only lip service to the science part and focused solely on the social impact part – its science was often implausible, its world more a product of fantasy with nominal science to justify its categorization, and its entire emphasis lay on cultural concerns, particularly feminist and queer concerns, while reaching a refined, polished literary level of narrative style mostly unattained by Hard Science Fiction.

Swanwick defines it as "literate, often literary fiction, focusing on human characters who are generally seen as frail and fallible, using the genre to explore large philosophical questions, sometimes religious in nature" (23). While classic cyberpunk has refrained from indulgence into a literary mode of writing, it comes close to melding with the humanist mode in its quest for merging high-end technology with existential concerns in a seamless narrative, without lapsing unduly to either side. Consequently, Science Fiction, which had been so far notorious for being fantastic stories draped loosely in science bearing little resemblance to real life, or positing alternative worlds too far removed from what was possible, was now hailed by a section of readers and critics alike, for being uncannily close to the real world while simultaneously extrapolating into a highly plausible future.

Andrew Ross wrote:

> Much, though not all, of the sixties counterculture was formed around what I have elsewhere called the *technology of folklore* – an expressive congeries of preindustrialist, agrarianist, Orientalist, and anti-technological ideas, values and social structures. By contrast, the cybernetic countercultures of the nineties are already being formed around the *folklore of technology* – mythical feats of survivalism and resistance in a data-rich world of virtual environments and posthuman bodies – which is where many of the Science Fiction- and technology-conscious youth cultures have been assembling in recent years (88).

Moreover, what was notable was that classic cyberpunk drew both its technological and social elements from contemporary reality, projecting a future that Marshall McLuhan called “Rear-view mirrorism, [that] "we look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future" (74). What was being critiqued was not even what the future would be, as much as the direction in which the present was headed. On a similar note, Gibson remarked that, “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 Science Fiction writer should” (McCaffery interview 274).

What Asimov had said, then, way before cyberpunk came along, turns out to be frighteningly correct – “The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom” (281).

These broad features that characterize cyberpunk – capitalistic mega-corporations, loner/marginalized anti-heroes, noted for its focus on “high-tech, low life” (Ketterer 141) in a near-future technologized dystopian Earth and the instability of reality and identity in a postmodern world – have been recognized and agreed upon by critics and readers alike, though minor disagreements on which works fall strictly within the realm abound.

Yet, cyberpunk continues to elude a coherent definition, one that would pin it down to definite elements, and enable a simpler categorization. Sterling maintains that while the label has been defined well-enough to stick, the "typical cyberpunk author does not exist" (ix). It is a delicious paradox that for a subgenre so well-defined and unanimously agreed upon, the authors do not seem to adhere to the style the critics say defines them. McCaffery rightly points out, that from the very start, "cyberpunk writers began producing works that defy easy categorization" (13).

Critics have long been divided on the inclusion of authors in the term, some going so far as to insist that Thomas Pynchon and Edward Rice Burroughs are cyberpunk writers, while some refuse to include even Pat Cadigan, now known as the Queen of cyberpunk, in the list.

Part reason is, that cyberpunk has never been a welcome umbrella term for the authors who thought of the designation as a loose term defining what they wrote, on the basis of a few core elements. Gibson went so far as to say that the label "is mainly a marketing strategy – and one that I've come to feel trivializes what I do" (McCaffery interview 279). A marketing strategy it most definitely was, espoused by Sterling to garner more readership and critical attention, a fact resented by the authors who found they were suddenly forced to conform to a style they didn't even know they followed, or risked being cast aside like Cadigan. This also led Shiner himself to lash out in 1991 at the onslaught of stereotypical works empty of the cyberpunk ethos that followed, declaring the cyberpunk movement dead, deriding them as "sci-fiberpunk" (25).

Secondly, cyberpunk's lifespan has been highly volatile and unstable, as a wave that emerged in the early 1980s, culminating into a highly debated movement in less than half a decade, only to be vehemently declared dead in 1991 by Lewis Shiner, and re-emerging as a

prominently feminist second wave, which again divided the critics over definitions. While a part of readership and researchers insist that cyberpunk is not dead, but has simply evolved, transmogrified into another wave, some others have declared it dead and further sub-divided its futuristic derivative successors into categories like biopunk and nanopunk, or placed it in a clearer umbrella term “post-cyberpunk”.

Therefore, it seems unsurprising that while almost everybody can recognize cyberpunk when they see it, there is no solid coherence on their views of what consists of cyberpunk, and what definitely does not. cyberpunk, as a label, it seems, has been imposed by its critics, rejected by its authors, and appropriated by its readers. Like the genre’s strong affinity to postmodernism and instability of definite meanings, cyberpunk seems to mean different things to different people, and will not yield to a singular identity.

While the original cyberpunk wave was dying down with the end of the ‘80s, a new wave was emerging, one that would save the subgenre from extinction by positioning it within wider social concerns earlier bypassed by classic cyberpunk, thus evolving into a pattern whereby it became more flexible, though a bit less recognizable sometimes.

Cyberpunk fully utilized the invasion of technology to prod the prejudices of our taken-for-granted notions. But it was feminist Science Fiction, pre- or post-classic cyberpunk that made conventional, mainstream Science Fiction more inclusive by addressing an array of questions the latter had not considered so far. A feminist slant to Science Fiction meant unearthing and challenging the imaginary lines of gender demarcation that clog our minds, and aligning it with mainstream feminist critiques to respond to our contemporary concerns of body, sexuality and gender through the lens of technology. Elyce Rae Helford says:

> Science fiction and fantasy serve as important vehicles for feminist thought, particularly as bridges between theory and practice. No other genres so actively invite representations of the ultimate goals of feminism: worlds free of sexism, worlds in which women's contributions (to science) are recognized and valued, worlds in which the diversity of women's desire and sexuality, and worlds that move beyond gender (291).

Aptly referred to as “feminist cyberpunk” (357) by Karen Cadora in an essay by the same name in 1995, the new wave interestingly comprises mostly of women authors, both straight and queer – while many male authors continue to write cyberpunk, it is both striking and a little unnerving that they defer from exploring the new wave and choose to stick to the classic mode.

In literary terms, cyberpunk was but an “intervention” in Science Fiction, and the cyberpunk “impulse” was very much to “cannibalize and reconstruct in a classic postmodernist way” (Ross146). With its emphasis on popular, low-culture and apparently shady characters and settings and the ensuing subaltern lens through which the new subversive culture is viewed and celebrated, postmodernism becomes an integral part of the cyberpunk narrative. In a way, cyberpunk is queerly postmodernist.

Feminist cyberpunk has strong connections with postmodernism, with its emphasis on marginalized identities and the overthrowing of a singular, universal truth. It is also important as a part of cultural studies simultaneously which deals with making the subaltern stand out, and rendering significant silences eloquent.

Feminist cyberpunk works discussed here will be works that display substantial adherence to cyberpunk ethos and elements while simultaneously bending conventions of the

subgenre they found stifling and reductive from a gender identity perspective – these works added a prominent feminist slant (including queer and religious themes) while maintaining the "4 Cs" intact. Positioning women and queers as protagonists within the original paradigm of cyberpunk, these works have voiced contemporary cultural concerns that cyberpunk failed to address even with reasonably strong female characters such as Molly Millions.

Strong female characters were a remarkable feature of classic cyberpunk – while classic cyberpunk hardly comes across as sexist, it was never directly concerned with the issues of women, their identities, or gender equations in a technological world. Classic cyberpunk, consequently, has come under harsh criticism from many corners for being too narrowly concerned with what is called "the lowest difficulty setting there is", i.e. the *straight white male* (Scalzi).

Andrew Ross calls cyberpunk "the most fully delineated urban fantasies of white male folklore" (145), further saying:

> Cyberpunk's 'credible' near-futures are recognizably extrapolated from those present trends that reflect the current corporate monopoly on power and wealth: the magnification of the two-tier society, the technocolonization of the body, the escalation of the pace of ecological collapse, and the erosion of civil society, public space, popular democracy, and the labour movement. cyberpunk's idea of a counterpolitics – youthful male heroes with working-class chips on their shoulders and postmodern biochips in their brains – seems to have little to do with the burgeoning power of the great social movements of our day: feminism, ecology, peace, sexual liberation, and civil rights. Curiously enough, there is virtually no trace of these social movements in this genre's 'credible' dark future, despite the claim by Sterling that cyberpunk futures are 'recognizable and painstakingly drawn from the

> modern condition'. However modern the zeitgeist of cyberpunk, it was clearly a selective zeitgeist. However coherent its 'narrative symbolization' of modern technofuture trends, it was clearly a limited narrative, shaped in very telling ways by white masculinist concerns (152).

It was in defiance of this reluctance of cyberpunk in addressing these issues that feminist cyberpunk emerged. It was not, though, the first time that feminist issues had been aptly represented in science fiction. Joanna Russ's feminist utopia *The Female Man* was written in the 70s, and Ursula K. Le Guin wrote *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969, well before the cyberpunk movement. James Tiptree, Jr. and C.L. Moore wrote distinctively feminist cyberpunk stories well before anyone else, and can be, in a sense, considered true precursors of the subgenre.

Feminist cyberpunk is actually an umbrella term for the inclusion of contemporary social issues neglected by classic cyberpunk. Apart from bringing female characters to the fore as protagonists, there was a considerable focus on the LGBT community, which marks a prominent presence in the feminist wave.

The issue in feminist cyberpunk is of examining the ways in which women could be marginalized and subordinated in a technological future, essentially, as to how technology and biology could be used to manipulate and control women's bodies and minds, and consequently, looking for ways to resist subordination. Science fiction gives that scope to feminism to destroy and reconstruct every possible social convention and re-assemble the entire power structure in any way the writers wished. The point was, that technology had not erased the question of women and their complexities of race and class – it had exaggerated them, given them a new form and put them in a new perspective.

With males dominating the cyberpunk scenario, females were swallowed by technology, their bodies and identities lost and left unexplored. Running parallel to the literary world is the world of cinema, of visuals, and movies like *Terminator* and *Johnny Mnemonic* explore the ramifications of being technologically advanced and being a white male sufficiently, while undermining the role of women, pushing them into the margins as either victims, or at the most, side-kicks, being delegated their traditional roles - technologically adept women, but sidelined to the male species. This argument supports Claudia Springer's claim that "while popular culture explores boundary breakdowns between humans and computers, gender boundaries are treated less flexibly" (Pleasure 41).

"Feminist Cyberpunk", however, according to Karen Cadora, "envisions something that feminist theory badly needs; fragmented subjects who can, despite their multiple positionings, negotiate and succeed in a high-tech world" (357).

The narratives of cyberpunk, while not being predominantly stereotypical or misogynist in their depiction of women, offered clearly limited roles to them – mostly those of a Girl Friday and/or Lover – these were strong characterizations, though – these women were not conventional plot devices used for a revenge motive or portrayed as nurturing, brave but vulnerable mothers, wives or lovers – they were kickass razor girls, indispensable to the plot, with more concerns at hand than being loved by the hero. In fact, Gibson has acknowledged the influence of Joanna Russ; Molly in *Neuromancer* is a loose tribute to her Jael from *The Female Man* (Wolmark 116). But their significance ended there – the obliteration of, or mere lip service to gender inequalities marks classic cyberpunk with a deliberate refusal to deal with "soft" or "feminine" issues.

Wolmark, in noting cyberpunk's aforesaid reluctance, remarks:

> Characters like Molly Millions or even Laura, Bruce Sterling's heroine from the 'professional'-management class in his novel *Islands in the Net* (1988) are indicative of the presence and influence of feminist Science Fiction, but they cannot be said to be an expression of cyberpunk's own willingness to tackle questions of gender identity and subjectivity (121).

While the works under scrutiny are not "feminist" in the sense of actively making a case for feminism, they are narratives that freely use cyberpunk elements and ethos to explore marginalization from perspectives other than the usual "white, straight male" stance, and discusses "writers and works that, while not necessarily 'feminist' in any rigorous sense, have opposed or modified the genre's heavily masculinist tendencies" (Landon 125). Drawing from the other acute pressing issues such as feminism, queer rights and environmentalism, these works embrace a framework that Shiner encouraged when he wrote that "The novel must face the future. 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" (25).

Despite Sterling's early efforts to garner critical attention to the genre, it received response only towards the end of the eighties, a time when it had already formed an enthusiastic readership but was dying out in terms of productivity. Unhappy with stereotypical cyberpunk-y trash being churned out, while Shiner had declared the movement dead, Donna J. Haraway had already published "A Cyborg Manifesto", theorizing that cyborgs, as a literary device, would break down the binaries of gender, sexuality and humanity. This assault on the clearly masculine tendencies of classic cyberpunk attracted feminist critics to dissect classic cyberpunk, and encouraged other writers to address these issues in their works.

While the reasons for women not participating in writing cyberpunk are debatable, it is clear that those clamouring against the limited concerns of cyberpunk were feminists. This second wave, prominently feminist in its leanings (and that includes queer and environmental concerns), did not spring out of the blue – there had been some classic cyberpunk works that were inching closer to this wave's sentiments, providing a subtle bridge to facilitate this shift of concerns.

Pat Cadigan, the sole woman cyberpunk writer in the First Wave, penned novels that presented a shift in its approach to characters, as well as thematic differences between the two waves – not only has she a female central character, it is a character who is not posited as a titillating character to be enjoyed and imagined by the male gaze. In an equally large leap for cyberpunk, her novels espouse a less celebratory mood towards the subversive nature of technology, and probe the questions of embodiment with a grimmer approach than the exulted attitudes of cyberpunk's relinquishing of "meat". This is an attitude increasingly depicted in the feminist wave, where technology is viewed with a more critical gaze, and where technology, despite its usefulness, is treated less like a fancy gadget. From a toy in the hands of feisty street punks, technology, in the hands of the feminist wave, morphs into a site to mould cultural roles in a more flexible shape.

An important figure in feminist cyberpunk is the figure of the female cyborg/gynoid – an erasure of the binary of gender. Haraway writes that "This cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation." (150)

Cyborg goes beyond gender, since it denaturalizes the relationship with body and gender performance, and undermines cultural reservations about identities with reference to bodies. The figure of the cyborg thus is seen by the feminist as a tool for female liberation

and is examined in terms of its ability to reject gender performance for the Other Sex. The power of the cyborg figure lies in its inherent artificiality, its instability, its uncertain place among established gender and its ability to destabilize the notion of gender which has been for long rigidly fixed and resistant to change in the face of oppression. Cyborg is not only post-gender, but post-human as well, questioning the very identity of humans, questioning where the essence that makes one human, lies on, and in the context of feminism, how a cyborg plays with a female body differently from a male body. With the exploration of the transgressive nature of gender by means of technological invasion of the body, there opens another portal to complexities, the question of sexuality, which finds more scope to explore its own interests post the disassociation with “gender performativity”, a narrative that produces and maintains the illusions of “true gender” by "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them." (Butler 179). Cyborgs have blurred the distinction between human and machines. It is neither a machine, nor a human being, yet, it is both, and the society is grappling to come to terms with a product that it has managed to invent, but has failed to understand.

What the cyborg does is not only upset gender binaries, but other cultural markers as well. It is deeply mired in the social consequences of coming to life, rather, coming to life within the purview of human laws and customs. Though it would not ‘recognize the Garden of Eden’, despite the fact that ‘their fathers, after all, are inessential’ (Haraway 151), a cyborg cannot entirely escape the configurations of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion and economics. As Haraway remarks:

> Cyborg gender is a local possibility taking a global vengeance. Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to

> produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction. There is a myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination — in order to act potently. (181)

While Teresa de Lauretis writes, "the cyborg, which is not only beyond gender, or ungendered, but also efficient, clean, indestructible, and sexless" (46), my own reading confirms that the cyborg becomes just as entrenched in sexual, gender and racial boundaries as humans. Its mechanical, non-human conception affords it no freedom from human conundrums.

Another recurrent theme in feminist science fiction is the idea of motherhood – reproduction is an essential biological distinction between men and women, with technology having direct repercussions on both the biological as well as sociological aspect of feminine identity, securing its place as an inevitable discourse in feministcyberpunk. Going a step further from its purely feminist roots in questioning the source of control of women's bodies, it considers motherhood on its elusive equation with technology and a technological future.

Recent technologies such as contraception, abortion, surrogacy, IVF and genetic cloning have already questioned and altered our assumptions of motherhood and identity. A source of liberation for many women, they have also served as tools of further repression and control of women's bodies.

By citing *He, She and It* (1991), Kevin McCarron relates feminism specifically to reproductive issues and states, "the really *macho* aspect of cyberpunk lies in its complete lack of interest in biological reproduction" (270, original emphasis).

Unlike cyberpunk, feminist cyberpunk not only allows women a central, non-stereotypical role but also brings to the fore neglected issues of family, gender, biology and reproduction, along with their social, economic and political consequences. Although cyberpunk did deal with cyborgs, a sort of giving birth to a new body and entity, it completely eschewed issues of human birth and motherhood. In feminist cyberpunk, these ideas have been tossed around and played with in a variety of ways and perspectives.

Along with a discussion on motherhood and family, it is imperative that sexuality and gender be also examined. While queer studies have long been included under the broader umbrella of feminist studies, their emphases lie on crucially distinct points of argument, so that they merely intersect but do not interact as closely as imagined. The focus of queer studies is on sexuality, while that of feminism is on the social constructions of gender that repress them.

The confined areas of scrutiny and theoretical frameworks fail to render a comfortable exchange between the two. However, they do intersect in cyberpunk.

Veronica Hollinger, in "(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism and the Defamiliarization of Gender", writes, "on the whole, science fiction is an overwhelmingly *straight* discourse, not least because of the covert yet almost completely totalizing ideological hold heterosexuality has on our culture's ability to imagine itself otherwise" (302, original emphasis).

Queer characters not only bring homosexuality to the fore, but also defy the norm of conventional sexual relations, especially with the cyborg-figure. Thomas Foster said:

> Virtual realities … tend to make it much more difficult than it used to be to impose a one-on-one relationship between a single body and a single discursive identity … and

> it thereby also becomes more difficult to limit discursive identities to one per body, or, by extension, to limit genders and sexual orientations to one per sexed body. (123)

Classic cyberpunk had stuck to an Earth-bound setting as an integral part of its narrative of a technologized near-future. However, in recent literature, the genre has been considerably diluted to accommodate freely the two terrains that had so far remained in mutual exclusion – an Earth-bound setting and a Galactic setting. The feminist cyberpunk works that will be discussed here, are not necessarily within the original definition of classic cyberpunk – they are works that are simultaneously set on Earth and solar colonies.

Science fiction provides a new, free ground empty of restrictive cultural practices such as religion and mythology (though it is not entirely so, since most classic cyberpunk does employ mythology, though in oblique, pretty much far-fetched forms). Much of feminist cyberpunk freely makes use of religious and mythological motifs – such as Piercy's *He, She and It* or Lyda Morehouse's *Archangel Protocol* - explicitly and in doing so it largely leaves the ground free to feminists to explore forbidden themes, to play around them and to mould them to their own interpretations and imagination. This freedom is rendered not in the form of absence of mythology, but in a rewriting and reinterpretation of mythology in futuristic terms, where both mythology and technology would act upon each other.

While first-wave cyberpunk highlighted only the issues of technology and male identity in a mega-corporation-dominated high-tech post-human world, feminist cyberpunk adds its own interpretation to this existing mould. It additionally inspects the role of technology in shaping our environment, religion, notions of family, motherhood, sexuality and gender as well. Rather than breaking away from cyberpunk, feminist cyberpunk is an extension of it, the remaining half that encompassed what was left out of classic cyberpunk. While cyberpunk addressed concerns that excluded everything non-white and non-male,

feminist cyberpunk drags back to the fore the burgeoning socio-political-cultural concerns of the present world.

Allison Bechdel's comic *Dykes to Watch Out For* laid out what is now popularly called the Bechdel Test, a yardstick to measure female characterization in pop culture in 1985. The female character who followed the rule commented that she had not been able to watch any movie after 1978's *Alien*, since *Alien* was the last movie to have:

1. Two named female characters
2. Who talk to each other
3. About something other than a man (Romano).

While *Pacific Rim*, a recent Hollywood Science Fiction flick, failed the Bechdel test, it gave inspiration to a new kind of test that laid down an additional new yardstick to gauge whether a woman had a consequential role in the movie or not. Named after the Japanese woman character in the film, Mako Mori (played by Japanese actor Rinko Kikuchi), a movie passes the test if it has:

1. At least one female character
2. Who gets her own narrative arc
3. That is not about supporting a man's story (Romano).

While neither of the tests' passing makes a movie (or literature, for our requirements here) feminist, it definitely makes a work somewhat women-friendly, according women a place equal to men when it comes to representation, and making a female character's role not dependent on the male's.

However, it is not solely English novels and short stories that took up these concerns – an important media was also Japanese cyberpunk manga and anime that addressed an important aspect – that of cyborgs and androids/gynoids – amongst other cyberpunk markers. These manga and anime opened up the delicately interwoven issues of gender, humanity and sexuality, especially because women, as in Western Science Fiction, have been stereotyped in manga and anime as well. In manga and anime, they appear as either provocatively dressed yet innocent, desexualized girls (*Mardock Scramble*, anime) or hyper-sexualized femme fatales (*Ghost in the Shell*, anime and manga). Such objectification as a source of sexual/romantic interest or a return to innocence provide ample scopes for a critique of the roles of female figures in the heavily popular media that has a fandom not solely among the Japanese, but also among Westerners, often referred to as Otakus.

Anime and manga, says Susan Napier, explore the "continuum of identity because of the nature of the media themselves. Because anime and manga function in a non-referential realm, they may allow for a more complex form of viewer identification" (Howl's 121). Hence, like in cyberpunk novels, feminism is also as much relevant to life, especially that of Japanese women, as an expression of culture and gender dynamics in terms of manga and anime. Since modern Japan has been synonymous with the cyberpunk setting of *Blade Runner*, it is only obvious that the interface between Japan and cyberpunk cannot be ignored anymore.

Now known as *anime,* these Japan-made animated films were also popularly known earlier as *Japanimation.* While it was inspired by Western animation techniques as early as in the 1910s, anime quickly separated from its Western roots to explore genres of its own, such as *Mecha, Ecchi, Harem* and *Super-Robot,* and to appeal to its own sets of demographics, such as *Shoujo, Shounen, Kodomo, Seinen* and *Josei,* something that is also reflective of

Japanese culture, a point that I intend to explore in my analysis of women's social position in Japan over the years with respect to the representation of women in cyberpunk anime and manga.

Incidentally, *manga,* or Japanese comics have a similar place in Japanese culture as the *anime.* Unlike in the West, manga and anime are consumed passionately not just by children, but also by adults. As a consequence, manga and anime can range from simple kids-oriented stuff to mature explorations of complex ideas, equivalent to the respectable 'high' literature.

Although manga was considerably influenced by Western comics when it comes to style, it more or less had adopted, and maintained a style developed in the 19th century. For the Japanese, the word Manga refers to comics as well as cartooning.Outside Japan, the word 'Manga' has acquired synonymity with comics published in Japan, and the study uses the term in that narrow context.

For the sake of convenience and greater clarity, I shall trace the history of manga in brief only during and after the Occupation years, wherein the roots and shaping events of modern manga lie. Since many manga have been adapted into anime, their history is closely entwined. Illustrations that appear in manga, which have political-cultural roots, reappear in anime – and become fertile sites for both aesthetic and cultural evaluation. While the wide-eyed, super-innocent looks of characters are attributed as arising from the depression from losing the First World War and seeking solace in cute images of innocence, their use in delineating women long after the catastrophe has passed, indicates its seepage into the cultural psyche of Japan, not just as a remnant of a particularly painful past, but as an extension of ensuing socio-cultural norms. Japan's relaxation on censorship in the 1990s has obviously much to do with the proliferation of hyper-sexualized images in both manga and

anime, especially in the shounen and shoujo categories aimed at teenaged and adult audiences. This facet of artistic expression, coupled with an inquiry into the roles of women in Japanese society shall become an important part of my study.

By contrasting classic cyberpunk with feminist cyberpunk, I wish to trace the evolution of cyberpunk as a genre representing very limited world-views to a politically charged site, and engage critically with its repercussions on society in its role as literary fiction – it is in their fidelity (or lack of) to the growing concerns of equality in a world scarred by its cultural creations that it holds any lasting value – after all, at the very roots of its genesis is a counter-culture attitude.

However, this is an elaborate account of American cyberpunk – another form of cyberpunk that has been largely neglected in comparative analyses with the American kind is Japanese cyberpunk, a genre that has evolved under the double influence of its own unique heritage and also the unequal flow of American Science Fiction into the Japanese market. Japanese cyberpunk, here, refers to cyberpunk works produced by the Japanese, and in Japanese/English, but available in English.

With cyberpunk or futuristic fiction being produced by many countries now, it is important that my particular choice of the Japanese variety be explained; it is not without reason that I chose Japanese cyberpunk over others, especially Afro-futurism. For one, Japan has been locked in a political, and thereafter, cultural and economic battle with the West, especially America, since as back as the 1800s, when the West forced open the gates of Japan. While the destruction of Japan in the two World Wars marked it as an enemy territory in the first half of the 20th century, the second half saw the impossible rise of Japan as an economic and cultural power, threatening America in its once-assured dreams of global domination. Japan's incredible transformation from a nation reluctant to even engage with the

world till the 1800s to its frightening expertise on technology in the mid-1900s, especially robotics, clutched the West in paranoia. Thus, Japan, for America, was a complex friend as well as foe, a nation America both admired, envied and was disgusted with at the same time. By the 60s, this paranoia began to be reflected in the image of Japan America was trying to project internationally, where Japan was de-humanized and demonized as technologically advanced but ruthless and inhuman, essentially the classic subhuman robotic android, the technological counterpart of the fantastic Gothic monster – a freak of nature with frightening villainous powers. Obviously, this stance subtly crept into literary productions as well, and made Japan the wicked stepmother of cyberpunk worlds, the reigning evil monarch of dark mechanical lands.

On the other hand, modern Japan, which "simply *was*cyberpunk" (Gibson, "Future Perfect, 48) world, had a cyberpunk literary tradition of its own, markedly different from its American counterpart. Scarred by the technology that had destroyed it in the World Wars, Japan bore an uneasy relationship with science. While it continued unabated to advance science, Japan was also deeply distrustful of it. Up to the First World War, Japan considered Science Fiction merely as children's literature – it was with the paperbacks that the US Occupation soldiers brought to Japan that the era of modern Japanese Science Fiction began. However, the first full length Science Fiction novel in Japanese, *Dai Yon Kanpyoki*, by Kobo Abe, was written only as late as 1958-59.

As chalked out by Yamano Koichi in a 1969 essay "Japanese Science Fiction, Its Originality and Orientation" (published in English in 1994), Japanese Science Fiction can be broadly divided into three phases of development. The first phase in Japanese Science Fiction, 'The Pre-fabricated House Phase' or 'Infiltration and Diffusion', saw Japanese authors creating a tradition of Science Fiction under a heavy influence of Western Science

Fiction; a second phase ("Remodeling the ready-built home phase," or "adaptation and acquisition"), in which the Japanese writers expanded their scope; and a third phase ("Putting up a new house," or "creative departure"), in which Japanese speculative fiction discovers, and carve its own cultural identity—although the exact nature of that identity is unclear (Yamano). By the ‘70s, people were considerably interested in Science Fiction as a literary genre. But the late 80s, called the Wintry Age in Japanese Science Fiction, saw the decline of Japanese Science Fictionin general, partly brought about by the discontinuation of Hayakawa Science Fiction Contest, a major outlet for Science Fiction writers, and partly brought about by the audio-visual revolution that swept the public away from literature as a whole. Science Fiction, however, bloomed in manga and anime, and became a significant ground for serious explorations of technology and the ethics surrounding it. In a way, Japanese Science Fiction, without a formidable Science Fiction tradition of its own, but armed with its own mythology/culture and contemporary advancements in science (and with exposure to Western Science Fiction), carved its own unique brand of storytelling. While the influence of Western Science Fiction cannot be undermined, it also cannot be ignored that Japanese Science Fiction, cyberpunk or otherwise, is deeply marked by its own history, culture and anxieties – and consequently, has its unique tradition even as it is sheltered under a common umbrella of Science Fiction with Western Science Fiction.

Japan’s history of Science Fiction is unusually difficult to classify chronologically – while the waves of Science Fiction in American fiction were essentially a reaction to its earlier forms, thus forming a logical chronological history, Japanese Science Fiction was producing these waves simultaneously – the sudden inflow of a hundred years’ worth of American Science Fiction into the Japanese market created authors that wrote in their favored subgenres simultaneously, in an ahistorical manner.

Takayuki Tatsumi explains:

> From its birth in the Jazz Age, Anglo-American Science Fiction took more than three decades to reach the zenith of its classical development in the 1950s. By contrast, the rise of Japanese Science Fiction in the 1960s coincided with the explosion of New Wave speculative fiction in England and North America, and thus Japanese Science Fiction could not pursue the gradual historical development that led to these new subgenres in the West, but rather ran through the great paradigm shift between outer space and inner space in only a decade. To critics and readers in Japan, therefore, Science Fiction seems to have evolved, in the Eliotic sense, within a simultaneous order, with hardcore Science Fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, and monster narratives like *Godzilla* enjoying a peaceful symbiosis. From its beginnings, Japanese Science Fiction has thus incorporated the various Science Fiction traditions synchronically rather than diachronically, producing an extraordinary range of magna opera (Generations).

To Koichi's three classifications, Tatsumi adds a fourth one, which he calls the "Fourth Generation" writers of the late '80s and '90s, who took for granted "the postmodern modes of cyberpunk, cyborg feminism, and 'Yaoi poetics' (the Japanese equivalent of the K/S [Kirk-slash-Spock] slash fiction aesthetic) as it testifies to the hyper-capitalist concerns coincident to both Japanese and Anglo-American Science Fiction" (Generations).

While cyberpunk fiction has been less prolific in terms of quantitative output in Japanese literature, it has made up for the lack in manga and anime. Popular not only in Japan but also throughout the West, Japanese manga and anime constitute some of the most important Japanese cultural exports, and share an uneasy relationship with their Western counterparts.

Although the history of manga and anime spans over a huge period, modern manga and anime starts only with the Second World War – and Science Fiction and fantasy were the genres that boosted the manga and anime industry, and vice-versa. Since 2000, the Japanese government has actively encouraged export of popular culture as a form of "soft power" (Nye) in the hope that it would boost the flagging economy. The development of Science Fiction/F as a genre, in fact, has been fundamentally linked with the popularization of manga and anime on the global stage.

Japanese narratives, whether literature or other media, have been shaped by its history – since the Meiji Restoration, Japan's political focus had been modernization of the nation, in order to compete with the West and equip itself for the future – modernization for Japan meant several things at once – heavy and efficient militarization marked by harsh discipline, scientific discoveries in medicine and unrivalled progress in futuristic technology, of which the latter would grip the West in paranoia. This quest for modernization, however, created a group of intellectual dissenters, as it raised questions about the compatibility of Western modernity and Japanese spiritual aesthetics – however, this debate took on a noticeably and significantly serious turn only post World War II.

Japanese narratives are also coloured with its anxiety about proving its equality in racial terms, ever since the Meiji era, when it first encountered prejudice by the "superior" West, owing to the "yellow skin" and Mongloid features, and culminated in the kicking out of Japan from the League of Nations Charter in the 1920 as it insisted that the charter include a clause that the Japanese were racially equal to the "white" race, a proposition that was rejected by the rest. This ethnic humiliation, followed by national humiliation in the World War II bombings which compelled the divine Emperor to surrender to the technologically

equipped West, have forever changed the course of all Japanese cultural productions, including the very popular forms of entertainment – literature, manga and anime.

Post World War II, as Japan steadily and stoically picked itself up as a nation, it was ruled by neo-nationalists, who sought to curtail any cultural activity that went against national propaganda. For a very long time, manga artists and anime developers consistently produced texts that aligned themselves with the national ideology, especially the one that vilified America as a harbinger of destruction and a monster, rather than risk imprisonment and punishment.

While it would be incorrect to say that *all* creative content produced adhered to this norm, it would be safe to say that most did, out of fear, if not outright agreement. Many of them treaded a dangerous middle path, where they critiqued violence and war in a way that apparently reminded the viewers of America villainy, but could also be pointed at the Japanese atrocities too. Osamu Tezuka, fondly and aptly known as the Father of manga, treaded this principled path where he depicted his disdain for militarization and warfare, rather than indulging into jingoistic neo-nationalism.

However, what has lingered in the collective unconscious of the Japanese is its painful memory of the images of bombed cities and lacs of civilians dead, and the acknowledgment that despite science being the facilitator of destruction, it could not turn away from science, and in order to build itself, would have to take refuge in science. The resulting ambivalence regarding the nature of science, its ramifications on the human society, as well as the conflicts between the “benevolent” use of science and the “malignant” science, the tension between the vulnerable, imperfect human spirit and the noble human spirit that can turn science into progress and peace are at the heart of Japanese Science Fiction, incorporating mythical and mystical elements of Japanese traditions into its futuristic narratives, have

driven the plots of much of Japanese Science Fictionmanga/anime, right from Tezuka's *Astro Boy* to the recent *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence.*

The drive for modernization post WWII pushed up literacy rates, resulting into a vast audience for printed material, which boosted the consumption of newspapers, which began to serialize manga, and then bound volumes of manga itself. While in the late 19th century, national newspapers opted for the one-or-two frame cartoons as was the norm in Western media, newer papers, aimed at the working-class adults and children, began to include serialized manga, with a four-panel instalment each day. Magazines like *Boys' Club* (Shonen Kurabu – 1914) and *Girls' Club* (Shojo Kurabu – 1923) contributed significantly to the medium being increasingly targeted at specific demographic groups, also producing a unique phenomenon where these comics were no longer entertainment for solely children, but had proliferated in catering to various age groups, genders, sexualities and tastes. Categories like *Kodomomuke* (for young children, about 8 years old), *Shonen* (boys, roughly 8-18 years), *Shojo* (girls, roughly 8-18 years), *Josei* (young women, roughly 18-40), *Seinen* (young men, roughly 18-40), *Seijin* (men's pornographic), *Yon Koma* (four-panel strips), *Silver/Golden* manga (for older readers), Hobby manga (such as Golf manga, Pachinko manga, Fishing manga) and Educational/Informative manga, have flourished – however, there are conflicting trends, such as women forming a large reader base of Shonen manga, and men forming a big portion of Shojo manga readers.

The word manga is now synonymous with comics outside Japan – however, in Japan, it has stood for pictorial narratives, with few or no dialogues – the word manga itself being made up of two kanji (ideographs) – *man* (whimsical) and *ga* (picture) – denoting a pictorial narrative of any form. However, in popular context, manga now exclusively refers to comics

produced in and about Japan, by the Japanese, and we shall, for the scope of the thesis, stick to the Western conception of manga.

Although manga has been popular for many years, it is due to the wood-block print artist Katsushika Hokusai that it gained international recognition. Susan Napier attributes the immense popularity of manga in modern Japan to a long-standing affinity for pictorial narratives (Howl's 21). With the introduction of cartoon-style manga, its popularity and scope have increased exponentially – manga, and consequently anime, now cover a vast range of variety in plots, and are aimed at increasingly niche audiences. While all possible print media began to include manga instalments, in the 1930s, popular manga were often collected and bound in book form, and these *akabon* (red books), the name derived from the distinct red covers of these books, allowed the readers to read the manga at once instead of collecting instalments.

Since the 1930s, popular technology/engineering magazines for children and adolescents included manga that were militaristic in tone and significantly used science and technology, through the Science Fiction genre. This not only gave the magazines a wider, more enthusiastic audience, but also laid the foundations for the ensuing popularity of Science Fiction in the manga and anime world.

The rise of anime also coincided with the booming market of manga. While print media was becoming rapidly popular, around 1914, and especially after WW II, Japan began to import films on a large scale, and the Japanese industry began efforts to master the field of animation. Along with the Science Fiction books that the US soldiers brought with them, Japan began to import animated movies, which comprised Russian and East European puppet films as well as productions that featured the latest American cel animation technology (Tsugata 210-11).

By the 1930s, Japanese animators experimented on various forms – puppet, cut-paper, cel animation, etc. also producing feature-length narratives, beginning the tradition of animation films. It was also around this time that Disney produced its first full-length movie, breaking the myth that animations could only be small episodic productions. These Japanese animations also were imbued with technophile elements until the end of WW II, when Japan saw first-hand the destructive aftermath of technology in the wrong hands. Following its defeat in WW II, Japanese cultural productions shifted in perspective from being jingoistic patriotism to deep introspection, and this was reflected in manga and anime too. While Japanese traditional elements continued to be a part of them, the cheerful, all-embracing, enthusiastic technophilia was replaced by a grimmer contemplation of ethics and science, and observations on the nature of human society in a flux on account of science.

In 1942, following the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings and Japan's bombing of the Pearl Harbour, a group of Japanese intellectuals debated on the exact nature of science, whether it was antithetical to the unique Japanese spirit that many believed would lead Japan to victory, science-technology being inherently Western in nature.

This conflict between science as a way of life capable of integrating itself with the Japanese spiritual and national consciousness and as an inevitable medium for progress, and science as the source of destruction of everything the human race has achieved so far, loom heavily in most Japanese productions – surprisingly, despite the horrendous aftermath of the atom bombs, instead of becoming paranoid, the Japanese developed a disciplined, rational, though stoic and ambivalent outlook on the ramifications of science on human life.

Using futuristic narratives of cyberpunk to probe the nature of life itself, Japanese cyberpunk also explores a future where artificial intelligence would become the order of the day, and while being careful to navigate through the ills that science was capable of bringing

and the fallible human race was susceptible to succumbing to, the Japanese embrace the anxiety-ridden posthuman selves the future would produce. Unable to ignore the fact that the very technology that destroyed them in WW II was the only hope of resurrecting the nation again, Japanese Science Fiction in any form or media grappled with this complexity of how technology would alter our assumptions of what comprised of humanity, and if that posthumanity would strip humans of the "essence" of humanity – and in doing so, it moreover questions an even more important question – if there is any "essence" that defines humanity, or if it is an overrated, grand narrative that falsely produces the notion that the individual is unique and important, and that the human race surpasses every other form of being in superiority. It is this ambivalence not just about the nature of science, but also about the apparent realization that humanity is not *that* unique to be safeguarded from invasive technology and a melding of the human and the metal bodies to reconstruct the nature of life.

In the late '70s and early '80s, television garnered a huge portion of the entertainment market, boosting the viewership of anime, but leading to a decline in the readership of literature, causing the discontinuation of the Hayokawa Science Fiction contest, a major contest for upcoming Science Fiction writers. During the 1970s, anime faced challenges due to the popularity of Western animations, coupled with greater costs of anime-making and lower profits compared to its Western counterpart, partly driven by the apparent impossibility of competing with Disney. However, with Sogo Iishi and other artists who captured the zeitgeist of modern Japanese youth while still retaining the traditional Japanese techniques, the anime industry was revived, and is in full-bloom once again.

While the regular themes of love and adventure continue to be illustrated in anime and manga, the 1980s was a significant decade, in that it ushered, parallel to the West in chronology, its own unique brand of cyberpunk – one that had its roots not in writing, but in

music. With time, Japan was appropriated by Western minds as the "true" location of cyberpunk – where cyberpunk would apparently manifest itself in the future. This, too, has interesting roots – Japan's phenomenal rise as an economic super-power along with its frightening grip on ultra-modern technology that seemed to focus on automation and robotics had the West, particularly the USA, in paranoia – a political paranoia that played out in literature and cinema and virtually handed over the future (an American future, nonetheless) to the relentlessly modern Japan.

Unlike Western cyberpunk that was born out of literature, cyberpunk anime has its roots in Japanese punk music. During the late seventies and the early eighties, Japan, and especially Tokyo was under the sway of rich, vibrant punk music bands such as GISM, Gauze, Stalin, The Rockers, The Roosters, Confuse, Lip Cream and Systematic Death. Owing to Sogo Iishi and his earlier participation with three of the above-mentioned bands, Japanese punk music branched out into art and cinema. In 1982, the same year as *Blade Runner* was made, Iishi made the anime that was to immortalize his name – *Burst City* – a work that has proved to be an inspiration to later cyberpunk anime, most evidently *Akira*. To the Japanese youth, it was what *Neuromancer* was to the American youth – it represented the zeitgeist of contemporary times, the dystopian and technology-invaded changing times, an eerie mixture of hope and despair.

Also, unlike Western cyberpunk literature, contemporary Japanese anime and manga often had strong female characters of consequence. *Ghost in the Shell* manga, one of the most popular cyberpunk manga available, was serialized in 1989, just five years after *Neuromancer* was published – while the latter relegated to Molly the role of a side-kick/lover to the male protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* was not just a protagonist who was female (and whose side-kicks were male), but was also a 98% cyborg

facing identity issues – a young policewoman who, as a six-year girl had lost her body, with only her brain intact, and was later given a metal body, enabling her to live again, but with an existential baggage of its own. Apparently, the Japanese anime and manga seem far ahead of its Western counterparts when it comes to female visibility that also passes the Bechdel test and Mako-Mori test, and yet, many popular anime and manga also employ female characters more in line with maintaining the "kawaii" function. It is thus interesting to juxtapose the different perspectives the West and the Japanese hold when it comes to gender roles, gender depiction, role-assigning and body representation.

A major difference between American cyberpunk and Japanese cyberpunk is that while American cyberpunk looks at the future as a lethal place, focusing on the cyberpunkarchitecture to convey that sense of dread, Japanese cyberpunk evokes memories of military destruction, reminiscent of the ravaged landscape that remains etched on its national consciousness. The Japanese see the future as an inhabitable place, not as some virtual reality nightmare, unlike American cyberpunk. It is a very distinctive Japanese idea that technology can flourish in confluence with a society's cultural soil. Unlike the mechanical, inhuman Japanese and nihilistic futures being depicted as the unescapable fate of humans in American cyberpunk, Japanese Science Fiction takes the stance that all technology we produce, even if it becomes dangerous to our comfortable ideas of what comprises humanity, humans will eventually find a way to come to terms with the new reality and figure out a niche where humanity and technology can co-exist.

Japanese cyberpunk is more critical of its world, in a quiet, introspective way – it acknowledges the necessity of the very technology it is wary of in a practical, matter-of-fact way unlike the American mode that resorts to paranoia. Japanese cyberpunk presents

technology as a double-edged sword – American cyberpunk sees it more in line with the trope of a femme fatale – a fatal seducer.

For Japanese cyberpunk, cyberpunk is a fact of life, interwoven into the present mode of life, a mode that is recognizable despite being set in the future. For American cyberpunk, the near cyberpunk future is unrecognizably distant in its daily routine. It becomes an alien future that intimidates by its strangeness of sights, sounds and social practices, than from any real consequences of the tech that brought about this change. American cyberpunk is designed to intimidate, trigger paranoia at the outset than inspire introspection at the confluence of science and society.

Japanese cyberpunk has retained all the elements that characterize American cyberpunk – the four Cs enumerated by Bonner - computers, corporations, crime and corporeality. The protagonist is very often, though not always, a marginalized loner figure who must manoeuvre his/her way through the system. And yet, Japanese cyberpunk and American cyberpunk approach the same future in very different ways – the protagonist learns to work as a part of the team, often for larger good in Japanese cyberpunk. In American cyberpunk, the hacker hero is mostly unconcerned ethically and works solely for himself/herself, in classic cyberpunk. In American feminist cyberpunk, we more often come across female protagonists who fight for the larger good, while simultaneously "feminizing" Science Fiction by implying that concern for larger issues unrelated to personal benefits is a characteristic of females, positing most men in its narratives as unsympathetic macho creatures who would not "get" what women want – this alternative cyberpunk future where women hold the key to the future sometimes lends itself to the feminist Goddess movement that espoused the back-to-nature anthem in its rejection of technology as essentially male, and its embracing of nature as a female entity.

In Japanese cyberpunk, on the other hand, the protagonists may be male or female, and gender issues often take on a more contemplative role than enunciating a particular ideology – Japanese cyberpunk raises more questions than it answers, while American cyberpunk invariably ends with some explicit or implicit answer to whatever questions it raises.

Anime such as *Serial Experiments Lain* or *Ghost in the Shell* have two completely different protagonists, with Lain in *Serial Experiments Lain* reinforcing the mother-figure in a pre-adolescent hacker girl who saves the inhabitants of the virtual world by shedding her daily real world teddy bear-clutching childhood to become a guiding force in the virtual world, and Major Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*being a 98% gynoid in the police force who battles the hacker Puppet Master, who is an A.I. itself, challenging the gender stereotypes prevalent in much of the world, not just Japan.

While Japan has always been less stringent on what is appropriate viewing content for children, most Japanese media imported into the West have been censored in keeping with Western sensibilities – two aspects that have always been problematic for the West have been the depiction of death, and the casual approach to nudity. While children's' shows such as Shin Chan easily depict the central character, a rowdy kid named Shin Chan frequently show the audience his butt in disgust, a number of shows also frequently depict female nudity – what is scandalous for the West is common practice in Japan, and nudity in Japan's case is extended to both males and females, and sometimes, without the sexual innuendo either.

Ghost in the Shell begins with a shot of Major Kusanagi's nude body, voluptuous in profile and seemingly sexually charged – until the viewer notices the wires jutting out of her body, revealing her to be an assemblage of wires and artificial material resembling body tissue, immediately stripping her of all earlier sexual perception. The casualness with which

she appears nude, rather than proving provocative to the viewer, only heightens the sense of artificiality, further probing the idea that humans too are comprised of red veins instead of wires and covered with similar looking tissue, thus questioning the inappropriateness of what is a natural universal part of human existence.

Although stereotypical eye-candy female characters definitely exist in substantial numbers, there are also considerable number of anime and manga that challenge this trend and project gender and sexuality as a very complex network of behaviors, social standards and assumptions, making the viewer/reader themselves painfully aware of the narrowness of their own perceptions.

Death is yet another feature of Japanese cultural productions that has been a taboo for the West. While the Japanese are comfortable with exposing children very early on to death, especially, the death of a central, much loved character, even the protagonist (as in *Astro Boy*), or loss of a close friend/family, or a philosophical realization where the protagonist is not reassured at the end by the celebratory espousal of the victory of the good over the evil, but rather, is overwhelmed at the realization that neither is the antagonist irrationally evil, nor s/he pristine, flawless in character – fallibility of even the best of humanity regularly features as a trope in post WW II Japanese creations – there are no strict binaries of good and evil, right and wrong.

Although Osamu Tezuka, considered the Father of Modern Post-war anime, contributed heavily to the wide acceptance of anime not just throughout Japan but also the West, from the content to the illustrations which were inspired by pre-War Disney characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, with Frisbee-sized eyes to generate a larger scope for variety of emotions, the real proliferation of anime began with the mammoth success of *Tetsuwan Atom* (Astro Boy in USA). Mecha anime such as Mobile Suit Gundam became an

instant hit and paved the way for robotics to become an emerging theme in Japanese Science Fiction in both anime and manga.

Much of popular media is filled with what Christine Hoff Kraemer calls the "token female" – a mere lip service to pseudo-strong female characters, females who could never advance beyond supporting roles and stereotypes. While American cyberpunk has "allowed" women to have stronger roles, truly central and non-stereotypical roles are few and far between. While many scholars have defended American cyberpunk in its portrayal of women, it is worth noting that an exchanging of the gender of the male and female roles in American cyberpunk would disturb the claim – it would be immediately apparent that though Molly in her own place was definitely stronger, the male protagonist exchanging places with her would be essentially playing second-fiddle to her in the new status quo.

Disney, the American equivalent of the Japanese animation industry, started churning out apparently strong female characters in response to parental demands in 1990s for better role models for their children, such as Pocahontas or Mulan. However, most of them start out as rebellious, independent women/warriors, and end up compromising on the very values that mark them out as different and strong, faced either with community pressure or their "essential femininity".

Japan, interestingly, a nation much in notoriety for its gratuitous depiction of sex and/or nudity as well as for such "token females", is now a cultural space that not only has tremendously strong female characters second to none in their show, but also as a producer of narratives that raise questions of the complexity of gender, gender roles and assumptions, sexuality and the instability and/or even existence of the term "self". Although females in American cyberpunk unmistakably stray from typically feminine roles, they have never entirely escaped the oppressive male gaze. Strong as they are, they are always an object of

delight to the male gaze. Visually appealing, their bodies are often sexualized enough to distract the reader from their indispensability. Despite being strong, they cater unmistakably to the male gaze, and in the classic capitalist stance, are products made to be consumed. A feminist critique thus becomes necessary, and Science Fiction, instead of rendering feminist discourse trivial, in fact, allows the fictional narratives to explore the issue at a remove from reality as we understand it, allowing for a more objective, critical gaze.

While American cyberpunk asserts the importance of the "self", the "individual" much in alignment to the Enlightenment, trying to negotiate its instability in the techno-age, where the idea of the self would not be questioned so much as modified. To American cyberpunk, it is simply a quest to refigure the configurations of the discourse on the self in cyberpunk futures. For Japanese cyberpunk, the question they pose is the very existence of the idea of the self. It is the denial of the self as the centre of a harmonious universe that comes up as a motif of their fiction as well as critical discourses.

While these differences in approach can be easily traced to the legacy of religion and arts that the two nations have been brought up on, they are further complicated by their problematic love-hate political-cultural-economic relationship. The Shinto legacy emphasizes on the necessity of humility even in the heroes – the fallibility of the human spirit, and hence the necessity of inter-dependence and teamwork.

One of American cyberpunk's defining elements is the "loner hero" who battles the corporations himself, discarded to the margins of the society – the society, and therefore, everything it stands for, becomes antagonistic to the protagonist, and the small band of underground punks overcome the homogeneous oppressive forces by blatant disregard, and not adherence to harmony. Their battle with the oppressive forces is not a moral choice – it is simply a matter of survival.

For Japanese cyberpunk, the narrative is imbued with social responsibility – in most anime, the protagonist starts out alone, and in the process, realizes the necessity of giving up unrestrained freedom in favour of combined forces, learning humility as well the power of teamwork.

However, for American cyberpunk, it is only American feminist cyberpunk that addresses these issues, but with more complex consequences, such as sometimes asserting the myth of the nature being a feminine force working against the masculine nature of technology, such as in Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991), or Linda Nagata's *The Bohr Maker* (1996), where nature is also associated with innocence, benevolence and the latent fury of an otherwise patient entity, traits often associated with women, with a slightly socialist bent. The masculine technology, conversely, is aggressive, destructive, and capitalist. While Trouble, the lesbian, illegal hacker protagonist of Melissa Scott's *Trouble and her Friends* (1994) fits the stereotypical classic cyberpunk protagonist frame, as a marginalized underground hacker concerned solely with her own survival, ultimately, her immediate concerns are replaced with the larger desire to free her compatriots and strive for a fair virtual world. The idea of the female as the essentially caring, nurturing figure is reiterated throughout American feminist cyberpunk, and in a way, while American feminist cyberpunk is in a way indicative of being more inclusive in terms of representation of larger social concerns, and being more sensitive to the marginalized, it also creates a narrative where women, while becoming strong protagonists, also reinforce some of the "essential" traits their gender supposedly embodies. As their characters traverse the question of sexuality, to be portrayed as lesbians, their involvement with "community", whatever it may be for them. For Trouble, it was her homosexual hacker community, while with Shira in *He, She and It*, it is her non-corporate, women-inhabited, old-world Jewish town Tikva.

Sexuality, in its intersections with gender discourse, often raises more complex questions – apart from portraying the LGBTs as the new marginalized, American feminist cyberpunk also portrays complicated situations where cyborg entities, through the artificiality of bodies, also questions the legitimacy of sexual preferences.

Hayao Miyazaki, one of the foremost animators of Japan, has clearly led the way in portraying female protagonists of consequence, whether in cyberpunk narratives or otherwise. Miyazaki's heroines are usually situated in fantasy narratives, rather than cyberpunk ones, but he has created an environment where strong heroines became the order of the day, rather than an exception. Protagonists like Kusanagi, or Lain, have not become trophy characters to be flaunted to legitimize claims of strong female protagonists. While Lain is completely desexualized, Kusanagi is sexually appealing in the extreme, only to let the viewer disgustingly discover that she is nothing but an assemblage of fibre and wires.

Religion is another important feature of cyberpunk. For American cyberpunk, cyberpunk is designed to intimidate at first sight, and it uses certain elements generously and repetitively to reinforce subconscious American fears - while science as a force negating and challenging divine laws has long been a subject of furious debate since the Enlightenment, most cyberpunk hasn't done away with religion - instead of negating the presence of religion, American cyberpunk has transformed religion into a ritualistic, enigmatic force, that, by its very unrecognizable technological avatar, becomes a strange, alienated power, unreliable and therefore, untrustworthy - while the cocoon of religion remains, and is transmogrified to suit the needs of the future, it hardly comes across as a source of peace or solace. God, after Philip K. Dick, is almost non-existent, and religion in American cyberpunk comes across as a habit and a legacy, rather than a divine presence. However, American feminist cyberpunk has made remarkable forays by revitalizing the importance of religion(s), using different settings

like the usual *American city-Japanese zaibatsu-empty religion* combination to trigger paranoia.

Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* focuses solely on Jewish religion, invoking a parallel 16th century legend to create a backdrop for the modern Jewish freezone town Tikva that ultimately battles the megacorporation where Jewish religion is banned. Similarly, Linda Nagata's *The Bohr Maker* deals with no religion in particular, but the setting has been changed from the First-World-USA-in-danger to an unequal Third World Asian country being neo-colonized geographically by the USA, becoming an imminent threat to a non-hacker, female protagonist Phousita who unwittingly becomes the protagonist, while a memory in chip form Nick tries to find a body to survive. Other important variations are *China Mountain Zhang* (1992), *Archangel Protocol* (2001), *The Windup Girl* (2009), and *Nekropolis* (2001).

Archangel Protocol(2001) keeps itself to the USA, but it becomes a heavily religious allegory, where religion again becomes an autocratic force, both God and Satan using technology to hack into people's lives and control their fates, with the rise of fundamentalist Christian religion, akin to the Puritans with their unyielding religious dictates running the lives of their citizens.

China Mountain Zhang(1992), is set in a fascist China that is the new economic, social and cultural capital of the world, where everyone is obsessed with looking as Chinese as possible, and homosexuality is punishable by death, and the only asset women can wield is beauty. It opens up a plethora of questions, reminding the readers more of the direction the present is headed in, bringing in issues such as homophobia, where, unlike the American idea of democracy, Chinese autocracy refuses the marginalized protagonist even a chance to fight back. While it breaks free of the obsession with America, the flag bearer of democracy and

values being overrun by malicious, heathen alien Japanese culture, it does nothing more than replacing Japan with China, imagining itself in the hands of another nation that threatens the economic dreams of the USA.

By the same writer Maureen F. McHugh, we have *Nekropolis* (2001), an ultra-fundamentalist Islamic setting running on the Sharia Laws, controlling humanity with technology, *jessing* people, i.e. enslaving people through neurological implants, where 21-year-old female protagonist jessed Hariba tries to elope with a transgender android whom she finds intelligent and soft. While it deals with present day concerns of transgender, free-will and theocracy, it also treads the politically incorrect path of positing the Third World as an unfree futuristic world while also partially being justifiable in its fears considering the present political scenario.

The Windup Girl (2009), by contrast, comes closer to the ethics of classiccyberpunk than other American feminist cyberpunk works that have deviated much from the standard American cyberpunk norms. It presents a future Thailand where bio-seed revolution in the hands of corrupt Thai leaders destroy the working-class poor caught in the middle of an internal political war between two parties in the pursuit of power. The class concern of American cyberpunk is compounded by the sexual exploitation of a gynoid who finds the abuse intolerable and desperately flees and gets tied up with other protagonists.

What remains to be seen, given how American postcyberpunk has gotten over its paranoia with the Japanese as the cruel race engulfing the democratic, progressive American state and spirit, is whether it has not wittingly, or unwittingly, replaced Japan with a plethora of Third World places equally cruel and ruthless and unliveable. If that is so, can American feminist cyberpunk be said to have redeemed itself of the stereotypical representation of the Third World, just because it does not imagine America invaded by others? Or does it evade

that trap only to be trapped by the notion that every place un-American is unliveable, whether it invades the American soil and soul or stays put, geographically speaking.

It remains to be seen what American feminist cyberpunk has done ideologically in shifting the setting from a Japan-infested America to the Third World. Unquestionably, both these trends come from current political climates, and are not simply products of innocent imagination. They are countries, who are all, at some level, a threat to America and its dominance. While Japan has long been a complex friend and foe both, China with its phenomenal economic growth has overtaken the manufacturing market and given stiff competition to American goods. States in the Middle East, especially those ruling on the Sharia lines, have been in constant conflict with America, and other Third World countries bearing no direct conflict with American hopes, however, have always been marked with the stigma of being uncultured and less civilized, characterized by corruption and poverty. Apparently, all projections of un-American states seem to do nothing more than reinforce of having America as the dominant superpower in order to ensure peace and progress. An America ruled by un-American entities, or un-American states run by un-American entities, both seem to have only perpetuated disorder, chaos and destruction.

An additional notable characteristic of cyberpunk, whether Western or Japanese, which distinguishes it from other subgenres of Science Fiction is its setting – most classic cyberpunk tends to be set in the Orient, or employing motifs that depict the proliferation of Japanese culture, depicting a future technologized world saturated with and obsessed with the Orient – Japan or Hong Kong. The study intends to examine how the Orient became a preferred setting, and to see traces, covert or overt, of neo-Orientalism in a technological world, or *techno-orientalism*, and comparing if feminist cyberpunk consciously follows or parts with the trend.

Cyberpunk is now synonymous with Japan, with Gibson proclaiming that "Modern Japan simply *was*cyberpunk" ("The Future Perfect"), on being shown around in the country. However, Gibson was referring to, was the skin of Japan, its apparent futuristic technologization solely, rather than a study into how the Japanese balanced their cultural ethos with the technological onslaught. From what Fredric Jameson posits as a photorealistic dynamic, a simulacrum of the real world that overshadows the real in his elucidation on a poem *China* by Bob Perelman, by substituting China by Japan, he transforms Gibson's Japan into "images, of which the 'realism' of the photorealist painting is now a simulacrum" (Jameson, "Cultural Logic" 213).

A further Orientalizing tendency, consolidated by the term *zaibatsu*, or Japanese multi-national companies, in cyberpunk fiction as representative of both third-stage capitalism and a marker of stereotypical Japanese ruthlessness, is noticed in Gibson's works by Darko Suvin in "On Gibson and Cyberpunk Science Fiction" (1991). Building upon Jameson, Suvin, Baudrillard's ideas of 'simulation' and 'simulacra' and other theorists, the study will encapsulate the representation of the Orient from a technological dystopian perspective, also reflecting on the conspicuous near absence of Oriental characters in an unmistakably prominent Oriental setting. 'The exotic (Orientalist) setting', writes Leonard Sanders, 'becomes a location for Western projections and imaginings' (106).

Feminist cyberpunk, on the other hand, has relatively diluted classic cyberpunk by replacing the obsession with Japan with a deluge of varied places, ranging from Morocco (*Nekropolis* by Maureen F. McHugh) and Saudi-Arabia (*Alif the Unseen* by G. Willow Wilson) to China (*China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen F. McHugh). While it can also be seen as a process of breaking away from techno-orientalism, feminist cyberpunk emulates the

same neo-orientalist tendencies by the depiction of Middle-Eastern/African/Third-World/Developing countries.

Cyberpunk fiction produced by America, whether classic cyberpunk or American feminist cyberpunk, seems to be motivated primarily, in its political aim of disturbing the popular sentiment in favor of American political strategies, regardless of how extreme American measures may be. Carrying ahead the idea of Orientalism as Said put it, American cyberpunk seems to have indulged into Techno-Orientalism, in the words of David Morley and Kevin Robbins who have argued in *Spaces of Identity* (1995) that "Western stereotypes of the Japanese hold them to be sub-human, as if they have no feeling, no emotion, no humanity". (172). Naoki Sakai further notes,

> The Orient does not connote any internal commonalty among the names subsumed under it; it ranges from region in the Middle East to those in the Far East. One can hardly find anything religious, linguistic or cultural that is common among these varied areas. The Orient is neither a cultural, religious or linguistic unity. The principle of its identity lies outside itself: what endows it with some vague sense of unity is that Orient is that which is excluded and objectified by the West, in the service of its historical progress. If the West did not exist, the Orient would not exist either (Modernity 499).

If the Orient is a Western projection, then Techno-Orientalism is a form of Orientalism informed by the capitalist structures of the Information Age. Japan, therefore, is not merely a geographical location or a culture, but a superimposition of Japanese markers in a futuristic frame. Jean Baudrillard once called Japan a satellite in orbit. Now Japan has been located in the future of technology. Morley and Robbins say,

> If the future is technological, and if technology has become 'Japanized', then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese, too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity (168).

It is important to note that Techno-orientalism, as an idea, has come from American media projections of Japan as a monstrous economic entity since the 1960s, when Japan, overturning all logical assumptions about progress after its destruction in World War II, came into limelight after Mitsubishi acquired American companies. Interestingly, it is not just economic power that Japan has come to flaunt after that. Japan leads the world in robotics and intelligent technology, and also has given Disney a run for its reputation, if not money, by extending its “soft power” in the form of exporting cultural products such as anime and manga.

What the American psyche projects through its cultural productions, including cyberpunk, is its paranoia of the Japanese taking over the charge of the world, and turning it into a bleak place, ridding it of all humanity that American has striven to keep alive since its inception as a democratic nation. What comes across then, is a heavily technologized Orient, in place of the Saidian “backward” Orient, with the recurrence of brutality, lack of civilization, and unbridled ambition.

While it has been sufficiently established that Japan has been subject to Techno-Orientalism in American cyberpunk narratives, it is to another aspect I wish to draw the idea of Techno-Orientalism. Apparently, American cyberpunk has been possessed by the Japanese. What is surprising is that it has meticulously avoided the literary legacy of Japanese in producing cyberpunk narratives. While the West has never shied away from lifting Japanese plots, characters and entire scenes, and even ripped off titles from Japanese

anime and manga, it has publicly denied even the knowledge of the existence of the originals. When Disney reframed the Japanese *Kimba, the White Lion* (1965-67) as *The Lion King* (1994), with noticeably close parallels, or lifted off stylistics from *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) to make *Matrix* (1999), or ripped off the idea of dream-altering from *Paprika* (2006) to produce a movie like *Inception* (2010), it has never acknowledged the liberal influence of Japanese cultural productions until it has been pressed to do so.

One of the objectives of my research is to examine why "cyberpunk" has come to be synonymous with American cyberpunk despite the prolific, thematically complex and popular productions of Japanese cyberpunk ever since the '80s, parallel to the West in chronological history. It seems unnerving that most searches on Google with the term "cyberpunk" only throw up references to American productions, and almost bypasses the Japanese variety, as if it doesn't exist. While Afro-futurism, or other languages/cultures producing little or no cyberpunk work of consequence, Japan has produced proper cyberpunk literature, manga and anime right parallel to the Americans, starting with *Akira* and following it up with masterpieces such as *Ghost in the Shell, Serial Experiments Lain, Texhnolyze* and *Paprika*.

It comes across less as a coincidence that such a huge cyberpunk industry could be effectively hidden in most academic and popular discussions on cyberpunk, while simultaneously drawing material as well as technical help from the Japanese, and yet negate the importance, and if possible, existence of Japanese cyberpunk. My research will therefore also focus on the reasons why Japanese cyberpunk has been excluded on such a consistent scale, and if it is also indicative of techno-orientalism whereby the West seeks to obliterate alternative Japanese futures that do not portray the world being taken over by the ruthless,

inhuman Japanese, and instead advocate the philosophy often depicted in anime, that of peace, adjustment and team work.

More importantly, a deeper look at Japanese cyberpunk would entail the observation that despite both Japanese and American cyberpunk being vastly different in their approach to the future, the core elements - the four Cs - remain the same for both. It is interesting to note how the American seem to believe that the only possible cyberpunk future is a noir, gritty world dominated by the Japanese *zaibatsus* churning out Artificial Life for money, power and global domination, a fate which only an illegal underground marginalized hacker can defeat. In contrast, the Japanese see technology as a threat to peace, if landed in the wrong hands, and how through a combination of smartness, ethics, and a little broadening of vision to accommodate to the social changes following the effects of such science, one can still reap the benefits of that science.

It would then be crucial to ask this: How different is Japanese cyberpunk from Western cyberpunk? Do the differences amount to anything more than a nominal difference or is it symptomatic of deeper differences in culture? Does that, in any way, alter our perspectives and definitions of what cyberpunk is? Do the differences, in any way, imply that what we generally consider today as cyberpunk, is nothing but the dominant Western view of cyberpunk?

An affirmative to the last three questions would mean challenging the very definition of cyberpunk as we know it, a proposition that threatens the dominance of America not only in its fictional futuristic universe, but also its present ideological universe.

Apart from this, it would be an extremely interesting exercise to see if there are any significant differences in which Japan, within the realm of cyberpunk, is depicted by Western

cyberpunk traditions and the Japanese cyberpunk traditions. To put it simply, do the Japanese write, portray and see Japan in cyberpunk differently than their Western counterparts? If so, what sort of tendencies do these two nations display in the larger field of cultural studies?

On a similar plane to these media, cyberpunk has been a popular trope in gaming. From Table-top RPGs to video games, cyberpunk is an ever-growing favourite among gamers – following its popularity, it is imperative that a feminist critique of it be prepared, especially in view of Anita Sarkeesian's attempts to do the same to other video-games.[1] Sarkeesian's videos are cultural analyses of popular culture media including video/PC games following a historical approach, simultaneously appraise the changing (or not-so-changing) trends of female representation and stereotyping. Some, such as *Damsel-in-Distress Part 1, 2 & 3, Dude-in-Distress, Miss Male Character: Tropes v/s Women, LEGO and Gender: Part 1 & 2,* are among her controversial recent videos.

While fiction, anime and manga reach only a limited, though quite vast audience, PC games have a vastly greater reach, and are a more popular expression of reigning social sentiments. The anonymity of the games, whether offline or online, coupled with greater direct participation and choice-making of the gamer than presented to the reader/viewer of literature/manga/anime, makes it a medium worth of analysis, whereby it reaches more number of people, allows a chance to explore the motivations of people who only respond to their environment without really examining or questioning it, and instead of simply focusing on the niche elite clan of readers or manga/anime fans, reach out to a diverse range of people across countries, all playing the same games in different corners of the world, belonging to different ethnic, social, political, economic, demographic, gender and sexuality backgrounds. It is a genre that immediately responds to the needs of the gamers, and gaming companies

[1]http://www.feministfrequency.com

strive hard not to offend its gamers lest they quit playing the games, and hence, are both reflectors and producers of ideology. While games can provide choices to the players, and also let them communicate, the very choices allow people to make choices comfortable to them. For the ones who already are rebellious, it can allow greater liberty; for those not very open to new ideas, these choices make it easier for them to reinforce traditional attitudes through "performativity", and alienate the minority/marginalized players further.

While Anita Sarkeesian's attempts to trace and analyse the place of women in gaming narratives as well as gaming behaviour have not extended to cyberpunk games, this study attempts to bring these games under scrutiny and explore the representation of women, as well as the Orient (if applicable) in the gaming content.

Sarkeesian's own summing up of her intent through this venture is apparent in an interview:

> Feminist Frequency is a video web series that primarily explores representations of women in pop culture such as TV shows, movies, comic books and video games. Mainstream popular culture has become, for better or worse, our dominant form of storytelling especially in Western cultures and these stories do have a profound influence on our lives, perceptions, values and belief systems — even if we don't always like to admit it. So, my goal with Feminist Frequency is to explore the tropes, stereotypes and patterns that are most often associated with female characters in mass media. (Dean)

Through the videos she has painstakingly prepared with her staff, it is apparent that like much literature, gaming too is an activity that has been mostly catered to the male audience, viewing females from a predominantly male gaze, reinforcing cultural markers that

have stereotyped women as soft, weak, helpless creatures, and lately, the more morally ambiguous kickass sidekick serving as the hero's Girl-Friday/Lover.

While it might be argued that gaming is such an obscure source of popular media to be considered seriously, it is extremely important to note the backlash Sarkeesian suffered when she, an avid gamer since childhood attempted to fund her Kickstarter project in 2009 to enable her to make these videos.

It is not just particularly the content of the game that is, despite being a source of entertainment, deeply harmful to the shaping of cultural and gender sensitivities of the gender that plays them the most, i.e. boys and men, but the rabid insistence by men to preserve the skewed gender status-quo and the violent forms it takes, that is shocking and disgusting, to put it mildly. It cannot be argued that gamers are a too obscure, minority community, or that games are too inconsequential an activity to intrude upon the pressing issue of gender insensitivity to become the focus of serious studies.

Games like *DeusEx: Human Revolution*, *Shadow Run*, *Akira*, *The Matrix* (Franchise), *Blade Runner*, *Syndicate*, *Remember Me*, *Collateral*, *Cypher*, *Hard Reset*, *Neuromancer*, *Cyberpunk 13*, *Cyberpunk 2020* and the much-awaited *Cyberpunk 2077* (whose teaser trailer has a prominent female cyborg in a skimpy outfit), to name just a handful, are but an extension of cyberpunk, albeit in a different, and sadly, much neglected medium. With its large (and still increasing) fan-base, it is absolutely imperative to analyze popular, representative and exceptional cyberpunk games to understand how they have adapted the genre to their needs, followed by a simultaneous cultural critique as serious in tone and attitude as one directed at canonical literature.

The games discussed would be analyzed on the three characteristics Espen Aarseth proposes in his essay "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis" (2003):

• Gameplay (the players' actions, strategies and motives)

• Game-structure (the rules of the game, including the simulation rules)

• Game-world (fictional content, topology/level design, textures etc.) (Aarseth)

In order to analyze how players respond to games, Richard Bartle (2005) has analysed the impact of various player attitudes in building a social atmosphere in online multiplayer games, where interaction between players in instrumental in the act of playing. The typology lists four kinds of players: Socializers (players who play to enjoy socializing with other players), Killers (players who play to annoy, harass or damage other players), Achievers (players who derive enjoyment from and actively seek victory in the games) and Explorers (players who enjoy exploring the nuanced settings/playing alternatives, hidden areas of the game or exploiting programming glitches) (Bartle).

Examining Gaming from the same yardsticks delineated for literature, manga and anime, wherever applicable, the study intends to critically analyse them not as separate media, but as a contemporary, and perhaps more popular form of cyberpunk culture, further shedding light on how cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, on the whole, have either reinforced or challenged its cultural limitations in a different medium.

Why did I pick cyberpunk, then, from other vast narratives available to me? For one, it deals with both the future and the present – it looks at the future from the lens of the present, and vice-versa too. It is a two-way critique, an imaginative, far-fetched, yet utterly

possible and frightening picture of the fate we are sealing for ourselves. And with technology such as social networking and smartphones, the world has only become a more complicated space. The virtual space has become more real, where anonymity, the possibility of multiple accounts and personalities, and the possibility of a restructuring of the social and the moral order, allows people to express things and behaviours online that they could not dream of doing in the real world. cyberpunk takes warfare to a whole new level, where corporations and nations are fighting to occupy mindspace, rather than geographical spaces. In an era where capitalism is marketed with fancy tags of globalization, cyberpunk is steeped in and becomes synonymous with unbridled capitalism, where people become unwitting subjects to control by knowing how to use technology, but being unaware as to how technology uses the mind to "reinforce social and cultural structures. The freedom to express also entails the freedom to bully, and online bullying has often caused suicides in the real world, pointing to the alarming fact that disconnecting with virtual reality is much more difficult than simply shutting down the PC. Social movements pertaining to issues like gender, sexuality, race take on a covert, yet important dimension in cybertexts – our stances today will define the future, and it is only through the future that we can judge the adequacy of our actions today.

Again, Americans and Japanese have been most prolific in churning out complex, imaginative cyberpunk texts dealing with these social and theoretical structures, and yet, they have projected two completely different futures, worthy of comparison. While cyberpunk is now synonymous with American cyberpunk, Japanese cyberpunk has been nearly disavowed, leading to serious questions on its exclusion from the term altogether. Games, a seemingly low-brow, trivial pastime with no serious academic value, however, are a cyber medium themselves, to study visual participative cybertexts that allow people to "choose" than simply read or view cyberpunk. Players effectively "live" in the cyberpunk world virtually, and provide important insights into how people respond to the possible futures.

Recent research focusing on cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, understandably owing to the vastness of the field, has been limited to exploring a single medium, or two related media at the most at a time. While Carlen Lavigne's *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study* (2012) is an exemplary exploration of how classic cyberpunk gave way to feminist cyberpunk in English, and specifically American literature, it completely ignores Japanese cyberpunk of any media, which, despite having its own unique brand of cyberpunk, is not only uncannily similar to Western cyberpunk, being ridden with problems of overt masculinity (albeit of a different kind), but is also largely related to Western cyberpunk. Both have nearly parallel chronological histories of inception, and have drawn elements from each other and adapted them to develop their own unique brand, thus contributing to the growth of each other.

Insightful researches like Leonard Patrick Sanders' *Postmodern Orientalism: William Gibson, Cyberpunk and Japan* (2008), while studying how the West has re-appropriated Japan, the mystic Orient in a new kind of Orientalism, Techno-Orientalism, are limited to the narrow yet deep field of drawing from Said, and they fail to account for what a neo-Orientalist attitude does to women/LGBT(Q)s in the works concerned. Women in cyberpunk are already nearly invisible by virtue of having nothing much to do and they become further obscure when a socio-political-historical approach evades the question of women/LGBT(Q)s further. Also, only classic cyberpunk works have yet been explored in the quest to lay bare traces of Techno-Orientalism – it yet remains to be seen what feminist cyberpunk has done to the Third-World nations it has chosen as its settings, as it moves away from Tokyo, Chiba or Hong Kong. It is only logical that feminist cyberpunk too be brought under the scanner for an inquiry into Techno-Orientalism.

In all the feminist critiques I have come across, none discusses how these works, whether in any chosen media, fare on the Bechdel or Mako-Mori tests. Not only will each work and medium I choose be subjected to these tests, it will also be explored if a new test, complementary to these prior tests can be evolved as a satisfactory marker of female representation – and possibly, to gauge if an Orientalist test can be prepared too.

There are studies focusing on Japanese anime and manga, some of which have short discussions on how an Otaku (Western fan) views the genres, but feminist critiques are largely missing, save a few outraged online posts/articles deriding legitimately their content while being themselves of little use as primary research material. Cyberpunk games, sadly, have somehow managed to stay off-radar. Anita Sarkeesian's laudable, serious efforts at tracing the trends of female representation in popular media including games, both old and new, popular and obscure, have not included any cyberpunk games.

Such an inquiry becomes all the more difficult since the evolution of cyberpunk literature and cyberpunk games have been nearly parallel, but without any recorded chronological history of the latter. Individually, these are all different aspects of the larger field of cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk – however, there seems to have been no research that views all of them together from a common perspective, a perspective that would identify the effects of one medium on the other, to posit the presence or absence of a common trend vaguely informing the evolution in each genre. All these aspects are too intimately entwined with each other to be able to meditate on one of them and iron out the rest. Not only would such an exclusive enterprise run the risk of being fallacious, I suspect, it would result in a different kind of Orientalism in research, where the researcher might unwittingly render the excluded as the Other.

Aims and Objectives:

The proposed research aims at examining classic cyberpunk works and feminist cyberpunk works, including novels, short-stories, manga and anime to trace the changing objectives and ideologies with which these works first emerged and evolved into first a sub-genre within Science Fiction and then into waves within its own realm. This evolution of classic cyberpunk into a less focused but more varied and flexible garb lends itself to a politically charged discourse that can be situated within and argued from the larger discourses of ideology, feminism, Orientalism and postmodernism. It will trace the roots of classic cyberpunk and its distinguishing features, to its gradual transition to a subgenre (feminist cyberpunk) that was replete with feminist concerns not unrelated to the larger feminist discourse. In discussing the causes and the nature of this transition, its features and its points of departure from the older form, the study also takes a sweeping look at other issues not taken up by classic cyberpunk that feminist cyberpunk addressed, consequently blurring the lines of the subgenre itself. Also, such a study would necessarily lend itself to an Orientalist discourse, tracing what cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, including both American and Japanese cyberpunk, have done to alter or reinforce stereotyped images of Japan, or of other places. The objectives of the research would be:

1. To analyse the emergence of the sub-genre cyberpunk in English literature from a historical and cultural perspective, noting its distinctive features as well as studying the roles and depiction of women/queers in classic cyberpunk, followed by an inquiry into the allegations against classic cyberpunk.

2. To analyse the emergence of a new trend in English cyberpunk literature that consists of a prominent feminist slant, comparing the features of this transition from classic cyberpunk to feminist cyberpunk and situating it in the framework of larger feminist discourse.

3. To explore other popular forms of media, namely manga, anime and cyberpunk games, that employ cyberpunk and applying a similar analysis to their features, noting, if any, transition towards becoming a politically and ideologically charged genre.

4. To analyse how classic cyberpunk started off from a narrow premise, transitioning into a subgenre that reflected present-day and future concerns and in the process, became less focused but more flexible.

5. To search for and analyse neo-Orientalizing tendencies in classic cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, especially with respect to the changing settings as cyberpunk gives way to its feminist counterpart.

6. To analyse the differences between the representation of Japan in the productions of Japanese cyberpunk authors/artists and their Western counterparts and probe into the cultural consequences of such representations.

Hypothesis and Research Questions:

The 1980s cyberpunk was characterized by a white, male, middle-class loner perspective that began to evolve into a wave that accommodated concurrent arguments in feminist theory, bringing to the fore other marginalized concerns never addressed by classic cyberpunk, such as queer sexuality, the interaction of technology and women, environmental degradation and religion/mythology, which were unique to feminist cyberpunk. Other media such as manga, anime and cyberpunk games, owing to their huge popularity among cyberpunk fans, also prove to be sites ripe for research into the same concerns applicable to literature. An inquiry into Orientalist attitudes of these works is also an imperative exercise here.

The proposed research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What is classic cyberpunk and how is it different from other sub-genres of Science Fiction?

2. How and why did it make the transition to a sub-genre focusing on feminist and post-humanist concerns?

3. How is feminist cyberpunk different from classic cyberpunk and how does it relate to a postmodern discourse of feminism? Apart from a prominent championing of women's stories and experiences, how does feminist cyberpunk act as an umbrella term for themes of ecological destruction, religion, sexuality and post-humanism via the concept of cyborgs?

4. How does classic cyberpunk re-enact Orientalism through cyberpunk? Does feminist cyberpunk address this issue, or does it participate in a different form of Orientalism by replacing Japan with the Middle-East/Third World?

5. How do other popular forms of literary and visual art, such as manga, anime and cyberpunk games (PC games) reflect the cyberpunk culture, values, ideological stances and other relevant concerns?

6. How different is Japanese cyberpunk from Western cyberpunk? Do the differences amount to anything more than a nominal difference or is it symptomatic of deeper differences in culture? Does that, in any way, alter our perspectives and definitions of what cyberpunk is? Do the differences, in any way, imply that what we generally consider today as cyberpunk, is nothing but the dominant Western view of cyberpunk?

7. Do the Japanese portray and interpret Japan in cyberpunk differently than Western authors, critics and audiences? If so, why, and what are its implications for the larger world?

8. Is there evidence of the sexuality and/or gender of the writer influencing the kind of cyberpunk s/he produces?

Research Methodology:

For the study of classic cyberpunk works, representative works of the canon, with special emphasis on women writers will be chosen. For feminist cyberpunk works, apart from representative works, other lesser-known and/or relatively recent works of fiction too will be studied and included for comparative analysis of trends. For critical analysis of content, style, themes, politics and ideology, theories of feminism, cultural studies, postmodernism and Science Fiction studies are chosen. For other media, popular representative anime, manga and cyberpunk games (PC games) are included for cross-examination with literature as well as a concise, independent inquiry into their representations of literary cyberpunk concerns.

Classic cyberpunk has long been a controversial subject both within and outside the narrow Science Fiction community. Recent researches have contrasted it with its later, more evolved from Feminist cyberpunk to highlight how classic cyberpunk had re-enacted the white male concerns in a highly technologized, futuristic garb. Further, many researchers have traced a neo-Orientalist, rather, Techno-Orientalist tendency in the depiction of the Orient, specifically Japan, in these high-tech futures. However, these studies have been limited solely to Western literature, and have, therefore, suffered from what Spivak pointed out in her essay Can the Subaltern Speak? Western criticism of the West, according to the gist of the essay, has produced yet another myth of the malaise the West suffers from, treating the Orient yet again as an object rather than as a subject.

With this study, I intend to contrast Western notions of cyberpunk with the cyberpunk literature, anime and manga that are produced in Japan, by the Japanese. I aim to not only

highlight the differences within Western literature on what is cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, but also to question what cyberpunk really is, and whether the term cyberpunk as used today is limited to solely the Western perception of what the movement is.

Along with this, the study will show how cyberpunk has evolved from a spectacularly, solely white straight male perspective to a more women/LGBT(Q)-friendly genre. Along with that, the study also brings under the lens feminist cyberpunk, to see if it re-enacts the Techno-Orientalist tendencies of classic cyberpunk to project its new settings in a predominantly Western point of view.

Finally, the study will bring under purview cyberpunk games to analyze from all these perspectives how it fares, and see if its obscurity has allowed it to escape the narrow tendencies of its counterparts or has enabled it to become more hostile. Therefore, the study intends to explore and analyse both Western and Japanese forms of cyberpunk right from its inception to its latest evolutions, and see how they fare on feminist and Orientalist counts, bringing within its purview literature, anime, manga and PC games.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

1. Introduction

In the Introduction, I have attempted to problematize the understanding of the term cyberpunk, by exploring the beginnings of the term, its initial usage, and its gradual culmination into an identifiable subgenre within the Science Fiction tradition. Focusing on the fact that neither did the writers identify themselves as either Science Fiction or cyberpunk writers, consequently indicating that the overlapping features of their works were largely a product of their shared understanding of the contemporary world and its future course, rather than adherence to a specific literary style/genre/movement, I have pointed out to two

important aspects of the term cyberpunk: one, that it is a loose, ever-expanding term, and two, that it is still identifiable as a distinct subgenre owing to an overlapping recurrence of core shared elements and assumptions about the future.

In the next section of the chapter, I have attempted to chart the transition of classic cyberpunk to what has formerly been termed as feminist cyberpunk, and have argued in favour of an inclusive term "postcyberpunk", thus using the same term for the Second Wave cyberpunk works situating the "post-" as "beyond classic cyberpunk", rather than "after classic cyberpunk", though the latter also holds true to a certain extent.

In Chapter 1, I have introduced the term "feminism" and "masculinity studies" as they have been utilized in the thesis, to point to the inclusion of various non-heteronormative and gendered practices as a marker of the shift from classic cyberpunk to Second Wave cyberpunk, instead of attempting to define what "feminine experience" consists of. The framework is then used to examine various canonical classiccyberpunk texts, based on their engagement with gendered behavior in a supposedly genderless cyberspace.

Section two of this chapter focuses on the figure of AIs, cyborgs and humanoids, to further explore how the construction of the body, as well as the mind as the seat of gendered identity is complicated, and to a large extent, arbitrary. Rather than positing them as genderless alternatives to the bodies in the future, I argue how even their artificial bodies and entities are deeply entrenched in gender identifications.

Section three of this chapter takes up a similar analysis of gender and sexual normativity in two Japanese cultural media – anime and manga. Given that Japan did not experience the waves in cyberpunk, and its own cultural notions of femininity, masculinity and their integration with technology, I have explored the roles of females in such narratives.

In Chapter 2, I have analyzed in detail key postcyberpunk texts that have non-white, non-male, and/or non-straight characters as protagonists, and examined how they have explored the consequences of gendered bodies, roles and sexuality in a plausible near-future. My findings suggest that overall, the understanding of gender has expanded substantially, to prove itself inclusive of all non-heteronormative practices, and not just reiterate the essentialist position of constructing a feminine experience.

Along with postcyberpunk texts, I have also analyzed video games as an extension of cyberpunk culture. Produced in a chronology parallel to cyberpunk in fiction, I have endeavoured to see if the criticism against classic cyberpunk, in terms of gender, which has led to postcyberpunk reimaginings of gender in a second wave, has had any impact on gaming content. It is, however, shocking to note that games, when it comes to gender representations, are still stuck in the classic cyberpunk mode, with females playing a small selection of roles meant to further the male protagonists' goals.

Chapter 3 begins with an examination of the USA's dominant understanding and articulation of the Japanese as a race and as a dominant economy capable of upsetting its long hegemonic position in world affairs. Noting that the sentiment is reiterated among the Western nations in general, and is not solely an American phenomenon, although America has played a substantial role in etching it on the Western consciousness, I have tried to contrast the Japanese landscape in American classic cyberpunk with Japanese cyberpunk, and traced the two Japans back to their own particular engagement with history, science, and contemporary politics and economics, using the Techno-orientalist framework as suggested by Morley and Robins.

In Chapter 4, I have extended the Techno-orientalist examination to Postcyberpunk, which has replaced Japan with other Third-World countries as the location of the future.

While the paranoia of another country replacing US as the centre of the global affairs is not reiterated, one sees that except for Bacigalupi, all other authors, to a certain degree, exhibit a subtle notion of American superiority, or at least necessity.

A similar examination has also been extended to cyberpunk games, which, just like their engagement with gender, have shown no progression in their engagement with the Orient as the location of the future.

Thus, these chapters have tried to look at the various forms and media in which cyberpunk is produced, and consumed widely, to understand how gender and racial representations, far from being an organic extension to older, more conservative attitudes, are deeply located in the socio-cultural and political-economic nexus of existence. While studies on separate media have already been conducted, my attempt was to piece all varying narratives together in a linear time-frame to understand their impact on each other, as well as to locate points where they still refuse to interact with each other.

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