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Making Monsters:
The Construction of Race in Virtual Space

by

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the construction of racialized bodies in narratives that feature virtual spaces. Appended subjects challenge traditional notions of the human body and expose assumptions and anxieties surrounding bodies in general. Race, technology and hybridization have problematized the body, yet scholarly research on their effects in literature remains scarce. Each chapter features a unique narrative and media pairing: hypertext and *Patchwork Girl*; cyberpunk novel and *Snow Crash*; video game and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The original constructed body, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, provides a metaphorical blueprint for the dual notions of fragmented subjectivity and hybridized physicality, and speaks to the importance of wholeness.

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Introduction: Unleashing Virtual Monsters

If the eye is the "window to the soul," the computer screen is its posthuman equivalent in the information technology age. Almost a decade after the concept of the posthuman entered our collective repertoire, the word remains in use to describe the confluence of technology and human physicality in the real world. As we incorporate advanced forms of technology into our bodies in great quantities - an auditory brainstem implant here, a mechanical aortic valve there - questions of authenticity arise and it becomes increasingly difficult to locate precise demarcations between the body and its technological additions. In new media formats like video games and virtual reality, where the environment is artificially created, the body is likewise artificially rendered. This body is an "appended subject" which Jennifer Gonzales describes as "a body . . . constructed or assembled in order to stand in for, or become an extension of, a subject in an artificial but nevertheless inhabited world" (28). Appended subjects challenge traditional notions of the human body and expose assumptions surrounding bodies in general; analyses of the virtual or appended body can

reveal its purpose in the types of narratives in which it surfaces today.

The original progenitor of the appended subject narrative in western narratives is Mary Shelley's pivotal text, *Frankenstein*, which portrays a scientist who creates a creature from parts of dead bodies. The story follows the scientist as he anxiously withdraws from his "[abhorred] monster" (Shelley 95), and the creature as he unsuccessfully tries to make friends. Configured as "a product of tragedy" rather than a laboratory accident, the creature's "inability to cohere as a subject" (Gonzalez 35) is strongly connected to his tessellated existence; the jagged edges of his fragmented subjectivity prevent him from finding a place in society. Composed of parts, the monster is condemned to live as an incomplete individual; his patchwork body, therefore, invites close examinations of the relationship between parts and whole, including the body and its purpose.

The metaphor of the monster's fragmented physical existence has been applied to many forms of difference and the fears they awaken. Susan E. Lederer reflects that, since the publication of Shelley's novel, the reputations of "the working class, the uneducated, and the Irish," as well as African slaves and the disabled, have been marred

by the "Frankenstein label" (35). It is not difficult to see how Shelley's novel provoked parallel concerns about another form of physical distortion: race and interraciality. As Gonzalez notes, "the step from the tragic monster to the tragic mulatto or mestizo was a short one in the nineteenth century" (35). Moving into the twentieth century, biological determinism remained popular in America, with many believing "heredity rather than environment, economic system, or education to be the critical factor in problems of social unrest, immigration, unemployment, and crime" (Lederer 44). With biology and destiny indelibly linked, the racialized body remains constructed as a considerable and unsolvable social problem.

Although the term 'race' remains in use today, Audrey Smedley argues that it is a "cultural invention" that "bears no intrinsic relationship to actual human physical variations" (690). She also argues that the term possesses complicated undertones of cultural dominance: "'Race' was a form of social identification and stratification that was seemingly grounded in the physical differences of populations interacting with one another in the New World but whose real meaning rested in social and political realities" (694). Her claim that race is not restricted to

- and perhaps did not originate from - physical difference does not negate its existence, but serves as a reminder that its characteristics are unclear and its purpose suspicious. Bruce Davis argues that race began its troubled career when the early "European American" settlers proclaimed that the United States "would be a nation grounded in the visible truths of nature" without exploring "the reality of a nature behind the appearances;" a reality that he describes as "obscure, shifting, and complex" (vii). Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura and Gilbert B. Rodman have also expressed concern that the concept of race remains undefined and unclear, noting that, "if race were purely a natural thing, there wouldn't be such variation across time and space in people's understanding of racial difference" (5). Speaking strictly of the Black American experience, Charles C. Verharen frankly asserts that "[b]eing Black has nothing to do with color and everything to do with culture" (199). Despite the countless and sometimes conflicting definitions of race, there is much consensus that the effects of race are deeply connected to the body, with Cameron Bailey noting that "[the] discourse of race is, by history and by design, rooted in the body" (42). Bailey has written extensively about living as an immigrant of color, developing what he calls a

"hyperawareness" toward the active role of the body in forming identity (33). He uses the phrase "body-people" to describe those who live "as subjects named and identified through their flesh" (33). In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Dubois wrote of the difficulty of living as a Black man in the United States, and the "double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and an American" (85). This "double life" summarized Dubois's splintered existence as a Black man in America, and echoes the fractured focus of Frankenstein's monster whose social ostracism forces his examination of his own and others' beliefs toward his ontology.

Recently, the dialogue on race has spread to virtual environments. Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman use 0's and 1's, the basic structural units of computer code, to describe what they consider to be the two distinct racial topics of cyberspace: "all too often, when it comes to virtual culture, the subject of race seems to be one of those binary switches," either on ("i.e., it's a controversial flashpoint for debate") or off ("simultaneously unmarked and undiscussed") with no "shades of grey" (1). Bailey suggests that within the boundaries of this binary switch lies "the safety of binary oppositions;" he believes these oppositions provide the necessary fuel for social power:

social interaction depends on embodied communication, on stable, known genders, sexualities, races, and classes somewhere present in the communicative act. Without this, there would be no power flowing through communication, and without the flow of power, what would we have to say to one another? (Bailey 30)

Cyberspace, however, is less commonly described as a space of "embodied communication" and more as a *differently* embodied space decorated with unstable and unknown "genders, sexualities, races, and classes;" yet, Bailey finds that "the cybersubject as currently figured is male, white, straight, able-bodied, and ruling-class" (35). This profile appears regularly in fiction situated within cyberspace: for example, Case, a character from William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, fits this description despite existing mostly in "the bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (Gibson 6). In Gibson's text and elsewhere, the conflict between "bodiless" cyberspace and the overwhelmingly body-conscious profile of its cybersubject suggests the constructed nature of the body. Bailey argues that "embodied communication" is the prompt for this construction; likewise, Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman suggest that users construct virtual identities by "choosing an email name, putting together a webpage, designing a

graphical avatar, or creating a nickname for chat room or virtual world" (8). Despite the freedom to create and manipulate one's virtual appearance, it seems as though the overall effect of the virtual identity is the maintenance of the status quo in the form of a single, conventional cybersubject profile.

The construction of the "male, white, straight, able-bodied, and ruling-class" profile can be detected in new forms of media, although ironically some forms, such as hypertext, have been praised for exhibiting flexibility in style and content, and for resisting traditional aspects of authorship. Compared to the conventional text format that Jay David Bolter finds more stable, hypertext appears to be "chaotic" while it is actually composed of elements "in a perpetual state of reorganization;" elements that "form patterns, constellations, which are in constant danger of breaking down and combining new patterns" (9). Like the fragmented and hybridized body of Frankenstein's monster, and the changeable virtual identity pieced together from a username and an avatar, hypertext creates collages from fragments of pieces of text and images. Many have noted the empowering quality of hypertext which stems from this ability to disrupt traditional views of identity. George P. Landow believes that hypertext "does not permit a

tyrannical, univocal voice" (56) since "[within] a hypertext environment all writing becomes collaborative writing" (136), thereby empowering all readers. N. Katherine Hayles makes a case for hypertext's representation, construction and empowerment of the "mutated," noting that the "mutability" of the qualities of the screenic text that would be impossible with print (changing fonts, colors, type sizes, formatting, etc.). . . imply that the body represented within the virtual space is always already mutated. . . . (30)

Along with representing and constructing the mutated body, hypertext has also been known to shake the status quo through its construction of the feminist voice: Barbara Page (1996) has noted that hypertext has been adopted by women writers as a tool of "resistance" to counter traditional writing norms (para. 1). Although hypertext has yet to be recognized as a racialized "tool of resistance," its association with both mutated and female bodies suggests that the racialized body could indeed be constructed by hypertext. While there is no reason to doubt the capacity of hypertext to provide an adequate voice for racialized resistance, this aptitude remains inexplicably undocumented. The fact that hypertext has no noted connections to race nevertheless exposes its racial

affiliations: while "bodies may be invisible," say Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman, "issues of marking, racial and otherwise," can be observed "in all representational media" (9). A significant gap lies between the capacity of hypertext to convey racial concerns and construct racialized bodies and its actual employment to do so; this gap indicates that race remains a problematic and, until now, neglected topic that requires urgent attention.

Even without the burden of identity markers such as race and gender, the body itself presents complications. In cyberpunk literature, which explores existence in cyberspace, the infallible brain is the only required body part, while the mortal body and its requirements for rest, nutrition and general care serve to hinder the experience. This denial of the necessity of the body expresses a profound view of how the body can function as a "dead weight"; the allure of escape reveals a desire to simply transcend all physical problems and negative social effects like racism. In *Bodies of Tomorrow* (2007), Sherryl Vint describes these and other issues surrounding the construction of the body in cyberpunk literature. She notes that cyberpunk has been criticized as "merely misogynistic" for "[offering] only individual transcendence" instead of "social solutions" to the issues it defines (103),

including "sexist and racist prejudices of the meat world" (104). She cautions, however, against adopting cyberpunk's vision of the "social world," which she believes is "incomplete" (122); instead, she views cyberpunk as a form of criticism that reveals the risks of contemporary cyberculture: social isolation, alienation from the body that is further complicated by the presence of technology, and a "distorted" understanding of the social world as "perceived through information technology" (122). Because it is capable of revealing these risks, she maintains that cyberpunk fiction can function as a guide that can "assist us in understanding how distorted the perspective from cyberspace is" (122). While rejection of the body and desire for bodily transcendence have been central to cyberpunk, she optimistically asserts that this could change in the future.

Racial representations in cyberpunk and hypertext narratives, and other textual constructions of virtual worlds, compose only a small portion of the topics of discussion, particularly because they appear in limited numbers almost to the point of absence. The seemingly small number of racial bodies in these environments, however, should not be accepted as conclusive proof of their non-existence, for as Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman have noted,

"issues of marking, racial and otherwise" are commonplace in media (9). Shifting focus from the textual to the graphic environment, Kolko, Nakamura, Rodman and David Leonard argue that non-racial signifiers in representational worlds are more often the focus of scrutiny than racial signifiers. Despite this imbalance, however, they are able to locate racial elements in the midst of these environments. Working with the concept of the cyborg, Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman find that its gender tends to attract more scholarly investigation than "other elements of its identity" (9) including its race; thus they conclude that "many cyberfeminists [elide] the topic of race in cyberspace" (8). They acknowledge the impact of Donna Haraway's essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto," on gender and technology studies, and credits Haraway with promoting "how technology provokes us to carry new gender formations into daily life" at a time when research concentrated on the reverse - namely, the effects of gender relations on technology (7). While Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman praise Haraway for establishing the "hybrid, fluid, fractured" identity of the cyborg (7), an identity that helped to structure it into a representation of the possibilities that technology could provide for women, they also acknowledge that its multiple identity stops short of

promoting freedom for other types of "body people" (Bailey 33). Although the cyborg represents freedom exclusively from the gendered body, Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman nevertheless find racial elements in the body of the cyborg, identifying it as "a collage of the human and the machine" that "represents an integrated circuit of raciality" (8). By exposing a racial dimension to the figure of the cyborg, they complicate further its identity as a hybrid, demonstrates the fluidity of racial definitions through their unusual interpretation of the organic-technological blend, and prove that racialized virtual bodies may be more commonly - albeit unintentionally - represented than previously believed.

Unlike the racialized bodies of textual formats, those of video game characters are plainly visible, yet race remains a taboo topic as indicated by the silence that surrounds it. After researching the public and often political condemnation of the *Grand Theft Auto* video game series based on its inclusion of violence, Leonard finds that public focus tends to alight on the "violent and sexual nature of this series" although "there has been little public debate or outcry regarding the racialized content of these games" (49). With violence and sexuality absorbing so much attention, research that focuses on the

effects of race in third-person shooter (TPS) video games can be difficult to locate; it appears that the near-absence of research on the topic of race mirrors the silence that surrounds the topic of race in hypertext, cyberpunk literature, and game dialogue. To study the significance of race in TPS games where racial difference is seldom acknowledged, it is therefore necessary to substitute TPS games with other types of games and other media forms such film; the game-oriented term "interactive cinema" coined by Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins (para 1) conveys the notion that game development follows and builds upon film development. Thus, although research pertaining to the significance of race on TPS video games is remarkably absent, the topic can be approached indirectly through research on African-American gangster films and fantasy role-playing games (FRPGs), which frequently include analyses of gender as well.

Kevin Schut describes three categories of "ideals of manhood" available within many fantasy role-playing games: "respectable, rough, and playful" (116). Of these, the qualities of "rough masculinity," including "power, physical strength, individualism and the ability to dominate" (102), he connects with African-Americans and the "white working-class" (103). Schut stresses the

contradictions present in each category, and states that all of the qualities set "standards" that "are impossibly high for most men" (104), thereby constructing a male character who is "an impossible man" who "has it all together" (117). Thus, through these constructed characters, games "allow the player to experience the extraordinary and to break social taboos" (107), regardless of the identity of the player. Schut's assertion that games permit players to "experience the extraordinary" suggests that every player playing a male character is playing "an impossible man," with whom it is almost impossible to identify. His assertion parallels the argument by Nakamura, Kolko and Rodman that video games can provide "an interactive environment in which one can role-play as a member of a different race" (10). Ben DeVane and Kurt D. Squire, however, believe that this kind of "role-play" is composed of players' "own experiences and knowledge" (264) and not from that of a racially-Other avatar. John Banks, by contrast, argues that the black, male body of the avatar of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* allows players to experience a "gang culture environment" (118). In each case, it seems that the fluid nature of race aids in constructing each game played by each player as different from the last.

The "rough masculine" ideal teams up with that of race in Maria Pramaggiore's exploration of violence and masculinity in African-American gangster films, constructing an African-American identity that is more divided than multiple. She argues that unlike, for example, "combat films" that value "male bonding against the backdrop of national belonging, the gangster film explores fissures that undermine the idea of univocal national identity" (120), thus creating discord within the film and forcing the viewer to accept the reasons for these fissures. In this way, gangsters are constructed as "outsiders in their own culture," becoming "the perfect vehicle for stories of violent behavior that grows out of long-term economic distress, political disenfranchisement, and social alienation" (Pramaggiore 120), the appended subject falling apart at the seams.

With virtual space still quite young, the significance of the racialized, constructed subject may need more time to become clear. Mark Poster argues that the appended subject will "prove especially useful for exposing the limitations of the internet as a new machinic assemblage for producing selves" (108). He predicts that "deploying the lens of race to develop our thinking about online identification will help us to exploit the potential

offered by the new media for experiencing community beyond identity" (Poster 108). A constructed community of appended subjects seems like a natural fit.

This thesis examines the construction of the racialized body in three narratives either about or situated within virtual realities. Its three chapters investigate the construction of racialized bodies in narrative formats where the construction of racialized bodies remains insufficiently explored: a digital novel, a printed cyberpunk novel and a video game. Each chapter explores themes of hybridization, fractured existences and racial representations in one narrative, and highlights the interplay between that narrative and its medium. Mary Shelley's nineteenth century text, *Frankenstein*, serves as a powerful metaphor for hybridization and the fractured identity throughout the chapters, particularly through its racial imperatives and technological connections.

The first chapter offers an analysis of Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), a hypertext novel accessible only through computer software. Like a contemporary Dr. Frankenstein, Jackson stitches together a female creature from pieces of text, literary and philosophical quotations and intertextual references. The female creature's hybrid body affects the development of

her own personal identity and, in a greater sense, reflects the impermanent and fractured existence of every human body. Although the tension in the novel results from her mixed physicality, the absence of direct references to skin color variation among her many body parts invites questions pertaining to racial concerns in the novel. While this text maintains deep connections to feminist concerns, subtle racial elements are identified at the surface level, adding a dimension of hybridity to the creature that remains unexamined throughout the text. This chapter investigates the buried racial clues in the novel in order to explore intersecting areas of commonality between race and hypertext.

Moving from a digital narrative to a paper novel, Chapter Two examines issues of hybridity in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). This cyberpunk novel features a pastiche of pop cultural signifiers, historical facts, technological themes and virtual settings, and, in keeping with genre characteristics, privileges the stable, unchanging mind over the needy, ever-changing body. The object of this chapter is to explore the intricate relationship between race, technology and the body. The traditional lead characters of cyberpunk texts generally adhere to the white male default standard, while this text

examines the strengths and weakness of various human, animal and cyborg mixes, as well as racial components in these mixes. Although race features prominently, technology is vital to this text in which a racially hybrid main character encounters overt forms of racism until his computer code hacking skills save the world from destruction.

The third and final chapter guides the analysis of the racially constructed body away from the textual environment of the preceding two chapters to a graphical one that features a pre-constructed, clearly visible body. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rock Star, 2004) is a video game set in a fictionalized American city, its atmosphere a blend of landmarks and hip hop references, and its characters constructed from representations of African-Americans and the gangster lifestyle as glorified in popular music and film. The player does have some amount of choice in her character's physical appearance and in the activity of exploration, however, to complete missions and finish the game, the player must lead her poor black character to commit violent acts, like shooting enemies and mugging pedestrians. Although video games featuring black character players are highly uncommon, public outcry following the release of the game focused almost

exclusively on its violent aspects, not its stereotypically racialized context. The near-absence of public dialogue concerning the purpose of race in this game reveals deep anxieties surrounding the perception and popular representation of race in America. This chapter explores the construction of black bodies as a crucial narrative element in this game, arguing that the game objectives are directly related to the race of the character.

Chapter 1: Race and Monsters in *Patchwork Girl*

For all our knowledge of the human body, the power that sparks its very creation remains a mystery. Our deep curiosity over our beginnings - of humanity, our own bodies and consciousnesses - perhaps contribute to the continued success of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, *Frankenstein*. The tale of the obsessed doctor and his unfortunate creation is widely known, due, in part, to worldwide distribution and the uncountable adaptations to theatre, cinema, video games, Halloween costumes and Saturday morning television cartoons. Almost two hundred years after taking his first breath, the heart of the monster continues to beat.

Most recently, the monster has resurfaced on the digital landscape. *Frankenstein* is one of the literary inspirations for a best-selling hypertext novel, *Patchwork Girl* (Eastgate Systems, 1995). Author Shelley Jackson integrates themes and characters from *Frankenstein* with issues of identity and hybridity within a hypertext system. Jay Clayton has noted that *Patchwork Girl* incorporates many pieces of text from other texts, illustrating the concept that, in hypertext fiction, "every text is a patchwork of allusions" (Clayton 14). This reference to intertextuality relates metaphorically to the concept that every body is a

"patchwork" of other bodies, since *Frankenstein* provides textual quotations as well as a stock of discarded body parts suitable for re-use. In Shelley's novel, the male monster pressures his creator to design a female companion that will relieve his loneliness. Against his better judgment, Dr. Frankenstein undertakes this project and assembles a female in the image of the male monster; that is, from body parts harvested from cadavers. Regretting his decision and fearful of future implications, the scientist rips the unanimated body apart while his monster watches with rage. Part grave robber, part thrift-conscious recycler, Jackson metaphorically collects the detached body parts and creates a fictionalized Mary Shelley to stitch them together.

Making use of hypertext's ability to combine textual and graphical elements, the novel includes a black-and-white picture of the female monster's body. Cut into squares and re-shuffled into various remixes, versions of the picture surface throughout the story, symbolizing the fracturing effects of gender and race in women's lives. A great deal has been written on the novel's preoccupation with gender, particularly because it follows the quest of one female and incorporates the groundbreaking work of another: by writing *Frankenstein*, author Mary Shelley

"[entered] the solidly male domain of writing for publication" (Dobson 268). Female-focused activities such as quilting, conservation and collaboration blend with quotes by gender theorists Hélène Cixous and Donna Haraway, advertizing the novel's preoccupation with feminism. Jackson's use of hypertext indicates her support of these feminist commitments; Barbara Page (1996) notes that hypertext offers some women writers "a means by which to explore new possibilities;" a tool of "resistance" that can be used to counter traditional writing norms (par. 1). She argues that,

"[among] contemporary writers, women are by no means alone in pursuing nonlinear, antihierarchical and decentered writing, but many women who affiliate themselves with this tendency write against norms of "realist" narrative from a consciousness stirred by feminist discourses of resistance" (par. 1)

If hypertext can be of service to feminist writers who wish to resist the "realist" narrative form in their writing, it may also offer an appropriate environment for expressing resistance against other limitations of social identity, such as race. Linda Martín Alcoff argues that "[racial] concepts and identity categories are constantly facing forms of resistance and contestation that transform both

their effects and their effective meaning" (232). The characteristics of racial identities change over time; that race is so flexible and "so clearly a construction" (Mark Hansen 108) suggests an affinity to hypertext fiction, which is likewise flexible and overtly constructed. However, past explorations of identity within this text have bypassed the subject of race in favor of that of gender. To coax the novel's subcutaneous racial concerns to the surface requires a close reading of its intertextual contributions, which constitutes the main focus of this chapter.

At the very moment their yellow eyes open, the two monsters of *Patchwork Girl* and *Frankenstein* infer from others' reactions that their unusual physical appearances will prevent their forming close bonds with humans. Dr. Frankenstein is terrified by the monster's appearance and abandons him within minutes of his first breath. The father of the De Lacey family is the only person to offer him compassion, presumably because the man cannot see: "I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere" (Shelley 141). De Lacey's sighted children run from the monster, leaving the monster to ponder, "Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me?"

(Shelley 142). A question of such despondence might trigger a reader's sympathy for the suffering monster, and there are reasons to believe that there may be more than unattractiveness to blame for the humans' intense reactions. In the early nineteenth century, issues of immigration and slavery were widely discussed and debated in Britain and the United States. In "Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain" (1993), H.L. Malchow argues that, when developing the character of her monster, Shelley was likely influenced by "contemporary attitudes toward non-whites, in particular on fears and hopes of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies" (Malchow 90). By 1807, the Transatlantic Slave Trade had been abolished in Britain and the USA; by the time Shelley wrote this novel she would have seen freed slaves in London (Malchow 92). Malchow states that Shelley's description of her monster's superhuman actions also reveals possible prejudices toward behaviors considered to be stereotypical of slaves, and that although no evidence exists to prove that Shelley deliberately fashioned her monster in the likeness of a Caribbean slave, the similarities in their physical descriptions are startling (Malchow 99). The monster's skin is described as the "colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy"

(Shelley 237); mummies are generally dark skinned (Malchow 103). The monster scampers across glaciers and mountains but is able to subsist on basic foods like "bread, cheese, milk and wine" (Shelley 108); it was declared by "apologists for West Indian slavery" (Malchow 104) that black bodies were capable of withstanding difficult physical states and performing feats of strength beyond the abilities of white bodies, and that "the Negro race did not require the white man's luxuries of meat and drink" (Malchow 105). With so many similarities, it is not difficult to imagine that Shelley and her readers would have been familiar with depictions of slaves as she created a rocky journey for her literary creature.

This journey has serious consequences for the monster who blames himself for the revulsion he believes he causes. Although *Frankenstein* was written more than a hundred years before Jacques Lacan started writing, the monster demonstrates the psychoanalyst's concept of the "mirror stage"¹ when he compares his unusual physique to the bodies of others:

¹ The mirror stage, a part of Lacan's early reinterpretation of Freud's work, describes the relationship between the human ego and external objects. It states that human babies pass through a phase in which the external image of the body (reflected in the mirror, or represented by the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that provokes the mental representation of an "I." The baby identifies with this image or "imago" of the unified body which contrasts with the

I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. (Shelley 124-5)

Another scene reminiscent of Lacan's mirror stage takes place in a second intertext of *Patchwork Girl*, L. Frank Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913). This children's story features a boy, a glass cat, and a Patchwork Girl who embark on a journey to find the ingredients for a magic charm. The ingredient is needed by the magician Dr. Pipt, who knows the 'secret recipe' of creation but treats his knowledge, in comparison to Dr. Frankenstein's intellectual sincerity, rather irreverently. After spending six years preparing a single serving of the Powder of Life, he uses it to transform a girl-shaped, cotton-stuffed patchwork quilt into a household servant for his wife, Margolotte. The quilt lends the girl a colorful appearance: "one cheek was yellow and the other red, her chin blue, her forehead purple and the center, where her nose had been formed and padded, a bright yellow" (Baum 7). In their Munchkin community where blue is the only color of value for

baby's vulnerable and immature body and establishes the image of the "Ideal-I" which the infant will strive to achieve.

everything from clothing to food, Margolotte hopes that dressing her servant in "so many unpopular colors" will make her so unattractive that "she'll never dare be rebellious or impudent, as servants are sometimes liable to be" (Baum 7). Although slavery was abolished long ago, the concept of categorizing individuals by skin color is nothing new. Rainbow-colored body aside, other physical characteristics serve to mark her status. Her hair, which is made of "brown yarn and [hangs] down on her neck in several neat braids," is the physical characteristic most clearly coded as African-American (Baum 7). The brown braids could be cornrows, a hairstyle originating in Africa that consists of braids in close parallel rows. Altogether, the colorful description paints "Scraps" (as she is nicknamed) as a household servant of mixed heritage including African roots, with the words of her creator invoking notions of cultural genocide: "[if] I get tired looking at her patched face I can whitewash it" (Baum 7). However, the plan to keep the colorful servant 'in her place' backfires, as the girl's reaction to her reflection illustrates:

Why, I'm thoroughly delightful. I'm an Original, if you please, and therefore incomparable. Of all the comic, absurd, rare and amusing creatures the world

contains, I must be the supreme freak. Who but poor Margolotte could have managed to invent such an unreasonable being as I? But I'm glad--I'm awfully glad!--that I'm just what I am, and nothing else (Baum 15)

In this scene reminiscent of the mirror stage, the infant's admiration of her own vulnerable physical body is highly unusual; Margolotte expected the patchwork girl to feel shame, not pride, in her "incomparable" and "Original" appearance. The girl is "glad" to be "nothing else," moving beyond acceptance of herself to acceptance of her bumbling creator. However, we do not know exactly what "poor Margolotte" expected because of a terrible accident: as the patchwork girl comes to life, she accidentally knocks over a bottle containing the Liquid of Petrification, thereby changing her creator into a marble statue (Baum 15). One can only imagine the effect such an event would have on Frankenstein's monster had he caused such an accident for his creator; the Patchwork Girl just laughs.

While her "unpopular colors" within a unicolour worshipping culture serve as a metaphor for non-white skin in a racist society, other scenes in the story resemble contemporary racism more closely. In the magician's house, the phonograph plays "the latest popular song" which

contains the lyrics: "Ah wants mah Lulu, mah coal-black Lulu; Ah wants mah loo-loo, loo-loo, loo-loo, Lu!" (Baum 43). The lyrics provoke the Shaggy Man to declare that he does not "intend to be throttled by any Lulus like your coal-black one," warning that such music "makes civilized folks go wild" (Baum 44). The Shaggy Man clearly expresses anxiety that dark-skinned women could "throttle" him, and that "black" music will have a contaminating, perhaps sexualizing, effect on white people, the "civilized folks." According to Margaret L. Hunter, an association was long ago "constructed between sexuality and dark skin, exoticizing sex and the dark Other" and framing dark-skinned women as "sexually dangerous" (35). While the stuffed patchwork girl is presented as exotic (insofar as she looks unusual), she is portrayed far more as a comedic character than a sexual object in this children's book, attracting strangers' giggles along her journey and possibly lending a comedic element to Jackson's own creature.

Jackson's female monster has been influenced by the awakenings and experiences of the two unusual creatures preceding her. The creature's body is a composite of parts hand-stitched in the image of the male monster. Like the Patchwork Girl, she is a collection of multicolored

'scraps.' She recognizes her "form" to be comparatively "powerful" ("hazy whole"); yet, like her male counterpart, she ponders the curious reactions toward her appearance: "I've learned to wonder: why am I "hideous"? They tell me each of my parts is beautiful and I know that all are strong. Every part of me is human and proportional to the whole" ("why hideous?").

With such body-conscious texts supporting her work, Jackson plays up analogies between the narrative body (the story), the structure of the body (the hypertext), and the body of the monster. This "body" is composed of *lexias*, a term used by Roland Barthes (1974) to define blocks of text, or "units of reading" (Barthes 13), and later expanded by author George P. Landow to include other media: "blocks of words, moving or static images, or sounds" (154). The structural backbone of *Patchwork Girl* consists of 323 *lexias* (screens of text) that vary in length from a single sentence to a few paragraphs. The *lexias* are connected along pathways entitled "graveyard," "journal," "quilt," "story," and "broken accents." Along the "converging and diverging" pathways, the *lexias* are joined to one another by 462 links similar to a system of veins and arteries that create a nebulous network of paths through the text (Dobson 270). Together, the link and the

lexia - the 'skin and bones' of a hypertext system - provide a story for the reader to explore. One can travel through this system, reading the *lexias* and clicking on links, to piece together the monster's story as well as her body. The relationship between the body and the written word is emphasized in this approach to story-telling, particularly in one group of *lexias* entitled "body of work." With *lexias* representing the monster's body parts, and hyperlinks the seams of their connections, the network operates as the structure of her body in its totality. Form and content, then, are impossible to separate: the monster "is not simply a character in the novel, she is the novel" (Keep par.1).

Some have remarked that the ability to click and read at will lends the reader a sense of freedom, but this assertion has been debated. Landow, for example, argues that the hyperlink represents freedom because readers can build the narrative as they desire, theoretically entering and exiting anywhere in the narrative (154). However, although hypertext fictions generally offer flexibility in reading path selection, they still contain what Marie-Laure Ryan defines as multi-linear rather than non-linear narratives, meaning that there is a limit to the number of paths offered to a reader during a reading. Ryan argues

that multi-linear narratives "[trace] many pathways into a reasonably solid and chronically organized narrative core" (420). Each lexia of *Patchwork Girl* offers only a limited number of hyperlinks, and the resulting narrative still builds the story as designed by the author. A hypertext author "can control the reader's itinerary on the local level (where to go from a given node)" (Ryan 420) but not on the global level; similarly, readers may skim non-consecutive pages of a book to uniquely build the same narrative designed by its author.

Another aspect of readerly freedom concerns the difficulty in duplicating the path chosen by any given reader. Some *Patchwork Girl* lexias offer links to multiple lexias, and some links remain hidden until they are discovered by the reader; with so many link options to choose from, it is almost impossible to duplicate a particular 'reading,' or storypath. No storypath in this multiform narrative is privileged over another. The monster admits, "I hop from stone to stone and an electronic river washes out my scent in the intervals. I am a discontinuous trace, a dotted line" ("hop"). Christopher Keep argues that, just as the monster freely hops from stone to stone, the hyperlink serves to "liberate" the reader from the "linear determinism" of books (par.2). The elements of

slavery and servitude contributed by the intertextual sources add a deeper layer of liberation to this hypertext fiction.

Jackson took advantage of this freedom when she wrote her story in Storyspace, an Eastgate software application that supports a hypertext writing environment. Using the graphical interface of Storyspace, Jackson organized the lexias into groups which connect to each other like nodes in a network. Hypertext author Stuart Moulthrop uses the Deleuzian term "rhizome" to describe this design approach, which consists of "a matrix of independent but cross-referential discourses which the reader is invited to enter more or less at random" (301). It includes "no defined sequence" and tasks the reader with "[building] a network of virtual connections" (301-2). The map view in Figure 1 gives an outline view of the groups of lexias that make up the *Patchwork Girl* novel.

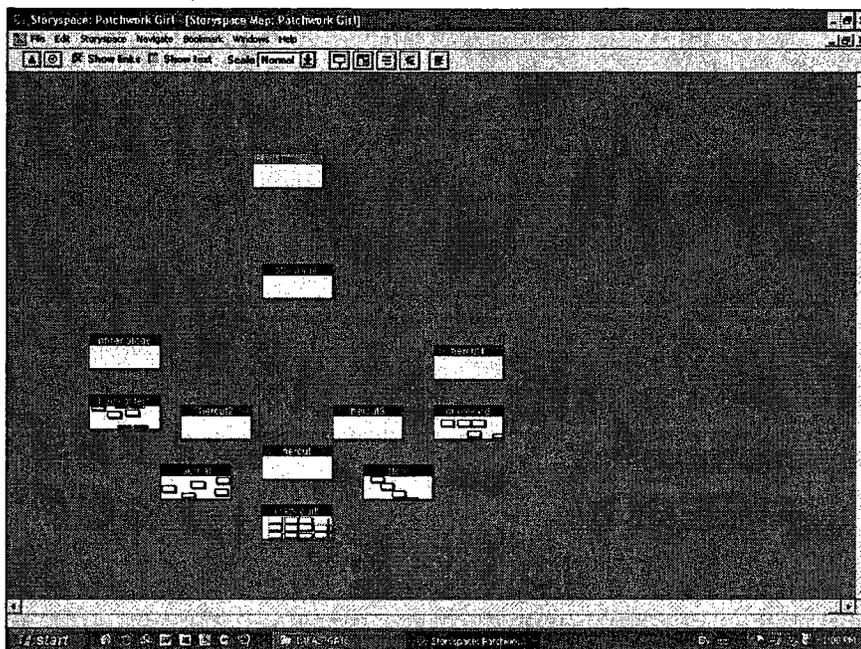


Figure 1: Storyspace Map from *Patchwork Girl* by *Mary/Shelley and herself*. Shelley Jackson. Eastgate Systems, 1995. Electronic.

The map above indicates the formation of lexias into five groups - the same number of human senses, fingers and toes (Dobson 270). This network-like structure and its flexibility metaphorically reflects the monster's body: "I am not predictable, but neither am I random" ("think me"). Like a holograph, this map reflects the choice-driven paths of the story in one light, and the monster's diverse origins in another: "[every] part of me is linked to other territories alien to it but equally mine" ("metaphor me").

The lexia entitled "this writing" opens with the following text:

Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but because of some myopic condition I am only comfortable with from dreams, I can see only that part most immediately before me, and have no sense of how that part relates to the rest. When I open a book, I know where I am, which is restful. ("this writing")

While Jackson incorporates many voices into this story - a narrator, the monster, a version of Mary Shelley, and perhaps her own voice - the speaker's identity is not always explicitly stated. One might be inclined to believe that the speaker of this statement regarding the unpredictability of the non-linear path is Jackson until the final lines:

. . . history is only a haphazard hopscotch through other present moments. How I got from one to the other is unclear. Though I could list my past moments, they would remain discrete (and recombinant in potential is not in fact), hence without shape, without end, without story. Or with as many stories as I care to put together. ("this writing")

Phrases such as "my past moments" cast shadows of ambiguity over the identity of the speaker. Others refer to combinations of genetic material ("recombinant") which

could refer to either the monster's or Jackson's physical body: "as many stories as I care to put together" indicates either Jackson's work or the monster's scattered history. This multivocality not only undermines the author's control over her own text, but also emphasizes the novel's theme of hybridity: "I am a monster - because I am multiple, and because I am mixed, *mestizo*, mongrel" ("why hideous?").

Alcoff argues that "in North America, where racial identity is usually assumed to be unambiguous or "pure," mixed identity can cause cognitive dissonance and fragmented selves" (Alcoff ix). Indeed, the association of "multiple" with "monster" forms a shattered mirror which reflects the state of this monster's corporeal existence, history, and fractured identity. Sewn together by her creator from scraps of other bodies, she is the unborn and the undead, and is acutely aware that her parts are her and yet not her. Many of the lexias that comprise her body reflect on her "fractured state" (Carazo 128): "I am made up of a multiplicity of anonymous particles, and have no absolute boundaries. I am a swarm" ("self-swarm"). N. Katherine Hayles notes that within the monster, "multiple subjectivities inhabit the same body, for the different creatures from whose parts she is made retain their distinctive personalities, making her an assemblage rather

than a unified self" ("Computer" 148). The original owners of her body parts speak for themselves: her mouth, for example, had belonged to a woman who spoke a great deal, and now grants the monster the ability to speak out against social injustices. The monster's body functions as an archive of body parts and their unique histories: "[each] part has its story, and each story constructs a different subjectivity" ("Computer" 148).

The patchwork quilt near the turn of the century in the United States and Canada served a similar *ad hoc* archival function. Quilt researcher Ruth McKendry suggests that the popular freeform design of the patchwork quilt provided "the most economical method of using scraps of scarce material that were too small to cut into a pattern" (38). Conservation was a way of life when raw materials 'on the frontier' were scarce, and quilters often incorporated the remnants of used clothes, blankets, and other fabrics to stretch their usefulness a bit longer. The fictionalized Mary Shelley reenacts this thriftiness when she forms her monster from pieces of fabric collected from "feed bags," maps and "silk coffin linings" ("quilt"). The lexia "crazy" explains that the scraps "might be any shape, color or material," and that as a whole, the quilt is "constructed without pattern or plan." Since materials were gathered

from around the house, with most having served some previous function, a quilt was more than a decorative blanket; it was also a visual record of history and memory. Inconsistent in design, mismatched in color, and symbolizing thrift instead of luxury, many patchwork quilts were prized for their beauty and irreproducible originality. Quilt-making was almost exclusively a female activity. In this text, the quilt serves as a metaphor for the female body, and symbolizes the housebound roles of wife and mother to which women were once confined, including their dependence on "the marriage market" (Hunter 37):

The art of quilt making became closely tied to the feat of catching a man. The unmarried state was not a happy one for a woman in the nineteenth century, since there was almost no way for her to make a living, and until she was settled she had to remain in the home of a relation as an unpaid servant. (McKendry 60)

Marriage played a significant role in shaping women's lives, and often provided the only escape route from the family home. Quilting bees were usually social occasions for women, but the 'bees' to which men were invited functioned as romantic networking opportunities. It was not uncommon for single women to postpone the completion of

their quilts until they were engaged and could afford to invest in this expensive undertaking. Such delays demonstrate the quilters' financial dependence on men and the importance of their marital status.

The various female-gendered elements woven throughout the novel reveal its feminist concerns, and address the construction of gender identity. Jackson's creature is made of female and male bodies and at least one animal body, yet she identifies as a female human. Landow has pointed out that the examination of gender in this narrative harmonizes with Jackson's use of hypertext, and "enables us to recognize the degree to which the qualities of collage - particularly those of appropriation, assemblage, concatenation, and the blurring of limits, edges, and borders - characterize a good deal of the way we conceive of gender and identity" (164). As a "mixed metaphor" ("metaphor me"), the monster encounters social difficulties related to the issue of her gender: she is shunned by those who are confused by her appearance. As a tall and physically substantial creature, she claims that "women and men alike mistake my gender" ("I am"); "the curious, the lustful, the suspicious, and the merely stupid watch me wherever I go and some follow me, scribbling notes and numerals, as if translation into a chart or overview will

make all clear and safe as houses" ("I am"). Their fascination branches from their inability to detect her gender and sex. In a crowd, she detects whispers questioning whether she is male, female, transsexual, the product of inter-species cross breeding, or attempting to "pass" as one of these. These whispers echo the real-life cries of white middle-class Americans and Canadians who, fearing the "browning" of their national identity, ponder, as Adilifu Nama has observed, whether immigrants "could ever be just like 'us'" (68).

One question that remains unasked by scholars of *Patchwork Girl* concerns the notion of "racial" passing when she so clearly is a compilation of skin colors. In a chance meeting between creator and monster in a forest soon after animation, Jackson's fictional Mary Shelley character describes the experience of seeing her creature's body for the first time in bright sunlight:

She was stark naked. I noticed what I could not have seen in the dim light of my laboratory, that the various sectors of her skin were different hues and textures, no match perfect. Here a coarser texture confused the ruddy hue of blood near under the skin, there smooth skin betrayed a jaundiced undertone, there a dense coat of fine hairs palely caught the

light. Warm brown neighbored blue-veined ivory. ("she stood")

The skin of the freshly-created monster is described as having "different hues and textures, with "warm brown" bordering "blue-veined ivory." The various hues could be associated with different races, but this issue remains unexplored in the text. The "qualities of collage" that Landow believes "characterize a good deal of the way we conceive of gender and identity" perhaps do the same for the construction of race. Readers are told that the monster is made from various people, but, as in *Frankenstein*, no racial histories are described. The racial associations of these various hues are left to each reader's interpretation; the "warm" shade of brown could be interpreted as the skin color of a Caribbean slave, or possibly tanned Caucasian skin. If the metaphor of the racially "mixed" monster is taken to its logical conclusion, one could expect her multicolored, crazy quilt body to showcase bodies of many races.

However, unlike *Frankenstein's* monster, the female monster is intimately familiar with the stories of the original owners of her parts. In the group of lexias entitled "graveyard," she isolates the history of each body part and thanks its contributor. By naming the previous

owner of her eyeballs, a historical tale is re-animated, reattaching a very old link between the Caribbean and the United States. In the lexia entitled "eyeballs," the monster expresses gratitude for her "wondrously firm and spherical" eyeballs which provide "clear and sharp" vision: "I owe this to Tituba." Jay Clayton believes that Tituba refers to "the name of a West Indian slave jailed in the Salem witch trials" of the seventeenth century (138). For decades her racial origins have been constructed and reconstructed by poets, playwrights and historians to reflect the racist notions of the day. In his article, "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro" (1974), Chadwick Hansen establishes that the real-life Tituba was a "Carib Indian woman . . . and the slave of the Rev. Samuel Parris, who had brought her and her husband John to Salem Village from Barbados" (3). However, many disagree with this assessment. Historian Margo Burns believes that the woman known as Tituba Indian "was Amerindian, probably South American Arawak" (Burns). The poet Longfellow seems confused on this issue: his poem/drama, "Giles Corey of the Salem Farms" (1868), lists Tituba as "an Indian Woman," but Act III reveals her mother to be Indian and her father to be a black man (C. Hansen 6). Hansen believes that

different people supposed Tituba to be of different races; their assumptions are not based on opposing pieces of evidence, but indicate racist leanings in "American historiography," particularly in cases where artists, and not historians, attempt to establish the race of Tituba (C. Hansen 3).

Audrey Smedley adds to Hansen's assessment in her article, "Race and the Construction of Human Identity" (1998). She argues that the connection between a person's skin color and his or her race is a new, almost specifically New World, development that emerged in the last few hundred years. She states that "[there] are no "racial" designations in the literature of the ancients and few references even to such human features as skin color" (693). Ancient peoples identified with their religions, communities, roles, and so on, until some time in the eighteenth century when the notion of race "developed in the minds of some Europeans as a way to rationalize the conquest and brutal treatment of Native American populations, and especially the retention and perpetuation of slavery for imported Africans" (Smedley 694). The layers of racial labels applied to Tituba by white people, from "Indian" (meaning "Native") and "Negro" to *mestizo* combinations, illustrates the subversive lure of racial

identity and its necessary inclusion in a discussion of racial meaning in this narrative.

Clayton argues that Tituba's sharp eyes help to 'focus' our attention on the connection between vision and race in this text (139). Vision is ubiquitous in this work: in the "labor" *lexia* we read a description of the monster through the fresh eyes of the creator: "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open" while in "dreams" the narrator speaks of her "blurred vision" and the sense of being "haunted by the suspicion not that I am blind, but that I'm not looking properly" Smedley defines the classification of "racial" groups as "the organization of all peoples into a limited number of unequal or ranked categories theoretically based on differences in their biophysical traits" (693). Certainly the patchworked creatures of all three novels experience a certain level of treatment because of their "biophysical" differences;" and it is key that the only person who treats the male monster kindly is blind. A touching scene occurs in *Frankenstein* when the monster gains "an insight into the manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth" as he watches Felix teach Safie from Volney's *Ruins of Empires* (Shelley 124). The monster "[hears] of the discovery of the American hemisphere, and [weeps] with

Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants" (Shelley 124).

The association between vision and racist notions regarding the "danger" of black women is demonstrated through the sight-based accusations of witchcraft that were brought against the historical Tituba. As the story goes, Tituba was labeled a witch in Salem for causing "hysteria" in two young girls. The girls wished to use magic to "see" the professions of their future husbands. As Tituba was known to practice magic, the girls asked for her help in performing a vision-inducing activity. The activity was "an English folk method of divining" which involved placing an egg white in a glass and staring at it until a hallucinatory state was achieved (C. Hansen 4). In their visions, both girls claimed to see coffins and became ill as a result. One of the girls became so ill that she remained in an altered state until her death. Through her involvement, Tituba was accused of fortunetelling. Hansen reports that of the many women accused at the time, Tituba was the first to come forward. In his words, "she ended her testimony of March 1, 1692 by saying, 'I am blind now. I cannot see.'"

The eye, visual perception and race are strongly linked in *Patchwork Girl* and its supporting texts. The

tears shed by the monster over the fate of Native Americans and Tituba's conviction for performing sight-based magic demonstrate how the eye contributes to social vision. Alcoff believes that race and gender visually mark our bodies, and that "[in] our excessively materialistic society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth" (Alcoff 6). The fictionalized Mary Shelley ponders the relationship between truth and words: "Wasn't writing the realm of the Truth? Isn't the Truth clear, distinct, and one?" ("conception"). The association of truth with singularity is incongruent with the monster's hypertextual, hand-stitched existence, and results in a fractured identity that links to real life issues. She faces additional pressure as a woman of 'colors' because her "mixed" identity is visibly marked on her body. Some women of color, whose bodies reflect their layered and sometimes complicated racial origins, that resist simple deconstruction, face this same stigma of truth and purity.

Clayton furthermore suggests that the female monster's eyes function as the source of her transcendence, neutralizing the notion that the eye notes visual differences, and thereby contributes to the ostracism of unusual-looking individuals. Dr. Frankenstein's monster is

not permitted to achieve this transcendence. Upon first sight of his creature's yellow eyes the scientist feels his skin crawl with a horror that is never replaced by love or affection. He refrains from meeting his monster's gaze. In contrast, the initial horror felt by the fictionalized Mary Shelley softens over time. In "thanks," the female monster shares her recognition that her eyes induced her creator's acceptance: "Hideous progeny: yes, I was both those things, for you, and more. Lover, friend, collaborator. It is my eyes you describe - with fear, yes, but with fascination: yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" ("thanks"). The monster realizes that her creator's observation of the "speculative" quality of her "yellow, watery" eyes establishes a connection between them. By returning her creator's gaze and bonding visually with her, the creature's eyes rescue her from a fate of ostracism to which her *mestizo* body would have condemned her.

Landow, too, addresses the "speculative" quality of Jackson's work, arguing that "[*Patchwork Girl*] permits us to use hypertext as a powerful speculative tool that reveals new things about ourselves while retaining the sense of strangeness, of novelty" (164). An example of a "new thing" the text leads us to understand may be the consideration that our exterior, although flesh and not

words, is similarly seen and "speculated" upon, read, and constructed by others. Tituba surprised her neighbors when she "penned a history of the village;" her body deteriorated by old age, they wondered, "what could a poor invalid, confined to a chair, know of their doings?" ("eyeballs"). In the lexia, "I am," the monster describes the color of her 175 year old skin: "the motley effect of patched skin has lessened with age and uniform light conditions." While this implies that her skin has faded somewhat evenly, she is "still subtly pitied," suggesting unchanging reactions to her various colors. Apparently her skin patches continue to maintain their unique identities and resist assimilation. In fact, through the voice of the spiritualist Madame Q, this hypertext novel speculates that everyone exists in a mixed and unassimilated state, for "[we] are haunted by our uncle's nose, our grandfather's cleft palate, our grandmother's poor vision, our father's baldness" ("body ghosts"). Even if every leaf on the family tree is believed to have been accounted for, our future is unpredictable and our bodies have already been "claimed by future generations" ("universal"). The absence of a discussion about "mixed" races in a novel about fractured, multiple identities exposes our culture's

unresolved anxieties toward the "impure" monsters among us
- namely, ourselves.

Her fractured identity still unresolved, Jackson's female monster still finds her own version of freedom, albeit via a different path than her intertextual ancestors. The Patchwork Girl is permitted to stay at a Queen's castle as a free individual: "Scraps may live in the palace, or wherever she pleases, and be nobody's servant but her own" (Baum 111). Frankenstein's monster escapes to the glacial isolation of the North where he remains physically free but emotionally imprisoned. Treading lightly between these paths, the female monster heads for the shade of a Californian desert, hiding from sunlight and human contact, invulnerable to assimilation or contamination.

Chapter 2: Race and Technology in *Snow Crash*

When Dr. Frankenstein and his monster transitioned from text to film in the early twentieth century, a visual imprint was made that would forever connect their story with scientific progress. In the original text, Mary Shelley implies that in order to carry out his nefarious experiment, Dr. Frankenstein may have relied on galvanism, the use of electricity for medical purposes which was a popular notion during the later nineteenth century. Shelley refrains from explaining exactly how the doctor coaxed the monster to life, and maintains the mystery surrounding that key scene. A century later, the film exposes the source of the monster's life force when a switch handle is flipped and the covered body of the monster lying on the laboratory table begins to stir. As the body shakes visibly beneath the sheet, the mysterious processes of electricity and the creation of life are indelibly linked.

The film and the text both emphasize that science is partially to blame for giving humanity the tools with which to create life without aid from the divine. More than the film, the text critically examines the consequences of humanity's possession of tools which allow individuals to bring their ideas to fruition independently. During the

Industrial Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sophisticated tools were developed to do the work that previously had been performed by humans; set in the Age of the Enlightenment, the Frankenstein story, notes Chris Baldick, "registers the anxieties of the period inaugurated in the twin social and industrial revolutions in France and Britain" (5). Consequently, suggests Baldick, Europeans wrestled with the notion of accepting responsibility "for violently reshaping its natural environment and its inherited social and political forms, for remaking itself" (5). At that time, Europeans were also wrestling with anxiety over notions of racial hybridity and the effects of interbreeding on society, particularly after the abolition of slavery and the integration of newly-freed slaves into European cultures. Denise Alessandria Hurd notes that racial anxiety in the nineteenth century was sometimes directed toward the offspring of two races, the "hybrid result of two different species (Black and White)" who was feared "to inherit the worst traits of both races" (para. 2). Hurd describes the tragic mulatto as one who "lives with a personal angst which stems from the difficulty it has in living with the "pull" of its different blood" (para. 1). Fears regarding racial hybridity and scientific change were clearly intertwined.

The link between race, science and the tragic mulatto remains strong to the present day. If *Frankenstein* is indeed a precursor of the science fiction (SF) genre, as Baldick (6) and Ziauddin Sardar (3) argue, it is also a significant source of the tragic mulatto character. Frankenstein's monster, a hybrid composed of countless human beings, embodies the "mixed" characteristic of the "tragic mulatto" (Hurd para. 1) and its tortured and unstable identity. Almost two centuries later, episodes of the science fiction television program *Star Trek* feature tragic mulatto characters (Deanna Troi and B'Elanna are two examples), and racial anxiety is evident in science fiction narratives told through other media.

Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction that relies heavily on technological themes and settings that contain a deceptive racial imperative. William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) remains one of the first narratives to explore the virtual environment as a setting, establishing the themes, style and other characteristics that would become identifying features of cyberpunk. The technological environment is a testament to the human desire to modify the environment, and echoes a preoccupation with the bodily manipulation and perfection issues found in cyberpunk's ancestral text, *Frankenstein*. In *Neuromancer*, the human

body is "upgraded" with steel prosthetics and lab-grown implants, not constructed from scratch like Victor's monster; the targeting of certain body parts for the purpose of enhancement explores fantasies concerning physical appearance and function. Likewise, parts of the body that remain unaddressed are exposed as areas of stability that require no enhancement. In cyberpunk, race is conspicuously avoided, and areas of the body where race can be detected, such as skin color and hair type, are free of surgical upgrading and replacement. Similarly, the presence and purpose of race in cyberpunk is an absent topic of research. While some researchers note that most central characters in the genre are male, there is little to no discourse surrounding the ubiquity of pure, white skin.

In this chapter, I wish to examine how the hybridized characters of Neal Stephenson's cyberpunk novel *Snow Crash* (1992) challenge the mono-ethnic profile of the cyberpunk hero while reinforcing the stereotypes that maintain it. *Snow Crash* features two technologically-savvy worlds: Reality, the "real" material world in which the characters live, and its hacker-designed virtual counterpart, the Metaverse. Against these real and virtual environments, the characters interrogate the effect and purpose of ethnic and

corporeal hybridity, setting the novel apart from other cyberpunk expressions which foreground ethnically "pure" main characters against technological and seemingly multicultural backgrounds. The words that compose the term *cyberpunk*, according to Dani Cavallaro, identify a preoccupation with dualism within the genre: "the 'cyber' and 'punk' components of cyberpunk constantly interact to produce varying constellations of the relationship between the glossy world of high technology and the murky world of addiction and crime" (24). The duality between freedom and imprisonment, glamour and erosion, and technological progress and deterioration contribute to the grand duality between cyberspace and materiality as illustrated by *Snow Crash's* Hiro and *Neuromancer's* Case. Case's "murky world" of Japan is infested with crime and addiction, but is also escapable for brief periods through the technology of cyberspace, which permits his mind to roam freely without being unencumbered by his body. The contrast between Hiro's "murky world" and Reality is characterized by capitalist imbalance: in Reality he inhabits "a spacious 20-by-30 in a U-Stor-It" (Stephenson 19) while living like "a warrior prince" in the Metaverse (63).

Lisa Nakamura notes that representations of the body are crucial to cyberpunk fiction ("Ethnicity" 61), and most

often, the body is represented as a hindrance that anchors the mind to the material world and prevents it from experiencing total and eternal freedom. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that cyberpunk characters exist in "[suspension] between a fantasy of escape from the meat and an awareness of the inevitable materiality of embodiment" (Cavallaro 161). The "fantasy of escape" takes place within the mind, and as Sabine Hauser has noted, the Metaverse is a perception. Yet, in that world "all brain activity still relies upon a body" (Hauser 33), and characters connect through avatars, "the audiovisual bodies that people use to communicate with each other in the Metaverse" (Stephenson 36). The body and the avatar maintain a connection: when the body is "doing something in Reality," the avatar goes "slack," resembling "an inflatable love doll" (Stephenson 420). The mind remains separate and disconnected; a unique entity that possesses no virtual representation. The mind, however, is linked to the eye through the rendering of virtual realities as spaces of perception: Gibson describes his version of cyberspace as "a consensual hallucination" (4), which highlights its visual element. Stephenson's Metaverse is similarly described as a laser-created image that "hangs in space in front of . . . Reality" (23). Avatars and bodies, Reality and "hallucinations" combine to

present an intricate interplay between mind and body in cyberpunk, with visual perception suspended between them.

With the yearning of the mind for escape and the inability of the body to satisfy this desire, the body becomes the focus of obsession, demonization and transformation. With "contempt for the flesh," Gibson's protagonist, Case, refers to the body as "meat" (6), indicating an awareness of its materiality and his belief that it is a burden. Case's attitude exemplifies the central cyberpunk notion that the body prevents the mind from uniting with other minds and holds it in a state of alienation. In *Neuromancer*, the quest for physical perfection through transformation translates into the desire to redeem the demonized body. Cosmetic alterations of the "meat" consist of artificial additions such as "vatgrown sea-green Nikon transplants" (21), razors implanted under fingernails (25) and mirrored lenses surgically placed into eye sockets (24). Mike Featherstone notes that the contemporary obsession with bodily transformation "[demands] a constant attentiveness . . . that comes with the capacity to retune the body's signifying surfaces from one moment to the next" (127). Every imperfection must be addressed, and characters have the "capacity to retune" the body limitlessly. Yet, despite

this radical plasticity, the central characters of cyberpunk remain "tuned" to a Caucasian ethnicity. Case is "default white," and "[lacks] ethnic or racial roots or referents of any kind" (Nakamura "Ethnicity" 70); since he and his cohort Molly "retune" the weakest parts of their bodies but leave their skin color alone, whiteness is not perceived as a handicap. The implication is that they are already ethnically "perfect" and thus there is no need to transform the race of their bodies.

Conversely, the racialized and hybridized protagonists of *Snow Crash* do not change the appearance of their bodies even though they have the freedom to do so. Anyone inhabiting the virtual Metaverse has the freedom to tailor his or her avatar to "look like a gorilla or a dragon or a giant talking penis" (Stephenson 36), but Hiro, who is not white, does not radically modify his avatar: "Hiro's avatar looks just like Hiro," dressed in a classier kimono (Stephenson 36). That Hiro's avatar is made in the image of himself doubles the amount of readerly attention on Hiro's ethnicity, a feature that sets him apart from other cyberpunk protagonists.

In fact, ethnicity lies at the root of cyberpunk's preoccupation with representations of the body. The white bodies of the central characters in the foreground create

the appearance of whiteness, but belie the contribution of non-white background characters and non-white cultures to the atmosphere. Thus, it could be said that cyberpunk, despite its white appearance, is actually color-coded. The protagonist roles in cyberpunk literature and film are predominantly filled by white characters, as Case of *Neuromancer* and Deckard of the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982) illustrate. In contrast to such racially "pure" characters, the atmosphere of cyberpunk narratives comprises an accumulation of cultural references such as vernacular languages, musical styles and religions lifted from predominantly non-white (particularly Japanese and African) cultures. This patchwork approach to building atmosphere is a major tenet of the cyberpunk genre, which is described by Larry McCaffery as

unfold[ing] in a typically postmodern way: mixing together genres, borrowing devices from the cinema, computer systems, and MTV, infusing the rhythms of its prose with those of rock music and TV advertising, pastiching prior literary forms and otherwise playing with literary elements (1)

This stylistic bricolage extends to representations of race, with writers and directors including and excluding certain races to emphasize themes in their work. For

example, director Ridley Scott incorporated many Japanese elements into *Blade Runner*, a cinematic cyberpunk classic. In his futuristic version of Los Angeles, city streets are decorated in stereotypical but anachronistic Japanese fashion with lanterns, umbrellas and noodle houses. An advertisement for an American soft drink features a geisha while Japanese music plays in the background. Japanese references are equally as common in *Neuromancer*; Japanese and Japanese-sounding brand names such as "Hosaka" and "Sony" (Gibson 46) are scattered throughout the novel, and a bar in the narrative allows "professional expatriates" to drink "draft Kirin" and "never hear two words in Japanese" (Gibson 3). The patrons hear no Japanese words because, presumably, Japanese drinkers do not frequent the bar; their absence calls attention to a lack of Japanese main characters in the narrative, for as Nakamura observes, no Asians are counted among the novel's hacker heroes ("Ethnicity" 62).

Like African drums supporting the rap of a white MC, black characters create a background for the white protagonist. A "thin black child with wooden beads and antique resistors woven tightly into her hair" opens the door for Case and his friends and leads "them along the tunnel of refuse" (Gibson 72). Outdated technology in her

hair and the presence of garbage suggest an atmosphere of slum-like degradation and ruin. Gibson lends his two Founders of Zion characters brown skin and "writes" their Jamaican accents: "Voices cryin' inna wilderness, prophesyin' ruin unto Babylon" (Gibson 110). This Babylon reference, notes Cavallaro, alludes to the "Rastafarian belief in the imminent collapse of white colonialism" and parallels the aligning of the British punk movement "with ethnic groups often branded as peripheral to British culture," such as cultures of West India (21). "The voices," says one Founder, "played us a mighty dub," (Gibson 110), referring to the reggae-based musical style that originated in Jamaica. In *Neuromancer*, Japanese elements and black characters lend an ominous feeling of decay and degradation and a sense of deep, "Old World" history that European-founded America, and even more so the ultra-new space of cyberspace, do not possess. That *Blade Runner*, by contrast, remains "free" of black characters is reminiscent of "the law of hypodescent," or the "colloquially defined 'one-drop rule,'" which states that "one drop of "black blood" compromises white racial purity" (Nama 43). An absence of black characters speaks to the importance of race as an absent signifier in the film, particularly when all of the main characters have white

skin, even the anthropomorphic cyborgs called replicants that are described in the film as "perfect."

In shaping the physical contours of Hiro Protagonist, Stephenson deconstructs the mold of the cyberpunk hero by creating a multiethnic central character who could be considered a second-generation transnational. Through this racial hybrid, Stephenson draws attention to the white hero paradigm that has been a cyberpunk tradition since Case and Deckard. Hiro's mother was ethnically Korean but grew up in Japan, making him "half Japanese, and under certain circumstances, totally respectful of authority" (Stephenson 153). His father was "African by way of Texas" (21) and Hiro looks like a black man with "cappuccino skin and spiky, truncated dreadlocks" (20). As though a tribute to Victor's monster, the first hybrid character of SF, Hiro's body is a patchwork. Juanita, in comparison, is aware of the minute details of her uncomplicated ethnic past "with a certitude that bordered on dementia," but Hiro does not know which part of himself he should privilege: "[h]is father was a sergeant major, his mother was a Korean woman whose people had been mine slaves in Nippon, and Hiro didn't know whether he was black or Asian or just plain Army, whether he was rich or poor, educated or ignorant, talented or lucky" (61). Nakamura notes that, "[when] the

body gets complicated and problematic, so does personal identity" (65), a set of complex issues shared by both black characters and black human beings. W. E. B. Dubois describes the particular type of identity crisis that arises from living as a black American. The American Negro, writes DuBois, lives in "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (3). This double-consciousness gives the American Negro "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others; "[one] ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (3). The black American man sees himself through his reflection in white society; this "double consciousness" might be extended to a triple or quadruple consciousness for a biracial American such as Hiro, particularly since he considers himself to be Japanese as well as Korean, African and American. His office in the Metaverse is "all quite Nipponese" with "tatami mats and ricepaper walls," but the babbling brook teems with trout instead of carp because "Hiro is American enough to think of carp as inedible dinosaurs" (Stephenson 106). African, Japanese, Korean and American: for a

cyberpunk protagonist, Hiro is considerably more multiethnic and multicultural than his forefathers.

Hiro's patchwork body represents a topographical map that indicates specific areas of social anxiety for white America. Like the ubiquitous space alien of 1950s science fiction stories, each of his ethnicities relates to a fear of a particular Other. Visually, Hiro appears black, and most other characters, like Y.T., believe him to be "black, or at least part black" (Stephenson 83). In one early Metaverse scene, Hiro's avatar is confronted by that of a Nipponese businessman who takes offence at the sight of Hiro, a black man, wielding Japanese swords that his soldier father brought back from Japan. The businessman's words, "men of your race were not allowed to fight during that war," refer to the disbarring of black men from enlisting to fight, argues Herman Graham III, "from the Revolution to the Second World War" (1). Graham found that white officials intentionally work to prevent African Americans from entering "the armed forces in the beginning phase of [any] war because they doubt that African Americans make competent warriors; because they fear the repercussions of having armed black men train in their communities; and because they want to avoid treating black veterans as citizens" (1).

In *Snow Crash*, references to slavery and "blackface" parody fear of the black man. After winning the duel with the businessman, Hiro mocks him with a minstrel performance of blackness that has deep roots in American colonialism: "'Well, land sakes!, ' Hiro says, 'Lookee here!'" (Stephenson 88). Eric Lott, who has studied the origin and practice of minstrelsy as it was performed in the Northeastern United States, states that "blackface" acknowledges the "collective fears of a degraded and threatening - and male - Other while at the same time maintaining some symbolic control over them" (25). Hiro parodies his opponent by making fun of the way the man sees him, and verbalizes his power over him: "Better fire up the ol' barbecue, Jemima!" (Stephenson 88). Hiro's "Jemima" alludes to the stereotypical plantation cook familiar from pancake mix and other foods, a southern dialect, and what Marilyn Kern-Foxworth calls "'bastardized' black English" (Kern-Foxworth 93). The "ol' barbecue" phrase invokes images of black workers as superior cooks and humble servants from the days of plantation slavery.

Beyond Hiro's black body, references to the African slave trade can be located in the capitalistic spaces of *Snow Crash*. While hurrying to deliver Hiro's pizza on time, Y.T. notices the waiting family "gathered on the front lawn

of their microplantation," and when they spot her with the pizza box, she imagines their thinking that the box is "a new ad layout for some Caucasian supremacist marketing honcho" (Stephenson 33). Advertisements are plentiful in this novel: there are advertisements for the Mafia (Stephenson 6) and freelance hackers (Stephenson 17), and the novel concludes with Hiro attracting attention to his hacking skills through a self-promoting "light and sound" spectacle (Stephenson 456). Marilyn Kern-Foxworth makes a case for recognizing the link between slavery and advertising: "slavery - a practice by which human beings are owned by other human beings - would not have been such an effective institution without the vehicle of advertising" (3). Antebellum American newspapers contained slave advertisements for sale and notices of "runaways or fugitives" and notified traders of their availability and skills, as well as arrival dates for ships containing freshly captured slaves (Kern-Foxworth 4). Although Kern-Foxworth notes that the institution of slavery was not wholly dependent on advertising, she stresses that its existence supported the communication network that eventually grew into "one of the most well-known businesses in America during the apogee of its existence" (4). Hiro's African heritage helps to reveal some of the "dark fears"

embedded within white American media culture; like a hacker-abolitionist, Hiro taps into a computer network to free the world from viral slavery. Ironically, his climactic advertisement is released upon the public as "a single bright column of light" (Stephenson 457).

While some characters relate primarily to Hiro's blackness, others react to his Asian features and clothing style; indeed, the two races are connected as double targets of white prejudice. One bigoted character in a franchise ghetto acknowledges Hiro's black and Asian heritages when he asks, "[a]re you a lazy shiftless watermelon-eating black-ass nigger, or a sneaky little v.d.-infected gook?" (Stephenson 300). This question incorporates a "balanced" prejudice toward blacks and Asians that upholds cyberpunk's preoccupation with privileging neither side of a binary equation, as "the genre's effectiveness actually [depends] on their dynamic interplay" (Cavallaro 24). Philip K. Jason notes that the racial slur 'gook' probably grew from American prejudices formed during the Korean War, stating that "Korean War veterans who later served in Vietnam" most likely applied the term to the Vietnamese first, and then "all Asians, finally" (114). Like Vietnam, Korea and Japan have also experienced military conflict with the United States in the

recent past; by including these countries as referents, *Snow Crash* helps to continue a longstanding motif that Ziadddin Sardar calls "the colonizing imperial mission of science fiction" (16), in which white colonialists try to claim foreign lands and inhabitants.

Of the three former opponents, Japan figures most prominently as the subject of SF "colonizing missions," due to the Western fear of the Japanese and their technological mastery. Joshua La Bare argues that "Japan's continued presence in science fiction is largely justified by its association with high technology, a relationship that has its roots in Japan's real economic and industrial development since the Second World War" (23). Japanese words and images, he argues, are used "to infuse our *imaginaire*" with images of Japan (23) in SF and cyberpunk, and he has found numerous words that allude to Japan in *Snow Crash*. In the first 18 of the 70 chapters he has counted "55 direct references to Japan," including "Nipponese," "Nippon," and "Japanese," (23). He believes that even the name of the bar of the Metaverse, The Black Sun, "refers us to an inverted Japan: not the rising sun, but the black sun" (La Bare 29). The Black Sun contains four quadrants, one of which is called the Nipponese Quadrant (Stephenson 56,) which "represents, of course, the

people who do everything else better: the Japanese" (La Bare 29). Japan's present economic success and technological achievements are projected into a future in which the Japanese figure as economical and cultural invaders of the United States. As David Morley and Kevin Robins report, the United States was until recently the world leader in technology, but now "Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future - with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation" (Morley 168). Gibson might agree: a decade after publishing *Neuromancer*, he noted that the Japanese have "been living in the future for such a very long time now" (Gibson "Tokyo"). As a result of its thinning power, the West is experiencing feelings of "technological 'emasculatation'" (Morley 169), a very different situation from its historical relationship to Africa.

The most profound connections between Japan and technology are that of the nuclear bomb and, further, the fact that the Japanese people survived the detonation of such bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. La Bare believes "[the] Japanese have entered our *imaginaire* as the only group to have been through the "true" apocalypse: the nuclear one" (La Bare 38). In *Snow Crash*, this apocalyptic

reference is established by the characters Hiro and Raven, the Aleut native and cohort of L. Bob Rife, both nuclear survivors. Both characters are shaped by nuclear Japan: Hiro's weapons, "a *katana* and a *wakizashi*," were stolen by his father "from Japan after World War II went atomic" (Stephenson 21); Raven's father was bombed by America "twice: once at Nagasaki, when he was blinded, and then again in 1972, when the Americans nuked our homeland" (367). Like Hiro, Raven's heritage is labeled incorrectly: Y.T. calls Raven "a mutant" (367), and although Aleutian, Hiro thinks he looks "Asian" (155). Hiro is, among other things, an Asian hybrid, which makes both men "mutant offspring of Japan, of the bomb, and, by extension, of America itself, the entity that did the bombing" (La Bare 39-40). Nuclear technology improves the technological status of Japan worldwide and promotes fear of the Japanese in America.

This notion that the East and the West are locked in an oppositional relationship is rooted in Edward Said's study of orientalism, which explores the origins of the racial and cultural tensions underlying this discord. One basic premise states that the 'Orient' exists as the West's 'Other,' and is needed by the West to provide definition. Techno-orientalism, a concept that focuses on the

technological aspect of orientalism, is described by
Toshiya Ueno:

Just as the discourse of orientalism has functioned to build up the identity of the West, techno-orientalism is set up for the West to preserve its identity in its imagination of the future. It can be defined as the orientalism of cybersociety and the information age, aimed at maintaining a stable identity in a technological environment. (94)

In cyberpunk, techno-orientalism can be seen in the association of Asian "cybersocieties" and Asian bodies with futuristic technology, an association that contributes to a technological, Asian-esque background upon which the talents of the white hero are permitted to shine. Differences lie, however, in the way techno-orientalism is expressed in earlier cyberpunk, like *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner*, and later works like *Snow Crash*. Asian bodies in older cyberpunk "[highlight] the notion that race must continue to exist;" they serve as "racial foils" that stabilize the identity of the white protagonist, like Chiba City's nerve splicers. By performing surgery on Case, these Asian characters act as "mediators between the machine and the body" (Nakamura "Ethnicity" 67, 66). The genre was already established and its characteristics familiar when

Snow Crash was published, and the effect of the techno-orientalism trope on the protagonist is noticeably different. Half-Asian but all hacker, Hiro uses his skills to write the Metaverse software, including the lines of code that help him win battles:

"Did you win your sword fight?"

"Of course I won the fucking sword fight," Hiro says.

"I'm the greatest sword fighter in the world."

"And you wrote the software."

"Yeah. That too," Hiro says. (Stephenson 104)

Hiro controls the code, ensuring his own success in battle, illustrating that he functions as his own "mediator between the machine and the body." However, his very presence illustrates that techno-orientalism "is a robust enough feature of the genre that it could not be discarded" and omitted from this cyberpunk novel (Nakamura "Ethnicity" 70).

Technology in this text serves to raise the status of characters associated with it, for "information is power." Darko Suvin has argued that "computer-hacker lingo" in science fiction raises the "social position" of technologically-knowledgeable characters (257); as an original software coder of *The Black Sun*, Hiro is one of "only a couple of thousand people" allowed to step across

the property line at the bar and solidify at will (Stephenson 40). Furthermore, as a half-black hacker, Hiro crosses another kind of line: his expert-level knowledge of computers addresses a notion that Beverley Lindsay argues is both a "belief and reality": namely, that "a digital divide exists among African Americans and other people of color compared to the majority of Americans" (112). Technology operates as a tool for social power, as indicated by its effect on the status of non-white characters like Hiro, and is linked to the invisibility of white privilege and the history of white European racism. The digital divide of which Lindsay speaks alludes to a long-standing paradigm that stems from the maintenance of two crucial Euro-American myths: the myth of progress and the myth of white, Western superiority. Even though the character Ng, a Vietnamese-American-cyborg who belongs to the "nonhuman system" genus (Stephenson 225), is shaped by techno-orientalism, his life as a severely disabled veteran is improved by his reconfigured van. The automobile remains a symbol of power and technological progress in *Snow Crash*, and car-obsessed American culture is structured to permit access to activities like "banking, car wash, funerals, anything you want" via the "drive through," which makes Ng's van "much better than a tiny pathetic wheelchair"

(Stephenson 226). Assisted by a "web of straps, shock cords, tubes, wires, fiber-optic cables, and hydraulic lines" installed in his van (Stephenson 225), Ng declares that "mechanically assisted organisms . . . are better than we were before" (Stephenson 248). (That America can manage to improve the physical existence of a Vietnamese man indicates the author's penchant for irony, since American chemicals like Agent Orange have been linked to serious birth defects in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.)

The Metaverse librarian daemon, the keeper of knowledge, reaffirms the superior status of the white Westerner. A Caucasian rendered through software code, he resembles a "silver-haired, bearded man with bright blue eyes" (Stephenson 107). Nakamura has noted that in cyberpunk, "machine-enabled forms of consciousness" are read as "posthuman," a notion also coded as the "postracial" ("Ethnicity" 61). However, in this racialized genre where characters operate within established color lines, the concept of postraciality is exposed as a white-tinted veneer. Ng and the Librarian indicate how the concept of race is a hybrid construction, like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, and Stephenson regularly refers to new ethnic groups that are constructed from shared characteristics other than gender or race: "[the]

Deliverator belongs to an elite order, a hallowed subcategory" (Stephenson 1), there are "enough Clints and Brandys to form a new ethnic group" (Stephenson 38), and skateboarders are acknowledged "as an oppressed ethnic group" (Stephenson 77). Some of the Refus on the Raft have rubber "antennas coming out of their heads" and are described as "a new species" (Stephenson 325). The individuals of these "elite orders," "new ethnic groups" and "new species" are composed of artificial and organic parts which fit together like a mosaic, with bodily boundaries enforcing the segregation of distinct parts with the severity of South African apartheid. Like the body and mind, the demarcated parts of a new ethnic group form a united whole but do not mix; even the "black-and-white" people who are "accessing the Metaverse through cheap, public terminals, and who are rendered in jerky, grainy black and white" are described in binary colors instead of grey (Stephenson 41). The kids of military personnel are described as yet another ethnic group: "Their skins were different colors but they all belonged to the same ethnic group: Military" (Stephenson 58).

The Brandys and Clints from Walmart, the skateboarders, the pizza deliverers, those accessing the Metaverse from "cheap, public terminals" and the military

kids share a working class "esthetic" that Dick Hebdige argues characterizes punk (4), the subculture that lends its name to cyberpunk and which is itself a subgenre. Beyond class, Hebdige's notions surrounding the irony of punk subculture apply to Stephenson's new ethnic groups and draw attention to the connection between irony and punk in *Snow Crash*. Subcultures, notes Hebdige, express their "challenge to hegemony" (4) subtly, "at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs" (17). These signs translate into style which is detectable on the body: punk's safety pins and garishly applied makeup and Stephenson's skateboards and cheap avatars are visual signs that simultaneously advertise opposition to the dominant corporate culture and its established notions of appropriateness and dedication to the subculture. The irony of punk, argues Hebdige, begins with its appropriation of reggae signs (such as hair) as identity stabilizers, causing punk style to be "read in part as a white 'translation' of black 'ethnicity' "(64) and trapping the punk subculture within a "frozen dialectic between black and white cultures" (70). This "frozen" state renders punk "incapable of renewal, trapped, as it is, within its own history" (Hebdige 69-70), and clashes with the punk obsessions of change and anarchy. It is ironic

that while attempting to formulate a stable identity, a subculture adopts elements of a foreign ethnicity which then limit the subculture's agency and freedom to change. *Snow Crash* mimics this irony by translating style into ethnic group: a skater who stops riding a skateboard is no longer a member of that "oppressed ethnic group," but he or she will possibly join a new ethnic group and become "oppressed" in a different manner by adopting a new hobby or transportation method.

Ethnic groups serve not as reverent identities but as parodic devices in Stephenson's text; for this reason, Hayles labels Stephenson "an equal opportunity offender" who has "something in his text to insult nearly every ethnic group imaginable" ("Posthuman" 277). She suspects "it is no accident that the villains are finally defeated by a coalition between an African-American/Korean, a Vietnamese, a Chinese, an Italian-American, and a young white woman," which she views as an expression supporting individuality, autonomy, and the creative initiative that Stephenson clearly values in computer hackers ("Posthuman" 277). Although Stephenson parodies many elements of ethnicity and cyberpunk characteristics, Hiro's hacking skills are rarely mocked by the narrator, even when he

unleashes his code-based spectacle at the narrative's conclusion.

The mosaic approach to ethnicity preserves purity and control in order to maintain the illusion of stability against the chaos of the Snow Crash virus, which is described using disruptive terms such as "static" and "noise" (Stephenson 73). As the virus spreads via software, language and religious networks, it unilaterally contaminates the populace, reducing individuals to a babbling collective. The virus threatens to dominate characters and assume control over their bodies, minds and physical environment, a considerable preoccupation of cyberpunk. Within the genre, such threats often take the form of a disempowering big business, government or Corporation, such as the Tyrell Corporation of *Blade Runner* or Tessier-Ashpool of *Neuromancer*. In *Snow Crash*, franchises like Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong are ubiquitous and benevolent in their desire to support the "high-tech personal accomplishment and betterment of all peoples" (Stephenson 99). The government, having drugged Y.T.'s mother, is less benign than Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong, but the real enemy is monopolist L. Bob Rife, who intends to unleash the virus on the human population.

Cecil Helman notes that in science fiction generally, "[the] idea of germ invasion, and the spread of infection, is above all a metaphor for sudden social change, a signal of acute moral uncertainty, sometimes of chaos" (36). The "sudden social change" in this text is immigration, the virus exposing the concern that immigrants from the Raft will infiltrate white America and decrease their control with a devastating outbreak. The Raft, a growing network of linked vessels, is like a clique of world alliances similar to the European Union that seems to encroach as it incorporates more ships. It appears as "a collection of human 'biomass' where people infected with the Snow Crash virus gather to form a new community under [L. Bob Rife's] rule" (Hauser 180). As though in mirror image, Hiro, Y.T., Juanita, Fido and Uncle Enzo unite to form their own ethnic group to re-order the world and defeat Rife, his army and the menacing virus.

No longer under the threat of contamination, Hiro and the others return to their everyday patterns: Juanita rips out her antenna and Y.T. drives home with her mother. Unchanged, their bodies and minds return to the pursuit of their contradictory goals, tightly bound by technology and constituting their own individual ethnic groups, like Frankenstein's monster.

Chapter 3: The Construction of Race in *Grand Theft Auto*

The construction of the narrative world through video format differs greatly from its construction within text-based formats such as novels and hypertext. For example, reading Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952) is very different from the experience of playing the role of Carl Johnson (CJ) in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), a Third Person Shooter (TPS) game that uses the viewpoint of a player character, or *avatar*², to draw the player within a virtual urban space. The avatar - in this case, CJ - provides the third-person point of view through which the player explores the environment and shoots enemies; for, as the name describes, shooting or otherwise killing enemies is the focus of TPS games. In the virtual worlds created by Ellison and the game developers from Scotland's Rockstar North, the survival of the black male protagonist depends upon his ability to negotiate the urban landscape. S. Craig Watkins states that "blackness as a cultural sign is produced, circulated, and enacted" (557); it is Ellison's and Rockstar North's interpretation of this cultural sign that reflects their view of the monstrous.

² Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings use the term *avatar* to refer to a game character "who serves as a protagonist under the player's control" (150).

The construction of blackness is a crucial narrative element in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), where the player character is a young African-American male. Kiri Miller notes that CJ's story follows the basic formula of the *Grand Theft Auto* series: he must complete missions to gain respect in order to raise his status in the criminal underworld of a big city, a fictionalized west coast city populated predominantly by African-American and Latino non-player characters and modeled on the geography of three southwest American cities (256). Between missions, players watch "cut scenes," cinematic sequences "that allow for the presentation of extended dialogue, narrative exposition, and character development" (Miller 257). In the game's predecessor, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002), the player character is a member of the Italian mafia in Miami, and is required by the game narrative to shoot police officers and rival gang members. In comparison, CJ's missions involve graffiti writing, pimping, shutting down crack dens and killing drug dealers to complete his two main objectives, which are, as defined by the text on the back of the game case, "to save his family and to take control of the streets." Like the protagonists of other *Grand Theft Auto* titles, CJ is the star of his own "rags to riches" story, but his missions and main objectives are more closely

associated with mass-produced images of African-Americans. Graffiti, pimping and drugs are stereotypically associated with African-American communities; "taking control of the streets" refers to the struggles within ghetto neighborhoods rife with gangster gunfire from which he will "save his family." Indeed, CJ's "safe house" is his childhood home located in Ganton, a fictional city modeled on Compton, a Los Angeles suburb. Josh Sides has called Compton a "metonym for the urban crisis" through the gang activity, drugs and poverty it experienced in the 1980s (583). Reggae, gangsta rap, soul, groove, and classic hip hop music lend support to the African-American cultural atmosphere, while the game narrative concludes with the release of a crooked cop and a citywide riot, a reference to the 1992 beating of Rodney King. Despite the musical, geographical and historical references, and the fact that most TPS games feature light-skinned player characters, David Leonard reports that discussions involving racial stereotypes in the series have been substantially fewer in number than those pertaining to its violent nature (60). However, the high visibility of a black male body in a TPS alone is sufficiently provocative to invite an examination of the construction of race within the game narrative, itself constructed by notions of capitalism, colonialism,

hip hop music and the blues, and the tension between player and player character. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the significance of CJ's race to the game; where the game title alludes to "California's major geological fault, *San Andreas*" and draws attention to what lies beneath the "faultlines in American culture" (Miller 256), the intention of this chapter is to unearth the layers of tensions underlying the relationship between race and the game objectives.

To clearly see what "lies beneath" the surface of present day American culture is to consider the behaviors, influences and circumstances of its past inhabitants. Pancho McFarland notes that in 1503 the first Spanish ship ferried African slaves to America; the music they brought, with its "rhythms, audience participation, dance and instruments" (942), proved to be a strong influence in the development of American blues. Michael Eric Dyson argues that the blues functioned

as a source of racial identity, permitting forms of boasting and asserting machismo for devalued black men suffering from social degradation, allowing commentary on social and personal conditions in uncensored language, and fostering the ability to transform hurt and anguish into art and commerce. (64)

The narrative of the protagonist, CJ, illustrates many of the preoccupations of blues music. Like the slaves who channeled their stories into blues music, the systematic forces of colonialism and capitalism shape CJ's environment and character. William Cobb notes that trains and highways often appear in blues music as surfaces explored by "black wanderers exercising the newly granted right of mobility" and escaping the poverty of the ghetto, "a terrain defined by the lack of mobility of its residents" (25). CJ reverses this sequence by travelling back to the ghetto: the game narrative begins with his arrival in San Andreas to attend his mother's funeral after living in Liberty City for the last five years. Like the devalued black man of blues music, CJ's social degradation begins at the start of the game when a corrupt police officer steals his money and frames him for the murder of another officer. Although the game is set in 1992, twelve years before the game's release, CJ wrestles with the contemporary legacies of slavery and oppression: poverty, crime and police brutality. Without job options or money, CJ stands at a metaphorical crossroads, a marker signifying a critical juncture that features prominently in blues music (Robert Johnson's "Cross Road Blues" [1937] is one famous example). Craig Werner writes that, for a runaway slave or a black

Southerner escaping a lynching, "every crossroads [presents] a choice of direction that could make the difference between slavery and freedom, life and death" (65). CJ encounters many crossroads while evading police officers and rival gang members, and travelling through a network of highways, bridges, overpasses and tunnels, as well as patches of desert, countryside and subdivisions that connect the three cities of San Andreas. Every fork in the road provides him with the metaphorical crossroads, the opportunity to make a decision that will ultimately affect his old gang, the Grove Street Families, as he helps to transform their pain into pride.

Although the game incorporates issues of mobility, poverty and segregation, thus echoing concerns typically mentioned in blues music, it is more accurate to describe its style as hip hop, a contemporary, next-generation interpretation of the blues that has been described as "the most powerful expression of the blues impulse" (Werner 136). Like its ancestor, the blues, the hip hop genre is committed to telling the truth about the African-American existence through musical and cultural expression. Hip hop is the blues for the present day; while "evil retains its religious significance" in 1920s blues lyrics (Werner 65), hip hop artists half a century later sang about urban

isolation, drug addiction and violence, social "evils" ignored by those outside the South Bronx projects where hip hop was first created (Werner 236). It is against this kind of evil that CJ battles when he arrives at home and witnesses the devastating effects of guns, drugs, and criminal cops on his "homies." After helping them to reorganize and reclaim their stolen territory, he completes the game victoriously, a hip hop hero within his segregated community.

The blues and ambling roads go together like hip hop and the urban jungle. While roads are a motif of the blues, hip hop music focuses on the City; gangster rap in particular, argues Nick De Genova, "resounds with an evocation of the geographical, referencing many of the more prominent ghetto crucibles of the country - Compton, South Central L.A., the Bronx, Harlem - or more ubiquitous localities like "the hood," "the projects," and "the streets" (119). The cities of *San Andreas* are characterized by their unique landscapes and models of historical landmarks which mirror the real-world cities they represent. The Watts Towers of Los Angeles are recreated in colorful mosaic in Los Santos, the glittering casinos and sandy deserts of Las Vegas decorate the landscape of Las

Venturas³, and, as Soraya Murray notes, the "colorful assortment of alternative citizens" reveals San Fierro to be a re-creation of San Francisco (93). The cities and surrounding areas constitute thirty-six square kilometres of virtual landscape, "making it necessary to develop a sense of direction and find efficient ways to move about" (Murray 93). The virtual space is so vast that game developers added a special map feature to the game and a paper map in the game case to orient players. CJ gains increased strength and stamina from running and sprinting through the streets, but it is far faster to have him hijack a car or a motorcycle, and missions requiring intercity travel make it almost impossible to avoid carjacking. To make it seem even more attractive, carjacking is an uncomplicated endeavor that requires only a single button click on the controller.

Lining the streets are commercial businesses selling discounted clothing, alcohol and fast food. In addition to the map, the game case includes a small booklet designed to appear like a travel guide to the three cities, advertising radio stations, restaurants and activities for the newly-

³As a representation of Las Vegas, "Venturas" may be an oblique reference to architect Robert Venturi and his book "Learning from Las Vegas" (1977).

arrived (Miller 270). This simulated tourist brochure emphasizes the frontier-like atmosphere of the "sandbox"⁴ environment, where players are free to deviate from the official goal of the game and pursue personal goals. It is possible to take CJ to a gym to work out or to a tattoo parlor to get "inked:" no penalties exist for breaking free of the current mission to pursue such activities, and there can be rewards in the form of admiring girlfriends and intimidated rival gang members. The expanse of virtual space, the ease of carjacking, the maps and the travel guide stress the importance of travel in this game, and underline the notion that San Andreas offers a variety of activities, all of which require money. CJ, however, is poor, a product of the ghetto; hijacked cars are his only means of long distance transportation, while pizza, fried chicken and burgers constitute his only dining options

⁴The sandbox mode of a video game is a unique mode that removes some of the constraints of the game (such as time limits) to allow the player to experiment and explore the game. Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings note that such unstructured game play is generally not rewarded by the game (140); players report that much of the fun of this mode stems from the freedom of the player to explore the landscape of the game and pursue his or her own goals. In their foundational text, "Fundamentals of Game Design," Adams and Rollings define the sandbox mode as "[a] *gameplay mode* in which the player is not presented with a victory condition. This mode has few restrictions on what he may do and offers no guidance on what he *should* do" (G9).

(Murray 96). CJ earns money by completing missions, although the first five missions reward him solely with respect. To survive in this materialistic environment - for the game instructs the player to lead CJ to restaurants, and to clothe him in his gang color of "Grove Street Green" - CJ beats pedestrians to steal their money, and, if they are "packing," their weapons, which range from baseball bats to submachine guns. Some missions, such as a scene called "Drive By," conclude with a multi-cruiser police chase that CJ and his homies survive if CJ is able to get to a spray paint store and re-color his car in time. Stealing cars, beating and robbing people and evading the police are activities CJ must commit to continue game play. CJ is living his version of the American dream, trying to improve his life; ultimately, however, these criminal activities paint him as an outlaw.

The outlaw character traditionally portrayed in blues music, says William Cobb, makes its appearance in the gangster character of hip hop. Hip hop culture, as defined by Hebdige, is "the culture that grew up around rap," and "involves dance, dress, language and wild style graffiti" (223). M.T. Kato charts its humble origins on South Bronx playgrounds in the 1970s, where disenfranchised youths established a space where they could make art and music

(192). They used discarded postindustrial refuse and technological commodities, such as "aerosol spray, turntables, vinyl records, [and] ghetto blasters" (Kato 192), to claim their space on the urban landscape and the airwaves. Through graffiti, hip hop retains this notion of "making space;" Kato suggests that as an "outlaw art" that has, thus far, avoided "corporate intervention," graffiti scrawled onto corporate downtown buildings and subway cars created a "common space" (179) on the commercial landscape of the 1980s. The notion of "making space" can be found in all games; Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins call attention to the "roots in architecture, landscape painting . . . or amusement park design" that all games have (para 1).

Making space is also a central activity in video games like *San Andreas*, where "the stories . . . are fundamentally about controlling territory, acquiring authority over threatening and disorienting spaces" (Miller 264). One of CJ's first missions requires him to locate one hundred occurrences of rival gangs' tags and spray paint his tag, "Grove Street 4 Life," over them. Spraying this tag (a reference to a 1991 NWA album entitled *Niggaz4Life*) serves to reclaim his territory, and imitates the hip hop "[obsession] with proprietary concerns" (Cobb 27). As William Jelani Cobb notes, hip hop culture is preoccupied

with ownership. This preoccupation is expressed through the tradition of sampling; "the impulse to collage" is a characteristic of older "black musical traditions, particularly jazz and gospel" (Dyson 67). Early 1990s artists such as NWA, Dr. Dre, Eazy E and Tupac Shakur often incorporated samples of other artists' songs into their music (27); in turn, *San Andreas* integrates their music and samples gathered from "ghetto" films such as *Colors* (1988), *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993). Players are also encouraged to sample by creating their own in-game playlist: the Windows® and X-Box® versions of the game include a customizable radio station that players can program with songs from their own music collection ("Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," "Soundtrack," 2009).

The practice of sampling reflects the hybridity of the musicians and contributes to what Robins calls "black urban culture:" multicultural kids from the inner city using digital samplers and "a whole lot of imagination" to express themselves (131-2). These hip hop pioneers set the pace - high on practicality and creativity, and low in cost - for what would later be identified as hip hop style. Break dancers of the 1970s and 80s chose clothing that allowed their bodies to move freely: sweatshirts with hoods, bellbottomed jeans and tennis shoes. They also wore

regular clothes but in unconventional ways: "caps were worn back to front and on the back of the head" (Hebdige 226). In *San Andreas*, CJ's default attire consists of a white "wifebeater" tanktop, blue jeans and a "caesar" hairstyle but the player is required by the game to purchase hip hop clothing such as high top "sneaks," trousers in camouflage design and oversized hoodies. CJ can buy accessories like sunglasses and gold chains with Rastafarian-inspired pendants, as well as bandanas. He can change his hair into an afro, jheri curls and cornrows. The hair, clothing and accessory options point directly to a young, masculine, African-American style: there are no options for straight hairstyles and there is no "feminine" clothing. Music in the game is supplied by analog car radios - technological anachronisms in comparison to today's MP3 players - and offers a subtle reminder of early hip hop's reputation as the music of the street (Cobb 14). The collection of eleven radio stations creates an aural network that players can explore by tuning into and changing channels, with songs and announcements playing in random order. The music of the hip hop stations serve to situate CJ in the early 1990s, the beginning of the hip hop genre's "modern era" (Cobb 63).

Going further than simply incorporating the surface style of hip hop, the game also references that genre's political investments. The voice of rap artist Chuck D of Public Enemy deejaying on the classic-rap station is noteworthy, as this group emerged just as the genre changed its focus, becoming more political as well as commercial (Watkins 572). Watkins believes that, from the beginning, rap was always about "the acquisition of status-conferring objects" (572); nevertheless, the early 1990s saw increased commercialism within the genre. The commercial interests of the hip hop artists of this era are often expressed in their lyrics: "[the] song describing the deprivations of the past and highlighting one's present financial largeness is so common in hip hop as to be a cliché," with the artists' shared desire to change their ghettos into empires through the commercial success of their music fuelled by capitalism (Cobb 127). bell hooks has written extensively about the cultural implications of white supremacy on black cultures, and argues convincingly that "gangsta rap celebrates the world of the material, the dog-eat-dog world where you do what you gotta do to make it even if it means fucking over folks and taking them out. In this world view killing is necessary for survival" (117). The *San Andreas* character who best embodies the material world gangsta of

San Andreas is OG Loc. After changing his given name, OG - "Original Gangster" - commits crimes with the hope that he will be apprehended and sent to prison, thus improving his career as a gangsta rapper, since "criminal records (actual or otherwise)" strengthen a rapper's "authenticity" (De Genova 119). The formula works, and OG is rewarded for his jail time with a recording contract. CJ kills for survival and, as Dennis Redmond has noticed, none of his missions involve activism or protests for social change (110). The contradiction within CJ is that he kills those who get in the way of his making his neighborhood - his space - safe.

These preoccupations of hip hop culture - making space and making money - continue to be felt in the virtual world of *San Andreas*. The game grants players the opportunity to use their creativity while pursuing territory and money, drawing them into the belief that the story being told is their own. In the TPS tradition, CJ's narrative is marked by a linear succession of missions that the player must complete in the order given. Despite this rigid confinement to "game rules," however, the player has the option of ignoring the missions to explore the possibilities of the game. No time limits are given for completing missions; players may linger in the virtual space and manipulate CJ into collecting oysters or take him dancing in a nightclub.

The sandbox mode permits this free exploration. In the tradition of sandbox games, players are free to explore the landscape and pursue activities such as these without directives from the game. Jesper Juul notes that *San Andreas* is an example of "open and expressive games, games that let the player use them in many different ways, games that allow for many different playing styles, for players pursuing personal agendas" (2007). Neil Sorens likewise writes that, "unlike the stories found in other types of games, these are not told primarily by the game's developer" but "are created and directed largely by the player's decisions" (Sorens para.4). The game developers created a virtual space so vast and rich with possibility in *San Andreas* that the player "creates an original story" every time he or she plays the game (Sorens para.1). The improvisational nature of storytelling within music is implicated here, for blues offers similar creative opportunities to the singer who "can sing the same lyrics a hundred times while never singing the same song twice" (Cobb 27). The freedom of the player to chart a unique game path also mirrors that of the hip hop DJ, or "MC," to spontaneously make and drop rhymes: "the pursuit of uniqueness in styles is the very driving force that valorizes the collective identity of hip hop" (Kato 191).

As Kato suggests, the permission to express oneself creatively using rhymes, stories or games gives one a sense of ownership (191); Juul adds that it also grants players the ability to "choose what kind of game they want to play" (2007). Players are also permitted to lead the action of their own game. Geographical areas of the game "unlock" and become available for use as CJ, guided by his player, completes missions and develops as an avatar. (A similar construction of the virtual landscape can be seen in *Patchwork Girl*, where the reader clicks on links and reads *lexias* to piece together the body of the monster.)

Despite the permissions provided that allow the player to explore the virtual world with CJ and pursue individual goals, both CJ and the player experience limitations to these permissions. While certain aspects of CJ's behavior and appearance can be controlled by the player, the game enforces limits: "[in] theory, players can do whatever they want in *San Andreas*, but in practice CJ constantly experiences pressure from different quarters" (Miller 277). CJ is pressured by requirements embedded within the game. For example, if the player does not dress CJ in his gang color of green, gang members will verbally express their mistrust of his lack of team spirit. Guided by the game requirements, the player makes choices that affect CJ's

clothing style, eating habits and behaviours. Depending on how a player chooses to "mod" (modify) and "play" CJ, he exhibits different personalities: "fat CJ, wisecracking CJ, and sweet-talking CJ" have all been observed ("Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Weekend Update: Street Talking" para.3). Taking him to restaurants more or less often will make him fat or thin, and more or less desirable to his girlfriends. His driving skills improve with practice, and he gains muscle with bench presses at the gym. Miller suggests that "[this] curatorial decision . . . relieved Rockstar of some of the responsibility for racial representation" (272), since CJ's appearance and even status would seem to stem directly from the player's choices. However, it does not release the developers entirely of responsibility, for the game is limited by its design. The player can modify many details of his appearance but not all of them; "someone else has compiled this collection of physical markers of urban, black, male being-in-the-world; the player is never the lead choreographer" (Miller 267). The player can only dress him in the clothing provided, and manipulate him into performing actions supported by the game. CJ will never wear a pink tutu or perform neurosurgery in San Andreas General Hospital.

Players are further restricted by the types of actions CJ can perform to finish the game. The freedom to explore the virtual cities and pursue individual goals stems from the game's sandbox design, and does not assist the player in reaching the conclusion of the game; instead, the player must also manipulate CJ into performing violent acts in order to progress through the game levels. It is impossible to have CJ avoid committing violence entirely and still continue game play. He is required to commit crime and to be punished for these acts, although he is sometimes offered the opportunity to either bribe police officers or hide from them by repainting his car, thereby committing additional illegal acts.

Issues of control and depictions of race in the game have unmistakable connections to American history. Urban American life in CJ's fictionalized world is coded as African-American through the use of music genres, clothing styles, slang ("ghetto" and "nigga" are commonly uttered by characters), recreations of cities largely populated by African-Americans, and, of course, an African-American protagonist and many African-American non-player characters. CJ is the only player character available (Miller 257), and his appearance and actions are directly controlled by the player (Adams and Rollings 154). Adams

and Rollings note that "exercising so much control makes [avatars] more puppets than persons" (154). The demonstration of such domination, where the will of the player is imposed upon the black body, is reminiscent of the proprietary and systematic control of the bodies of African slaves by colonizers who attempted to enforce their way of life and "civilize the natives." As though he were quietly living beneath a regulating colonial gaze, CJ remains a passive character. During the course of the game, CJ has the ability to express himself verbally with over 4,000 speaking lines, but only in response to the comments of passersby; in other words, he speaks only when spoken to, like a slave. Murray believes the portrayal of CJ's body serves as "a reminder of a shameful history" of slavery in America (96), right down to his clothing: CJ is able to purchase bandanas, a mask-like accessory that Marilyn Kern-Foxworth has found to be associated with nineteenth-century slaves in America (92).

The image of the slave has contributed to that of the outlaw as a reactionary figure whose crimes, states Cobb, are "the inevitable byproduct of a system that has made slaves of human beings" (34). The crimes CJ commits while pursuing missions provoke the attention of aggressive police officers (who react with lines such as "I could kill

you any time, I'm a cop"), help to shape him into the outlaw character of the blues tradition, which in turn has been reincarnated into the gangster character of rap (Cobb 126). The outlaw and the gangster are constructed as tough characters resistant to racist authoritative regimes; however, whereas the former is portrayed as sympathetic to "the marginal, the lesser, the weak," the latter denies his pain in order to cope against daily occurrences of racism, and boasts of his indestructibility in the face of adversity (Cobb 35, 31). The gangster's attitude of indestructibility is constructed to reflect both black and white concerns. hooks notes that gangster culture is "the cultural crossing, mixing and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes, and concerns of the white majority" (116). A construction of white culture, the black, male gangster is needed to maintain the order of that culture, as symbolized in *San Andreas* by CJ's persistent immortality - no matter how many times he is "wasted" by gunfire and fiery car crashes, CJ always reappears to try again. This tenacity is a reflection of black persistence in the face of adversity, and a measure of how necessary he is to confirm the safety of white middle-class order (Cobb 34). As Toni Morrison writes, through "an imagined Africanistic persona," people can

"imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture" (322). The gamers of the world can try on the lifestyle of the gangster, participating in what bell hooks might call "the sensationalist drama of demonizing black youth culture" (115).

The demonizing of black youth culture occurs in the game even when CJ does not act like a criminal. He possesses roles outside of the criminal world, as the sandbox mode allows the player to explore the roles of taxi driver, high-stakes gambler, arcade gamer, BMX bike competitor and pool player. Ben De Vane suggests that part of the appeal of this game for middle-class gamers is "the chance to inhabit marginalized identities and vicariously experience these highly stylized life worlds" (265). Although these roles are "legit," they are "stand alone" tasks that do not help the player complete missions and finish the game. More substantial tasks might have been able to transform CJ into a multidimensional character; as Maria Pramaggiore suggests, "multiple identifications" help characters "resist the limitations of identity politics" (32). Because of their secondary status, and because of their associations with poverty, unemployment, reduced social status and African-American life on the fringe of white, mainstream, middle-class culture, CJ's side projects

are not strong enough to crumble his image as a gangster, an image constructed carefully by Rockstar North. The virtual world of *San Andreas* is a collection of African-American signifiers and stereotypes interpreted and appropriated by Scottish game developers working on a commercial video game sold to and consumed by Americans.

The packaging of the gangster for commercial consumption was a risky but ultimately successful venture for Rockstar North. Before the game was released, "industry writers often suggested that it might be risky business for Scottish game developers to take on" a project that depicted inner city life in America (Miller 269). Worried that the game would be scrutinized for evidence of racist assumptions, they performed research so "meticulous" that they earned credibility with gamers (Miller 269). The preceding *Grand Theft Auto* titles feature white protagonists: in *Grand Theft Auto III* there was barely an avatar, and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* featured "a cartoonish mafia thug who was impossible to take seriously" (Miller 269). *Vice City* raised race-related controversy for its portrayal of Italian Americans, Latino Americans and Caribbean Americans (De Vane 266), but it was *San Andreas* that provoked individuals in some countries to request

government assistance in removing the game from stores (Miller 269).

Public concerns over the violence of the game, not its racial depictions or stereotypes, may seem to recycle the invisibility of African-American males by whites, a focal point of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. There is, however, one crucial difference concerning the antagonists: while Ellison's novel presents the white man as nemesis to the black man, the protagonist and antagonist of *San Andreas* are both African-American. Tenpenny, a corrupt African-American officer, blackmails CJ into killing several people who are trying to organize a criminal case against him. Tenpenny is charged with various felonies but acquitted for lack of witnesses; in protest, the citizens of Los Santos stage a riot. A shared racial background between protagonist and antagonist helps Rockstar North avoid real-world comparisons, as well as discussions over the complicated interaction of race, class and power. The use of a black cop also deviates from the historical accuracy of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, which were instigated by the acquittal of white police officers charged for beating Rodney King, a black man. In some cases, a black cop bribing a black gangster implies that the power imbalance is caused by issues other than race; in this case, however,

the criminal behavior of both characters doubly implicates their African-American race within white, racist culture. In *Menace II Society*, which provided a cinematic model for *San Andreas*, hooks notes that "we see the young black males have learned their gangsta values from watching movies and television and shows where white male gangsters are center stage" (117-8). She believes the significance of this scene "undermines any notion of "essentialist" blackness that would have viewers believe that the gangsterism these young black males embraced emerged from some unique black cultural experience" (117-8).

A close investigation of the basic structure of the game, however, exposes the monstrous power of certain invisible forces that are greater than the authority of any one character. Redmond argues that the game exposes the violence underlying capitalism that results from the "colonial-styled" racism of "the U.S. Empire" (110). At the beginning of the game, CJ is robbed by Tenpenny and Pulaski, a white cop, in a cut scene; as a poor, African-American young man from the ghetto, CJ is deemed to play the victim, regardless of who upholds white, racist laws. Like Tenpenny and CJ, black men existing within a white, punishing system, hooks believes rap artists are also victimized "by the more powerful, less visible forces of

patriarchal gangsterism" (122). CJ's continued resistance to the racist laws and his loyalty to his family-centered goals allow him to finish the game. Tenpenny, on the other hand, is given the opportunity to redeem his "blackness" through his power as a police officer but instead he chooses to act immorally by bribing CJ; the game also implies that he was involved in the death of CJ's mother. Tenpenny is mortally punished when he loses control of a stolen fire engine and drives off a bridge, while CJ returns, triumphantly, to his happy friends and neighbors.

CJ's violent world is a product of white power, but committing violence is the only way the player will achieve the goal of the game. Miller notes a "double-voiced quality" to the racial representations in this game that allows players to

walk the line between claiming that these cultural artifacts are unimpeachably authentic - because they represent bleak realities of violence, poverty and lack of opportunity - and that they are allegorical, ironic, not to be taken literally. (274)

Miller adds that not everyone will get the joke: references occur at high speed in the game in order to create an intense experience for the player, and individual players will interpret the references differently. Furthermore, by

referencing popular films like *Menace II Society* and music from Public Enemy, the game supports the "criminalization" of gangster rap, which in turn exploits African-American culture (De Genova 90). However, the culture of San Andreas is not purported to precisely reflect African-American culture or the real world in general. The streets are wide and free of traffic jams (Redmond 107); the cities are almost devoid of places of worship. No parents are shown taking their children to school or otherwise engaged in "family-oriented activities" (Leonard 59). CJ carries a cell phone, a highly uncommon piece of technology in 1992, the game offers a "complete lack of credible female characters" (Redmond 105), and CJ meets only a handful of people from other races who are not from rival gangs.

The conclusion of the game reveals an additional design restriction that undermines the notion that the game confines CJ and the player to engaging in violent criminal activity. CJ completes missions in order to reach his main objectives, which are "to save his family and to take control of the streets." The missions require CJ to commit crime, and each completed mission pushes him closer to attaining these heroic objectives. If CJ successfully completes his final mission, he attains his objectives, concludes the game, and is welcomed as a hero, having saved

his family members and neighbors from further abuses performed by criminal cops. As a result, the sole consequence of CJ's violence, and the only conclusion to the story, is the achievement of safety in a ghetto neighborhood. While it is impossible to finish the game without forcing CJ to commit acts of violence, it is equally impossible to conclude the game without fulfilling his objective of making his neighborhood safe. This inevitable and positive conclusion reveals the underlying value system over which the player has no control.

This unalterable value system requires CJ to commit brutal acts in order to become a hero, and is therefore unethical. However, the unethical and unfair obstacles he must overcome are necessary to highlight his heroic quality. Positioned against this unethical system, the lawless African-American ghetto, the crooked cops and his malevolent rivals, CJ is constructed as a sympathetic and competent character with credible and ethical objectives. In the context of a degraded and combative atmosphere, CJ's criminal acts are justifiable, and Rockstar can take responsibility for creating a moral hero who, through uncontrollable circumstances, must battle an unfair justice system to achieve his objectives.

Perhaps the influence of the player is overemphasized in other ways: with no one manipulating the controller, the game narrative, supported by the sandbox design, continues to thrive. Alexander R. Galloway notes that, in this state, without any input from the player through the controller, "nothing changes [in the game world] that is of any importance" (10). Pedestrians mumble to themselves or try to engage CJ in conversation, ambulances arrive to treat the blood-bathed people CJ has beaten, and CJ's body remains standing with arms folded, body swaying slightly with each inhalation as though perpetually suspended in the present tense. Galloway calls this "an ambient act" and notes that the machine will continue in this "state of rest" until the player returns to game play (Galloway 10). Juul suggests that the sandbox game "is the new style in video games, and an illustration of how contemporary video games are severing the ties to their historical roots in the arcade game, becoming something new and unique" (2007). The fictional narrative that shapes the contours of game, however, grows more compelling and also problematic as contemporary concerns and historical connections weave together a new landscape for exploration and play. Like his ancestors, the outlaw and the slave, and the monsters of Dr. Frankenstein and the fictional Mary Shelley, CJ is a

survivor, and his saga continues beyond the conclusion of the game. His allies reunited and his neighborhood safe once again, CJ hits the road to "see what's happening" ("Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," "Plot," 2009).

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