

Semester 1

Cyborg

In her 1985 work “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” Donna Haraway defines cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 1). Haraway’s cyborg is a vehicle through which the confines of society can be brought down and a new reality can be born, free of oppression. Literally, the cyborg is the incorporation of machine into a human body in order to enhance the capabilities of the human. Haraway proposes that this incorporation will tear down the concept of gender altogether in order to form a cyborg “species” that is neither capable of oppressing nor being oppressed.

The cyborg is also mentioned in Grant Morrison’s comic strip *WE3*, though the term is reduced to “biorg” to refer to the robot-animals in the comic. Morrison expands the definition of cyborg (though the word is slightly abbreviated) because it describes animals enhanced by technology instead of humans. The biorgs, who are all domesticated animals, have the sole purpose of killing. The return of these domesticated animals to their original killer instincts indicates an ironic loss of evolutionary progress. When they escape their human captors they use their enhancements to secure their freedom as nature’s organisms.

Patternism

Patternism is mentioned throughout Susan Schneider's essay "Getting a Mindscan." Schneider defines patternism as "as long as person A has the same computational configuration as person B, A and B are the same person" (Schneider 84). This definition is used in relation to the concept of "uploading" oneself, or uploading one's mind into a computer system that will allow a copy of the person's consciousness to be duplicated into an android body. However, a patternist paradox emerges in this example: while patternism would hold that the copy of the person is the same person, there can only truly be one person. So the person whose mind is duplicated into an android will emerge from the duplication as themselves, and the duplicate will emerge with the same mind and experiences, but in a different body.

Schneider then claims that a person's pattern is a necessary aspect of their identity, but not sufficient to determine an identity, as duplicates share a pattern but are not the original person. The addition of "spatiotemporal continuity" (Schneider 86) into this equation, in combination with a person's pattern, she argues, would form a complete identity. So pattern is one of two defining aspects of a human identity, but is not by itself able to define a human identity. In this way, patternism is a concept that straddles the line between humanity and inhumanity.

Transhumanist

Susan Schneider's "Could You Merge With AI?" describes transhumanists as aiming to "redesign the human condition, striving for immortality and synthetic intelligence, all in hopes of improving our overall quality of life" (Schneider 73). Essentially, transhumanists are humans who are optimistic about the viability of introducing modern technology into the human in order

to create an enhanced human. Schneider also mentions disagreements within the transhumanist ingroup—primarily that some think the singularity (the overtaking of artificial intelligence to organic intelligence) will occur soon, while others believe progress will not be so rapid.

Another essay by Schneider, “Getting a Mindscan,” also mentions the concept of transhumanists. In this excerpt, Schneider claims that “without a firm handle on [the issue of patterns], the transhumanist developmental trajectory is, for all we know, a technophile’s alluring path to suicide” (Schneider 90). Here, Schneider makes the claim that if a transhumanist has not considered the implications of patternism, it may lead to their destruction. So transhumanism can be dangerous if the concept is not thoroughly considered before it is pursued.

Digient

“Digient” is a term used throughout Ted Chiang’s story *The Lifestyle of Software Objects*. Digients are defined as “digital organisms that live in environments like data earth” (Chiang 64). Data earth is a digital world that can be accessed by humans via virtual-reality headsets. A moral dilemma arises when readers learn more about digients: the digital beings are considered conscious, and their ability to learn and grow indicates an intelligence similar to that of a human child. The question then arises, “what differentiates digients and human children?” Despite the fact that they are digital beings, they have consciousness, can make decisions, and can experience negative feelings.

While digients are the brainchild of Chiang, they relate closely to ideas seen throughout the mind unit, most closely to the notion of “uploading” oneself discussed by Susan Schneider. This idea further complicates the digient moral dilemma because with the ability to upload their

consciousness, the copy of a human present in the digital world is essentially no different from a digient. This dilemma is only further complicated when Ana, the main character of the story, plants her digient's consciousness in a physical android body.

Body

A broad and sweeping term, "body" was a key word of several readings assigned during the body unit. These readings viewed the term through vastly different lenses. Ben Spatz's "What a Body Can Do" explored the abilities of the human body. The reading offered a list of abilities that makes up a sort of definition of the body by showing readers what a human body is capable of. This list included "a body can do the Charleston," "a body can conform," "a body can undo," "a body can sing an old Jewish folk song" (Spatz 3), and other somewhat random abilities. Spatz's article does not glorify the human body, but rather provides a framework through which we can understand it. This framework is built on positives: things the body can do.

Michel Foucault's "Docile Bodies" also provides a framework through which we can understand the body, though it is vastly different from Spatz's. "Docile Bodies" discusses the body as a malleable tool; as something that can be shaped to accomplish certain tasks. Foucault claims that "the classical age discovered the body as an object and target of power" (Foucault 136). According to Foucault, the definition of the body must include the ability to be used.

Augusto Boal, in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, says "we can begin by stating that the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound and movement" (Boal 125). Controlling one's body is essential to the production of good theater, and via Boal, to

the poetics of the oppressed (see below definition). Here, the body can be seen as a starting point to the societal change that can occur under the influence of the poetics of the oppressed.

All three sources explore the possibilities of the body: as an agent of doing, as a tool to be molded, and as a changemaker.

Spectator-actor

Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* introduced the term "Spectator-actor," which refers to a person whose status is as both an actor and a spectator at once. Boal explains the importance of the spectator-actor: "The walls must be torn down... the spectator starts acting again" (Boal 120). By walls, Boal is referring to the barriers raised between actor and spectator that represent larger societal constructs. He explains this concept further: "To understand the poetics of the oppressed, one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people—'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal 122). By changing the spectator into a spectator-actor, the person is transformed into a vehicle for change and societal reconstruction.

Boal continues his definition with a claim: "The theater is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it" (Boal 122). If the theater is run by the bourgeoisie, it can be used to depict whatever the ruling class would like; it can be used to influence public opinion and to quell the people. Boal conducted an exercise in which people acted out situations and made decisions that ultimately resulted in a change of their microcosmic society being played on stage. After these exercises, these people could carry their status as spectator-actors into the real world and cause legitimate societal change.

Consciousness

The idea of consciousness emerged throughout the first semester of humes. It was prevalent especially in the mind and spirit units, in which it was defined in many different ways. In the mind unit, the idea of consciousness was associated with humanity. This connection first emerges in Amy Kind's *Philosophy of the Mind: The Basics* when she discusses what criteria determines consciousness. She discusses the Turing test, a method for determining whether a machine can think that involves testing whether a human can distinguish a machine's responses from those of a human. However, she offers an objection to this test: the argument from consciousness. This argument holds that "to be a thinker, it's not enough for a system simply to behave as if it's thinking. It matters what's going on inside." (Kind 105). Turing rejects this theory with the claim that by this logic, we would have to commit to solipsism because just as we cannot know what is going on inside machines, we cannot know what happens inside fellow humans. Another criterion offered for determining consciousness is by Susan Schneider, who suggests that we determine whether "machines have developed views of [their] own about consciousness" (Schneider 106).

While much of the mind unit revolved around the idea of consciousness and what determines whether a being (or machine) is conscious, the term appeared once again in the spirit unit in the notion of "double-consciousness" proposed by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He defines double consciousness as "this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others... One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone

keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 38). Du Bois brings an entirely different lens to the definition of consciousness: one of the oppressed. The consciousness of Black Americans is split between their own self-consciousness and society’s view of them, looking inwards. Du Bois emphasizes that a single consciousness is a privilege.

Whiteness

“Whiteness” is a term mentioned throughout the spirit unit. Ashton Crawley, in his introduction to *Black Pentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* defines whiteness as “a way to think the world; it has its theological and philosophical resonances and employments; it has its theological and philosophical emplotments. It is a violent encounter, an encounter and way of life that is fundamentally about the interdiction, the desired theft, of the capacity to breathe” (Crawley 6). Whiteness is about acceptance of a way of life that includes violence, that includes the desire to seize “the capacity to breathe” from those who do not subscribe to this lifestyle. The definition of whiteness is not limited to a color of skin, but is expanded to a mindset that limits the ability of non-white Americans.

The condition of being white is also discussed in W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he says of the African-American “he would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that his Negro blood has a message for the world” (Du Bois 39). Du Bois recognises white Americanism as a mindset, similar to whiteness, that places whites in societal power and makes upwards movement impossible for Black Americans. The message, Du Bois argues, is that the Black man desires the solace of being both Black and American at the same time, of merging this double-consciousness (see above definition) into one.

Semester 2

Utopia

In her book *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan states “the word utopia means, literally, ‘no place,’ and this book respects the letter of its sense by refusing to pin it down to prescription” (Dolan 7). Dolan’s argument is that through performance, we can depict these ideal “no places” in order to stimulate a people to work towards something. “Utopian performatives,” claims Dolan, “spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures toward a potentially better future” (Dolan 8). While utopia does not actually exist, it is comparable to a concept like infinity—it is something that can be worked with, a useful concept that can help us, via performance, to realize a more perfect tomorrow.

José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* examines the concept of utopia through a different lens. Muñoz makes a critical distinction between two different types of utopia: abstract and concrete. He writes that abstract utopias “are untethered from any historical consciousness” (Muñoz 3). Concrete utopias, however, “are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential” (Muñoz 3). While abstract utopias are, in Muñoz’s mind, a mere daydream, concrete utopias are rooted in history and are feasible. Muñoz’s definitions of these two utopias are compatible with Dolan’s idea of the word, as he would argue that her utopias through performance must be concrete in order to be effective.

Futurism

In the conclusions section of his *The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto*, Luigi Russolo claims that “Futurist musicians should substitute for the limited variety of timbres that the orchestra possesses today the infinite variety of timbres in noises, reproduced with appropriate mechanisms” (Russolo 28). The ideals of futurism are infused in this sentence. It is a movement departing from the traditional, an embracing of the avant-garde and both the ordinary and strange as an art form. Russolo, a major proponent of futurism, embraced the movement by advocating for unorganized music—music composed of, for example, “gurgling,” “noises obtained by beating on pottery,” and “death rattles” (Russolo 28).

A Slap in the Face of Public Taste is a Russian futurist manifesto which urges readers to “Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity” (Mayakovsky et. al. 1). The three names mentioned all represent the traditional, which the authors implore readers not just to abandon, but to actively reject. By definition, futurism requires a total rejection of tradition and a transition into a new, futurist world. The word is closely intertwined with other activist terms like Afro-Pessimism because it requires outright rejection of the past in order to effectively move forward.

Afrofuturism

The term “Afrofuturism” emerges in Mark Dery’s *Black to the Future*, which states that “speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture... might, for want of a better term, be called ‘Afrofuturism’” (Dery 180). The juxtaposition of traditional African American culture with a concept of the future conveys a message about blackness going forward; it functioned

(and still functions) as a symbol of hope and an ideal to work towards for black citizens of America dissatisfied with a system built upon a racial hierarchy.

In a 2019 Smithsonian panel with several influential Afrofuturist figures, Vernon Reid explained his love for the moon landing as a child. He expressed his disagreement with those who argued that there were too many problems on earth to be spending so much on space exploration: “I heard a lot of adults complaining, you know, ‘we got problems here on earth, why are they sending people up to the moon,’ and I was like, because we got to go” (Reid 35:35-35:43). This quote defines Afrofuturism perfectly. Racism isn’t a mere problem in America, it is the very cornerstone upon which the nation was built. There is no fixing the foundation—instead, as represented by space travel, we must leave and start anew in order to establish an ideal future for black people. Because of the brokenness of today’s society, a completely reimagined future is necessary for many black artists to express themselves fully.

Manifesto

“Manifestos” by Julia Foulkes describes a series of dance manifestos that altered the course of the American dance scene. A theme emerged in the manifestos that she mentioned: a desire to move forwards, and a rejection of that which had already been done. Through manifestos, she argued, “modern dancers moved on to establish new roles for themselves in the arts and in society” (Foulkes 26). Clearly, Foulkes’s definition of Manifesto is some recording of ideas powerful enough that it can cause major change in a specific field or movement.

Tristan Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto” is somewhat meta in that it, despite being a manifesto, explains the author’s distaste for manifestos. He states that “in principle I am against

manifestoes, as I am also against principles... I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction..." (Tzara 1). Tzara uses the word manifesto to convey that he is embracing contradiction, which is a characteristic of Dadaism. Despite disagreeing with the principle of manifestos, he is able to acknowledge his distaste for them while also using the form to advertise his proposed artistic movement.

Afro-Pessimism

Jared Sexton's *Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word* attempts to explain the difficult-to-understand term. The article defines the term with a list: it is "a negative appraisal of the capabilities of black peoples, associating blackness with lack rather than tracing the machinations through which the association is drawn and enforced... a myopic denial of overlapping and ongoing histories of struggle and a fatal misunderstanding of the operational dynamics of power..." (Sexton 2). The definition continues, explaining how afro-pessimism represents not only "associating blackness with lack" but also a society built upon heteronormativity. It represents, then, problems with the system: both systemic racism and sexism; a society built upon that perception of people of color as somehow lesser by default.

Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, while it does not explain Afro-Pessimism, addresses the aspect of the word associated with heteronormativity or societal homophobia. *Cruising Utopia*'s thesis states that "queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 1). Closely related to concepts of both Afro-Pessimism and Afro-futurism, this thesis expresses a dissatisfaction with the state of

the world and insists that society must be overhauled completely to achieve an absence of homophobia or systemic racism or Afro-Pessimism.

AIDs

David Wojnarowicz and James Romberger's comic book *Seven Miles a Second* itself could be considered an all-encompassing definition of AIDs. A quotation from the book, however, seems to encapsulate Wojnarowicz's feelings about AIDs perfectly: "I'm carrying the rage like a blood-filled egg... and as each t-cell disappears from my body it's replaced by ten pounds of pressure ten pounds of rage and I focus that rage into nonviolent resistance but that focus is starting to slip my hands are beginning to move independently and the egg is starting to crack..." (Wojnarowicz 44). AIDs is not just a disease, it is a societal symbol for ostracization, it is the literal bodily manifestation of otherness. This quotation connects the literal physical consequences of AIDs as a disease to those larger social implications. It is not just a symbol, though. AIDs represents a transformation, a new understanding of the world. It is terrible, it destroys the body, and at the same time, it inspires new power within Wojnarowicz.

Choreographer Bill T. Jones's performance *Still/Here* aims to bring to light stories of people living with life threatening illnesses. Jones asks participants to think of the lows and highs of their lives, and asks them to imagine their own death. Dancer Jay, when asked about his fears, answers "I fear the loss of my friends to AIDs... I fear that I will be the last to die" (Jones 9:47-10:02). Jay's definition of AIDs seems common among those living with the disease: fear. Depictions of fear emerged throughout *Seven Miles a Second* as well—though in both *Still/Here* and the comic, the fear associated with AIDs was usually fear for others. AIDs, then, represents

not only a network of fear but also a network of understanding that can only be achieved through mutual struggle.

Choreography

Isadora Duncan's definition of choreography is traditional, yet futurist in a sense. In her 1927 manifesto "Vision of America Dancing" she writes of a dance in her imagination "it [was] the living leap of the child springing toward the heights, towards its future accomplishment, towards a new great vision of life that would express America" (Duncan 198). Duncan defines choreography as dance, as a way of moving the body to express beauty that would mirror America's progress and achievement. Her definition, however, is woefully racist—she believed that Jazz rhythm was unrepresentative of America, that it expressed "the primitive savage" (Duncan 198).

Susan Leigh Foster's "Choreographies of Protest" described a very different definition of choreography. This piece provides the history of several notable protest movements that involved the use of the body in a significant way. These included the 1980s Act Up movement and the 1960 Greensboro sit-in, among others. Each of these movements involved a type of choreography: the former included die-ins in which participants lay on the ground, while the latter required placing one's body in danger by refusing to move from a lunch counter. Foster's definition of choreography is not centered around aesthetic but rather physical manifestations of a call for change. Both definitions, however, are rooted in futurist ideas.

Dadaism

Tristan Tzara's 1918 *Dada Manifesto* is itself a work of Dadaism. Tzara begins his argument with the statement "Dada means nothing" (Tzara 1). Anything, Tzara argues, can be Dada. The word itself holds no inherent meaning; it can be applied to anything in existence. Tzara poses a question: "How can one expect to put order into the chaos that constitutes that infinite and shapeless variation: man?" (Tzara 1). Humanity constitutes chaos, and Dadaism aims to depict that chaos by virtue of representing an art form with no inherent order or meaning. Dadaists do not recognize one theory—they subscribe only to the ideas that beauty is infinitely subjective and that all previous art forms fail to capture the true nature of humanity.

The word Fluxus is closely associated with Dadaism, and is the medium through which Humes students actively engaged with Dadaist ideas. An afternoon plenary was occupied performing Fluxuses, a concept created by George Maciunas that involves engaging everyday people in artwork through utter randomness and humor. A Fluxus entails nothing in particular: examples from plenary included running around and screaming, and untying the shoes of spectators at random. While the Fluxus movement followed Dadaism, it encapsulates many of the ideas present in both movements, especially regarding the idea of subjective beauty.

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