Human Subjectivity and Technology in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at human subjectivity as it interfaces with technological advancements portrayed in 'Altered Carbon', a contemporary Science Fiction novel. The term subjectivity, in this paper, is used synonymously with identity and the sense of self. The concepts reflect human existence that is in constant negotiation with the environment and embodiment. The analysis looks at how and why the mind/body, a basis of human subjectivity but considered as two different entities, are changed or altered due to interfacings with technologies. Through portrayals in the genre of Science Fiction, this paper envisions the shape of future subjectivity. Though this study does not attempt to provide an authoritative or conclusive charting of human subjectivity, it serves to provide an insight into our evolution to becoming posthumans as a result of our close contact with technology, as seen through the imagined worlds of Science Fiction.

Keywords: Science Fiction, subjectivity, mind/body, cyborg, posthumanism

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant markers in the development of human civilisation comes in the forms of tools and devices. Humans form close "relationships" with these tools and devices to the point of being inseparable. Just as children play with toys that reflect real life technologies such as airplanes, trains, robots, guns, telephones and computer games, adults indulge in new software, appliances, super cars and accessories, telecommunication gadgets, sports equipment as well as medical procedures.

However, as we continue to live in a technologically-mediated world, we rarely stop to think critically about the tools and devices that surround us. As humans invent more technologies, we need to think whether we are in control or have we become totally dependent or even addicted to it (Nye, 2006). When we have implants put in or artificial limbs surgically attached to our bodies to replace the original, are we merely removing our biological impoverishments or actually changing ourselves to fulfil our desires? In subscribing to these advanced technologies, are we in fact thoughtlessly exposing humanity to dangers and consequently driving it to extinction as more and more of ourselves are attached to or even resemble and operate like the technologies that we create? How do we take a step back to see what humanity is becoming?

Science Fiction is a complex literary genre that is sometimes referred to as "speculative fiction" or literature of change, where the logic of contemporary society, politics, cultures and technologies are pushed to the limit (Roberts, 2000; Shahizah &Noritah, 2010). Some Science Fiction writers portray utopian futures while others project apocalyptic visions, but according

to Jenkins, none predict the future "in a literal sense". Instead the writers "used their imagined futures to question, challenge and comment on changes they observe or intuit in contemporary society" (Jenkins, 1997). This is precisely the reason why, in my opinion, Science Fiction is a fitting genre for examining the future of humanity.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyse Science Fiction's futurist portrayal of human subjectivity as it interfaces with technology and how the subjects operate within an intensely technological setting. By analysing character portrayals and the technological trappings of Science Fiction, the objective of the reading is firstly to analyse the mind/body aspect. Taking the mind and body as two entities, the analysis looks at how and why the mind/body, specified as the primary site for human subjectivity (Hall, 2004; Mansfield, 2000), is changed or altered. The effects of the alterations on subjectivity will then be analysed via the "interaction" between mind, body and society. By "interaction" I take it to mean the way the human mind and body communicate and interface in dealing with everyday experiences and realities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theories and concepts surrounding this research are Descartes'(1997) mind/body philosophy of human existence, Haraway's (1985) theory on cyborg subjectivity and Hayles' (1999) theory of posthumanism. All these theories position human subjectivity as one of their central concerns. Although these theorists' perspectives differ, the combination that forms the framework for this study on Science Fiction allows for a diverse and more critical look at subjectivity as briefly outline below.

The seventeenth century Cartesian theory on subjectivity is adopted here to examine the presence and treatment of natural or nature-given sense of subjectivity within the futurist context of the Science Fiction texts. It is also applied as a means to understand human subjectivity by unravelling the separateness/closeness of the mind/body dichotomy. This is because the Cartesian famous notion of "I think therefore I am", which shows the mind as the entity that makes humans unique, becomes paradoxical within the Science Fiction contexts, which usually stress on the importance of materiality (Roberts, 2000; Yaszek, 2002).

The technologically altered humans are then analysed within the framework of Haraway's cyborg imagery and Hayles' vision of posthumanism. This cyborg imagery suggests the end of the natural concepts of subjectivity such as in the Cartesian theorising and marks the beginning of posthumanism where subjectivity is influenced by technology thus materially imagined. Effectively, this research covers the modernist perspective and also the new cultural theory concerning evolving technologies and its impact on cultures and civilisations. The framework, thus, takes into consideration traditionally established debates as well as contemporary ones that surround subjectivity.

DEFINING HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

THE HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE: THE SUBJECT AND AUTONOMY

According to Hall, the term "humanist" has always been "subject to considerable dispute" (2004, p.17). However, philosophies surrounding humanism places utmost "cultural importance on the

individual" (Sim, 2005, p.287). This view can be observed in the Renaissance concerns with man and his accomplishments and in the secular and liberal Enlightenment interests in progress and rationality that eventually led the way to Modernism (Sim, 2005, p. 287). Similarly, Hall also states that the concept refers to the "interest in …self-directed agency and the underlying optimism about human possibilities and achievements" (2004, p. 17-18). A constant influence on Western thought, humanism can be found in many forms in contemporary society. One such form is the liberal humanist that assumes the subject is a stable, intelligible, self-sufficient and autonomous entity (Woods, 1999; Malpas, 2005). In addition, regardless of the wide-ranging philosophies surrounding humanism, Mansfield (2000) states:

> [t]o humanism, in almost all its versions, it was the human act that defined our collective ascendancy: our spirit, our talent, our creativity, our will. The human race could clarify itself in its own history, lifting its head, extending its horizons, purifying its soul. (170)

What emerges from the discussion above is that the humanist places a high emphasis on man and his achievements, his future, his history and ultimately his subjectivity. This view has a connection with what Kenan Malik states in his article "In Defence of Human Agency" that human subjectivity can be referred to and is reflected in a person's consciousness of the self, foresight, will, purpose and agency (2002).

Nevertheless and regardless of man's autonomy to define himself, the integrity of the modernist, humanist subject and his civilisation are highly politicised and underpinned by questionable binary oppositions such as master/slave, civilised/savage, man/woman and man/machine. A few examples of historical events that question the mutually exclusive categories of the binary oppositions include the French Revolution, Russian Revolution, colonisation and slavery as well as gender oppression as events and practices that further brought about man's consciousness of his sense of self (Hall, 2004). These events show that the humanist principle of binary opposites, which depends on fixed identity politics, is no longer plausible as identity is a more fluid concept than the humanist would like to believe. This is exemplified further in the next section on posthumanism, as the boundary between man and machine is also blurred by technology.

THE POSTHUMANIST PERSPECTIVE: THE SUBJECT AND TECHNOLOGY

As humankind continues to exist in a fast changing world, human subjectivity is also evolving. Suddenly marked by an era labelled "the posthuman", a subject, according to Hayles, has become "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction." (1999, p. 3). More clearly and importantly, she identifies that a common theme in various discourse on the posthuman is the union between human and intelligent machines. In addition, in hi-tech culture contexts, it is no longer clear "who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine" (Haraway, 1985, p. 97).

The term "posthumanism" was originally identified with and developed from the term "transhumanism" (Krueger, 2005). The term "transhumanism" is believed to be first used in 1927 by Julian Huxley, a well-known biologist and also the brother of Aldous Huxley[1], in an article in which he wrote:

> The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself – not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way – but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature (cited in Bostrom, 2005).

According to Krueger (2005), some scholars of transhumanism define posthuman as

> ...a human descendant who has been augmented to such a degree as to be no longer a human... As a posthuman, your mental and physical abilities would far surpass those of any unaugmented human. You would be smarter than any human genius and be able to remember things much more easily ... Posthumans could be completely synthetic (based on artificial intelligence) or they could be the result of making many partial augmentations of a biological human or a transhuman. Some posthumans may even find it advantageous to get rid of their bodies and live as information patterns on large super-fast computer networks.

Now, transhumanism is a movement that promotes "an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology" (Bostrom, 2005) and posthumanism is the condition that arises from transhumanist beliefs and values.

Following the thread of transhumanism above, posthumanism began with "cybernetic visions of the simulation of human beings" aiming for humans to have "immortal existence in virtuality" (Krueger, 2005). Hence, the idea of uploading human beings into complete virtual existence inside computers is one the main thrusts of posthumanist thinking. This development can be observed in N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* in which she presents the posthumanist wordview and this worldview is discussed below.

To understand the views and standpoint of the posthuman, Hayles (1999) suggests the following assumptions to be characteristic of the posthuman:

> First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and the most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human beings so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. (2-3)

All four assumptions posit significant effects on the scope of human subjectivity. The first assumption that sees embodiment as "an accident" indicates that the survival of humanity does not depend on the biological and physical existence of the body but on informational pattern. Human embodiment that marked distinctive subjectivity and survival is no longer necessary when patterns of information and data can be digitally compiled and uploaded to any intelligent machine. This phenomenon (long since available) was predicted by Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, in 1954 when he envisaged automated factories run by computers that can be programmed to make decisions (Hayles, 1999). This assumption is also observable in

the US National Library of Medicine's Visible Human Project or VHP. Universally available in cyberspace, the data from VHP have been recognised as "clinical benchmarks" of normal human anatomy (Bell, 2001). The discipline of medicine and biomedicine will no longer have to source from real life bodies that will eventually suffer from loss of quality.

The second posthuman assumption views human consciousness as "a minor sideshow". Nevertheless, Frazzetto (2005) in his journal article "Understanding Consciousness" states that human consciousness has been the subject of study for many disciplines – neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, cognitive science as well as social sciences and humanities. This indicates the significance of subjectivity in understanding human and civilisation. However, if all this is "a minor sideshow", the posthuman assumption on consciousness then raises a very pertinent question about human subjectivity – what constitutes the basis for the seat of human identity?

The third posthuman assumption brings us back to the human body, which is seen as something that is malleable and can be manipulated. Donna Haraway's brief discussion on prostheses in her seminal essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" supports this very posthuman standpoint on embodiment. Haraway states that "[f]or us in imagination and in practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves" (1985, p. 97). In fact, Haraway is not completely off course when she envisaged this possibility because as early as the 1950's the Americans and the Russians were already applying cybernetic technology to develop prosthetics such as automated limbs for amputees and visual and aural implants for the blind and deaf (Yaszek, 2002). These researches were developed "to restore individuals to 'normal' levels of human functioning" (Yaszek, 2002, p. 8) thus showing the potential and malleability of the human body.

However, regardless of the posthuman view on the human body and the origins of prostheses, many theorists of technology remain ambivalent because according to them, "the dimensions of human experience, and the identity of humanity in general, are always at stake in the consideration of technology" (Mansfield, 2000, p.149). Michael C. Milam, in his essay "Science Fiction and Human Nature", strongly cautions humanity against the naive belief that science and technology will bring salvation and end all human misery and suffering. He says:

> [t]he survival of humankind does not lie in science and technology; it is, in fact, obscured by the obsession with scientific progress. Instead, the future of humankind lies in the field of ethics, in which we tell ourselves what to do with our creations and in which we work out methods to treat our fellow human beings as individuals and not as things to be exploited for narrow and cynical profit. (Milam, 1995)

What Milam is saying is that for science and technology to be humanity's salvation, there must be a change in human nature because "history demonstrates that our problems are ultimately of a spiritual and ethical nature". Therefore, as long as humans continue to use science and technology as we do today, "many of the wonderful toys, tools, and weapons that we have designed and built [will not reduce] human misery and suffering in any fundamental sense" (Milam, 1995). Nevertheless, in general it can be seen that cultural products such as science fiction films remain hopeful and continue to depict extensive prosthetic application among humans thus suggesting an evolution where humans are becoming more machine-like.

The fourth and final posthuman assumption, in a significant way, summarises the earlier assumptions by conveying the overarching view that the configured human can have an intimate symbiotic existence with intelligent machines. Proponents of the posthuman such

as Haraway, have been putting forward, since the 1980's, the cyborg image with its biological and technological symbiosis as a progressive alternative to the humanist, masculine fantasy of "mastery and domination" (Bukatman, 1993,p. 323). It can be said that Haraway's attempts to clear the path for humans to exist in relation to, rather than in conflict with, a technologically-mediated utopia is in fact her way of removing traditional humanist notions of the subject as an organic agent distinct from machines, which in the humanist schema is to be created and dominated. Not denying that science and technology is a "matrix of complex dominations" (100), Haraway concludes that they can be a "means of great human satisfaction" if we can stop the ambivalent worshiping/demonising of technology and embrace the "task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all our part… It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories" (101).

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study is to consider *Altered Carbon* (author Richard Morgan, published 2002) as a work that interrogates subjectivity in relation to the interfacings between human and technology. Science Fiction authors have long utilised and theorised about the intricate relationship between humans and machines in their writings (Robert Adams, 2000). Furthermore, due to the experimental nature of Science Fiction and based on futuristic settings peculiar to this genre, these authors uncover an ideal space to explore and narrate the possible effects of advanced technologies on various current social, economic and technological trends. These technologies undoubtedly will influence and change the construction of human subjectivity as will be shown in my reading of *Altered Carbon*.

Forming the first level of my analysis of subjectivity is the mind/body dimension. Focusing on the altering capabilities of the technologies, I analyse the portrayal of the human mind/body, a site regarded as the basis for the construction of subjectivity. At this first level of analysis on the mind/body dimension, the theories and concepts that are used include the basics of Cartesian dualism and Haraway's cyborg or man/machine amalgamation. Cartesian dualism is vital to this research as the basic premise is that the mind is the seat of human subjectivity and that separation of mind from body will not influence a man's sense of self. Haraway's cyborg imagery is used as a framework for the technologically altered humans heading towards or already situated within posthumanism.

The second level of analysis involves situating the manifesting subjectivities within Hayles' posthuman vision. The crux of her vision privileges embodiment as equally important in our sense of being. Even in a posthuman context, she envisions posthumans that celebrate the possibilities provided by technology whilst simultaneously realising that the finite nature of our selfhood is part of the human condition. It is within this framework that I will further discuss human subjectivity as portrayed in the selected Science Fiction texts.

ANALYSIS

Altered Carbon is characterised as a cyberpunk SF novel. Set approximately five hundred years into the future, it has all the characteristics of a cyberpunk fiction – a fast-paced, dark,

urban detective fiction combined with advanced technologies presented through distinctive SF imageries and tropes such as inter-planetary travels, virtual realities as well as digitalised, artificially intelligent environment. In the world of *Altered Carbon*, mankind has spread across the universe in colonies, occupying different planets, all under the protectorate of the United Nations (UN). Earth is known as the most ancient of civilized world – home of the human race. Order in all the colonies is kept by what is known as the UN Envoy Corps, an elite, commando-like diplomatic force. Much of human life has been digitalised and uploading of human minds via a cortical stack placed at the base of the skull at birth, which records the person's consciousness, is a common practice. If one were to die, his stack could be uploaded into another body (or "sleeve") and he could then resume his life in the new body making death a temporary state. Real death can only happen if the cortical stack is damaged. Ironically, in this novel, organic bodies are preferred over synthetic ones, and the supply of the organic bodies comes from those who cannot afford to be re-sleeved. In fact, those who are really rich can have themselves cloned so that they can be re-sleeved in their own bodies. Also due to the advanced digital technology, travel between colonies is done through inter-space data-casting (or needlecasting), aside from the usual space ship voyages. Through the data-casting, human consciousness is digitally shipped and downloaded into other sleeves. In addition, the penal system no longer keeps live criminals; only their bodiless minds in the form of the cortical stacks are placed in storage through the duration of their sentence, their mindless bodies made available on the market for sale or rent.

Takeshi Kovacs, *Altered Carbon's* protagonist, is a former envoy, turned hired assassin. Trained to adapt quickly to new environments and having gotten himself killed many times, being re-sleeved, is nothing new to him. After getting himself shot and killed on Harlan's World during one of his freelancing "terrorist" missions, he finds himself re-sleeved on Earth in a body that used to belong to Elias Ryker, a former police detective; and being offered a lot of money and official pardon from his previous crimes to investigate the death of Laurens Bancroft, a billionaire, who since then has also been re-sleeved. Convinced that the suicide claim made by the police is false, Bancroft summons Kovacs's services. Under the watchful eye of Kristin Ortega, the police lieutenant from the Organic Damage Division who handled Bancroft's "open and shut" case, Kovacs sets out to investigate the conspiracies of the underworld, which led to the alleged suicide. Unbeknownst to him, Ortega's distrustful attitude is due to the fact that Ryker was her lover before he was shelved for corruption. Harassed, threatened and harmed by various quarters, from the police to the underworld mafias, as well as finding himself falling for Ortega, Kovacs encounters a society more cynical and wary than he is.

Altered Carbon portrays the principle that bodies and minds are distinct and separable. This notion is applied and problematised in the context of a technologically–mediated environment by the author. In this cyberpunk and rather dystopian novel, much of human life has been digitalised and uploading of human minds via a cortical stack placed at the base of the skull at birth, which records the person's consciousness, has become a common practice. If death occurs, the stack can be uploaded (or "re-sleeved") into a variety of options based on its re-sleeving policies. If one cannot afford to be re-sleeved, the cortical stack will remain in storage. Real death can only happen if the stack - where every thought, emotion and memory is stored - is damaged.

The most favoured but extremely expensive option, available only to the rich and powerful, is to be re-sleeved in a clone replacement. The cheapest way is to upload the stack into a virtual reality setting where you "live" in a setting of your choice – disembodied and

disconnected from reality. The most common but not the cheapest option is to be re-sleeved in another organic body that is bought or rented of "the shelf" at "Download Central". The cheaper but less favoured option compared to the organic body is to be re-sleeved in a synthetic one but as Takeshi Kovacs, the protagonist, remarks:

> …you line up over at Syntheta's or Fabrikon. I've worn my fair share of synthetic sleeves; they use them for parole hearing quite often. Cheap, but it's too much like living alone in a draughty house they never seem to get the flavor circuits right. Everything you eat ends up tasting like curried sawdust. (Richard Morgan, 2002: 13)

Re-sleeving in a non-organic body fails to capture the finer details of an organic body. It is evident that the protagonist now feels less human.

The technology portrayed in *Altered Carbon*, which provides identity data-storage and transfer, also exemplifies the primacy of the mind over the body in maintaining survival. However, Allison Muri in her article "Of Shit and the Soul: Tropes of Cybernetic Disembodiment in Contemporary Culture", states that "one of the most pervasive themes in the fiction and theory of cyberculture of the past few decades has been that the human body is vanishing, irrelevant or, interfaced with the machine, an empty shell robbed of what is variously called spirit, consciousness or identity" (2003,p. 72). What Muri argues may be true of bodies without minds or soul but the question to ask is what of minds (or spirits as Muri calls it) without bodies?

In *Altered Carbon* the author's dark and dystopian portrayal of the human spirit in an equally dystopian surrounding suggests a degree of pessimism declaring that the human spirit is at the verge of destruction. Taking "spirit" to mean "soul" thus fitting in with Descartes' principle that the soul and the mind are two of the same, there is cause for worry because in Muri's point of view, it is not just the body that is diminishing; the human mind is also heading towards extinction. Nevertheless, the portrayal and handling of the matter through the struggle of the characters in the novel offers ways of acknowledging and negotiating the connection between technology, mind, body and identity in a posthuman environment.

Kovacs, as he is referred to in the novel, has been re-sleeved numerous times. His high-risk job as an envoy and later as an assassin for hire, almost always results in his body being organically damaged and basically not suitable for re-use. So every time he "dies" he is re-sleeved in a different body. For Kovacs, being re-sleeved is mundane and routine yet with each re-sleeving comes a silent struggle:

> Nearly two decades I've been doing this, and it still jars me to look into the glass and see a total stranger staring back... For the first couple of moments all you can see is someone else looking at you through a window frame. (Morgan, 2002:14)

However, his Envoy Corps training that focuses on strength of the mind helps him adapt quickly each time.

> Then, like a shift in focus, you feel yourself float rapidly behind the mask and adhere to its inside with a shock that's almost tactile. It's as if someone's cut an umbilical cord, only instead of separating the two of you, it's the otherness that has been severed and now you're just looking at your reflection in a mirror. (14)

As the mind is more important in ensuring the success of any "peace-keeping" mission involving data-casting and downloading into strange sleeves on other planets, limitations of the body would be assisted by "neurochem conditioning" or "cyborg interfaces" (38). As Kovacs recalls "it is the pure mind that gets freighted" (38) and it is this pure mind that is highly trained to quickly overcome disorientation in new bodies.

As a result of re-sleeving, the human form or physique is no longer unique, one-off and associated with a particular person. In as many ways the body has become a commodity it has also lost its significance in terms of identity ownership. In addition, for envoys like Kovacs and for most of the citizens of Harlan's World, Earth or any other planet in this 25th century setting, the decision to be re-sleeved or ortherwise depends on your benefactor or your status in society. Therefore, after death or any event that resulted in the stacks being shelved, some will remain disembodied and in "exile"; while others get to come back but the situation will be that their families:

> ...won't recognise their loved ones in their new sleeves; recognition would be left to the homecomers, and for those who awaited them the anticipation of reunion would be tempered with a cool dread at what face and body they might have to learn to love. (18)

For the ordinary "homecomers", coming back to life is not so easy either. This is poignantly portrayed through Irene Elliot's character where a deep sense of loss after being re-sleeved is projected. Irene is a data linkage expert whose business was not doing well. So for money, she used her skills to dip into an influential man's mind who was "between bodies". As "dipping" is illegal she was sentenced to thirty years in storage. However, she is brought back to assist in the "murder" case of millionaires. As Irene wakes up in a different body, she finds out her daughter has been murdered while prostituting to earn money to buy back her mother's sleeve.

> The shock of waking up inside someone else's body for the first time is nothing compared to the sense of rage and betrayal you feel knowing that someone, somewhere, is walking inside you. It's like the discovery of infidelity, but at the intimacy range of rape. And like both those violations, there's nothing you can do about it. (388-389)

Unlike the envoys, ordinary citizens like Irene are not trained to be detached, hence they long for semblance of past realities and relationships:

> I saw her look down at the body she was wearing, as if she'd spilled something down herself. 'Do you know how I feel?' she asked.
> 'No.'
> 'I slept with my husband, and I feel like he's being unfaithful to me...when they put me away I left a body and a family behind. Now I don't have either.' (388-398)

Kovacs with his envoy background and conditioning understands Irene's struggle but finds it difficult to rationalise as it involves human emotions of hurt and pain that cannot be unravelled or explained by technology, not even by one as advanced as re-sleeving that has allowed humankind to defeat death:

> There was a lot I could have said. A lot that has been written, researched and disputed...
> How to make your partner love you again, in any body... Some observations of

> secondary trauma in civil re-sleeving... even the sanctified manuals of the fucking Envoy Corps itself had something trite to say on the matter. Quotes, informed opinion, the ravings of the religious and the lunatic fringe. I could have thrown it all at her... I could have told her it would pass with time... That millions of other people survived it... I could have lied, I could have reasoned. It all would have meant about the same, because the reality was pain, and right now there was nothing anyone could do to take it away.
> I said nothing. (398-399)

Contrary to Irene's struggles, Kovacs can be regarded as the epitome of Haraway's cyborg subjectivity. He acknowledges that to ensure continuity his identity must be fluid, linked to and influenced by (narratives of) technologies.

> As a child I'd believed there was an essential person, a sort of core personality around which the surface factors could evolve and change without damaging the integrity of who you were. Later, I started to see that this was an error of perception caused by the metaphors we were used to framing ourselves in. What we thought of as personality was no more than the passing shape of one of the waves in front of me. Or, slowing it down to more human speed, the shape of a sand dune. Form in response to stimulus. Wind, gravity, upbringing. Gene blueprinting. All subject to erosion and change. The only way to beat that was to go on stack forever. (363)

Perhaps in this context, accepting a cyborg identity is the way to survive in a posthuman environment. Embracing partiality and contradictory standpoints on embodiment ensures Kovacs' peace of mind and reminds us of further impending changes and the increasing proximity between technology and our subjectivity. As Virginia Vidaura, who is Kovacs' trainer, tells her class of envoy trainees on the importance of accepting change:

> For all that we have done, as a civilization, as individuals, the universe is not stable, nor is any single thing within it. Stars consume themselves, the universe itself rushes apart, and we ourselves are composed of matter in constant flux. Colonies of cells in temporary alliance, replicating, and decaying, and housed within, an incandescent cloud of electrical impulse and precariously stacked carbon code memory. This is reality, this is self-knowledge... All and anything you achieve as Envoys must be based on the understanding that there is nothing but flux. Anything you wish to even perceive as an Envoy, let alone create or achieve, must be carved out of that flux." (362-363)

Therefore in the context of the technologies inherent in *Altered Carbon*, to conceptualise human identity in terms of flux is not to put at risk its survival. In fact, it is Kovacs' understanding of the flexible and changing structures of the environment that enables him to adapt and survive and for his subjectivity to remain intact.

At the end of the novel as he prepares to leave Earth and Ortega behind to be casted back to Harlan's World, he admits to himself, "For a moment something ached in me, something so deep-rooted that I knew to tear it out would be to undo the essence of what held me together… Then I had it locked down…found a chuckle somewhere in my chest and coughed it out…Still trying to laugh, I went through" (pp.533-534). The ache that Kovacs feels can be linked to the fact that he had let his guards down and allowed himself to have feelings for Ortega. Although Kovacs can be deemed a progressive cyborg, in order to remain intact he has to suppress the natural human desire to forge relationships which is contrary to the general posthuman perception that to be posthuman means to be released from death and unfulfilled desires.

CONCLUSION

Essentially, this paper explored the essence of subjectivity, within the framework of the human mind and body, as it intersects with technology. Within the posthuman worldview, the Cartesian mind/body dualism can be conceived as having an ambiguous position. On one hand, the belief is that the mind and body are two different entities, hence separable. This makes the posthuman assumption that human beings can have a seamless existence with machines via the human mind a possibility. On the other hand, the analysis of *Altered Carbon* shows that although the mind and body are separable by technology, the characters struggle to come to terms with their half machine and half human cyborg subjectivities.

However, the selected text and its imagined technologies provide an avenue for the human mind/body dimension to be debated within the posthuman worldview, especially within the cyborg subjectivity. This is because the technologies envisaged by the author provides an avenue to problematise Cartesian dualism in relation to human subjectivity within a futuristic Science Fiction context bearing in mind that the technologies are based on existing philosophies and technologies. In addition, my analysis shows that the novel brings to task human subjectivity further by experimenting within the context of the posthuman worldview which treats human consciousness as blocks of data that are copiable, transferable, or programmable; and human bodies as durable, limiting and an aspect of humanity that should be improved or discarded. Despite the impending posthuman cyborg subjectivity, these experiments reveal that human subjectivity is primarily based on the mind and body interacting and acting together to produce consciousness that is not fractured. To be a cyborg, that is an amalgamation of human and machine, it is vital to remember that subjectivity consists of a combination of a thinking mind and a body that should react accordingly to the thoughts. However, what the technology in *Altered Carbon* also reveals is that human subjectivity is more dependent on embodiment as reflected in the characters' connection to their bodies. This attachment, to a certain extent, negates the Cartesian view that the mind has primacy over the body in the context of human subjectivity.

ENDNOTE

1   Author of Brave New World.

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