Crip Embodiment and Posthuman Interactivity in Literary Protopias

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

JAYA SARKAR
ID No. 2018PHXF0439H

Under the Supervision of
Dr. Anhiti Patnaik
&
Under the Co-supervision of
Prof. Shilpaa Anand

BITS Pilani
Pilani | Dubai | Goa | Hyderabad

BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, PILANI

2024

BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, PILANI

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **Crip Embodiment and Posthuman Interactivity in Literary Protopias** submitted by **Jaya Sarkar** ID No **2018PHXF0439H** for award of Ph.D. of the Institute embodies original work done by him/her under my supervision.

Signature of the Supervisor:

Name in capital letters: ANHITI PATNAIK

Designation: Assistant Professor

Date: 30th March, 2024

Signature of the Co-supervisor:

Name in capital letters: SHILPAA ANAND

Designation: Associate Professor

Date: 30th March, 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this investigation, I argue in favour of the importance of an entangled community in which we are all firmly embedded. The writing of this dissertation is a particularly strong testament to that attitude. This thesis or any of the things I have written these past four years wouldn't have been possible without my supervisor, Dr. Anhiti Patnaik. Thank you for all the energy and love you have put into this work, your insightful guidance, your constant encouragement that made it possible for me to read and write during the pandemic, and your confidence in my growth. I am forever indebted to my co-supervisor, Prof. Shilpaa Anand, who is also the Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at BITS-Hyderabad. Her honest and constructive remarks, her help in navigating the PhD process, and her humility and kindness made the writing process so much easier.

I am grateful to my Doctoral Advisory Committee members–Dr. Spandan Bhattacharya and Dr. A. K. Jayesh, for their guidance and valuable comments, which have greatly improved this thesis. I am thankful to the DRC Convener, Dr. Lavanya Suresh, for her constant encouragement and insightful remarks throughout these past years. I extend my thanks to the other faculty members of the department—Dr. Santosh Mahapatra, Dr. Pranesh Bhargava, Prof. M.G. Prasuna, and Dr. Maya Vinai—who have enabled me to do better and pushed me to continue evolving.

I wish to celebrate this work with my fellow PhD colleagues at BITS-Hyderabad. First and foremost—Saritha Sasidharan—I am glad that we could journey together during various happy and sad moments of this expedition. Heartfelt gratitude to Ahmed Shabin, Revathy Hemachandran, Anwesha Mohanty, and Vinay Sankar for their endless support and for helping me navigate my

path through thick and thin. You people made this journey enriching and memorable. A big shoutout to my cousin, Riya, and friends at home in Kolkata—Souradipta, Sunetra, and Sattwik—thank you for the constant love, patience, and friendship you have given me for more than a decade.

I am indebted to my parents for their great deal of love, support and encouragement, without which the thesis would not have been written. They constantly reminded me of the worth of what I was doing and stressed the fact that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Finally, I thank my partner Supratik for his patient understanding, his interest in my work, his presence in all the virtual conferences where I presented my papers, and his efforts to preserve my mental peace during the highs and lows of the PhD process.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the evolution of the cyborg following the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* which paved the way for similar representations in literature and visual culture. This study traces the evolution of the cyborg from a weapon used in the Second World War to Donna Haraway's concept of a cyborg that exists in a post-gender world. From its origin, the cyborg has been seen as the Other, which leads the dissertation to focus on Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl,* where the cyborg initiates a protopian posthumanist vision of community practice and radical inclusivity. Organised in thematic sections, the opening chapters use the posthumanist theories of Rosi Braidotti and Katherine Hayles to examine how the female cyborg in Jackson's hypertext forges new relationships with humans and non-humans and how those relationships result in major rearticulations of affect, emotions and feelings. The cyborg is also studied under the lens of differential ontology, originating particularly from the works and ideas of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Expanding on Francesca Ferrando's philosophical posthumanism, this dissertation argues that the cyborg deconstructs any sense of centre, species supremacy and dualisms while resourcing the present with a pluralistic and collaborative perspective.

After examining the evolution of the cyborg figure, the next chapters develop and substantiate the presence of the cyborg in posthumanist literature. Posthumanist literature present stories in a certain way that humanist traditions cannot and enables people to confront the rupturing of anthropocentrism through it. Hypertext and hypermedia demand new kinds of users/interactors who are required to perform various roles simultaneously, such as–viewing, reading, structuring, interpreting, and deriving aesthetic pleasure. This dissertation refers to those who engage with hypertexts as *cyborg-readers* and those who engage with hypermedia as *cyborg-interactors*.

Posthumanist literature expands Roland Barthes's argument on the removal of the author figure, making way for the readers/users/interactors to interpret the text using their own experiences, thoughts and connections to the world. This thesis demonstrates how, similar to a cyborg, which rejects any centre and order, the hyper-narrative interactive film *Bandersnatch* and interactive story applications have no point of origin, and they reject concepts like linearity and sequentiality. It also engages with the theories of Monroe Beardsley and Immanuel Kant to argue that the cognitive activities of the interactors produce pleasure during the aesthetic experience of navigating through hypertext or hypermedia. This experience of the beautiful is an example of the manifestation of the capacity of the sensible. By using Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," this study further analyses how the process of spectating posthumanist literature is closely associated with investing money.

A further investigation is carried out to examine how crip aesthetics contribute to the constitution of a posthuman fictive world. Although Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* is an illustrated novel in print, it shares the nuances of other posthumanist forms of literature. By reading the novel as a Crip Lit, the dissertation demonstrates how crip constitutes posthuman aesthetics. Building on theories propounded by Robert McRuer, Carrie Sandahl and Victoria Ann Lewis, crip theory is used to analyse Lamb's novel because it brings to light the novel's rejection of normativity and its fascination with mental and bodily imperfections. Further, this thesis engages with Ato Quayson and Michael Davidson's theories to explore how Lamb's novel uses different narrative techniques to avoid making the disabilities of the characters the focal points of the novel. A protopic community is also found to exist within the novel, and this research examines how this community enables the protagonist and the other characters to overcome the coercive materiality of gender binaries and operate in networks of affinity that are more nurturing and flexible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"But how to establish the exact moment in which a story begins? Everything has already begun before; the first line of the first page of every novel refers to something that has already happened outside the book. Or else the real story is the one that begins ten or a hundred pages further on, and everything that precedes it is only a prologue."

(Calvino 128)

On February 14, 2022, when Marissa Meyer announced on her Instagram page that "In celebration of the 10th anniversary of *The Lunar Chronicles*, I'm releasing a new Cinder ebook… but with a twist! Cinder is getting married! She and Emperor Kai have made it to their big day—now all Cinder has to do is show up and say, "I do." But it's not so easy when YOU, the reader, are in control of her fate!" I felt that my research had come full circle. In one of my Feminist Studies classes during my Master's, I came across the name Donna Haraway. The brief introduction about her made me curious about her works. So, I picked up "A Cyborg Manifesto" a little later and familiarised myself with the term 'cyborg.' I started exploring this further and tried to understand how the concept has evolved over the years, and that's how I arrived at Posthumanist Studies. Moreover, I came across the Liz Glynn 2018 art exhibition entitled *Archaeology of Another Possible Future* at the Massachusetts Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. The exhibition included large-scale installations featuring objects such as wood pallet pyramids, hospital stretchers with vein-systems and other items with the message "Everything feels like the future except us." That sparked my interest further in this area, and I started looking for the presence of the posthuman figure in the domain of literary texts. This dissertation is born out of a proposal

comprising a few primary texts, including Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*. Published between 2012 and 2015, the series contains four novels belonging to the genre of Young Adult science fiction fantasy, centred around the protagonist, Cinder, who is a cyborg. A few months into my research, I realised that *The Lunar Chronicles* could be termed as a young adult science fiction to most, but not a posthumanist literature. I naturally kept it aside and began the research with the other texts. Although *The Lunar Chronicles* cannot be called posthumanist literature because of its inability to challenge traditional readership and spectatorship and an absence of posthumanist aesthetics that are imbued with technology, it still remains a popular Young Adult fiction. With Marissa Meyer deciding *The Lunar Chronicles* to be an interactive fiction on its tenth anniversary, I feel that traditional readership is not enough anymore. The fact that she had to choose interactive fiction to take forward Cinder's story speaks volumes. It points to the fact that the author herself realised that if she had to continue Cinder's story and also at the same time ensure that people were interested in it, she had to choose another method from traditional writing in print. The way the four novels within *The Lunar Chronicles* series have been written is neither new nor are they challenging the writing practice in any way. The novels do not re-evaluate the role of the reader and necessitate posthuman interactivity. But, with the introduction of the genre of interactive fiction, the reading practice will undergo a transformation, and the engagement level of the readers with the narrative will be increased. Even people who haven't read any of the four novels in *The Lunar Chronicles* series will be interested in engaging with interactive fiction because of its visual qualities, interactivity, and pictorial representations. The existing readers will also be interested in this so that they can actually see what Cinder and the other characters look like after years of visualising them.

1.1 Posthumanism as a Praxis

Posthumanism paves the way for an integral redefinition of the 'human' to understand it in pluralistic terms rather than in generalised terms. Posthumanism undermines rigid dualisms, which results in hierarchical conceptions. Before delving into the posthumanism that this dissertation is based on, it is necessary to distinguish the concept of protopian posthumanism from a range of related concepts of posthumanism. Critical posthumanism engages with the theoretical approach of deconstructing humanism with an awareness that humanism can never be overcome in any straightforward dialectical fashion. Critical posthumanist theorists such as Stefan Herbrechter and Cary Wolfe undertake a reflective approach to anticipate the transcendence of the human condition at a time when climate and social changes call for urgent humanitarian action. Critical posthumanism considers human subjects as an assemblage, intertwined with environment and technology and co-involving with machines and animals. A critical posthumanist approach focuses on the social, economic, and cultural-political implications of contemporary literature, leaving behind aesthetics and textuality.

Cultural posthumanism aims to integrate cultural studies discourses with a posthumanist approach. It aims at an interplay between scientific and technological theories and that of the cultural imagination, including science fiction and popular culture. Celebrated cultural posthumanists like Neil Badmington and Katherine Hayles derive from Donna Haraway's work on biopolitics and from transhumanist thinkers to argue for a posthuman body that is not restricted by any boundaries. They emphasise the disintegration of the liberal human subject in order to transform the body into a non-matter. Drawing from both of these theories, Francesca Ferrando's philosophical posthumanism focuses on the development of a posthuman turn that embraces an ecological, post-humanist sensitivity towards all humans/non-humans/more than humans.

Philosophical posthumanism aims at the re-elaboration of the non-human realm, paving the way to a future which is pluralistic and multi-layered. It considers posthumanism not as a singular discourse but as a radical, multi-layered one. Philosophical posthumanism favours technogenesis—the co-evolution of humans and technology. It does not consider technology as the enemy of humanism but accepts it as a part of the future where it would be responsible for the betterment of the present human condition.

Informed by all these forms of posthumanism, this thesis focuses on protopian posthumanism, which is a post-anthropocentrism, post-dualism existence, where different crises of humanity, including the COVID-19 pandemic, call for a re-evaluation of ourselves. Protopia is anchored in the celebration of what has been achieved thus far. It deals with how regenerative action and inclusive ethics of care may be engendered in the immediate future. A protopic posthumanist theory destabilises dualistic understandings of nature/nurture, equality/equity, and enmeshment/emancipation. This concept of posthumanism aims at a collaborative future that is radically inclusive and possesses multiple possibilities for all kinds of humans, non-humans, robots, cyborgs, and even aliens. Considering these multiple possibilities, it is interesting to explore how the posthuman subject has evolved across literature and visual culture. Starting from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* which represented the idea of experimental attempts to create artificial creatures, to the posthuman subjects of the third volume of Netflix's *Love, Death and Robots*, the posthuman figure constantly frees itself from the fantasised body images and embodies a subjectivity produced by new reproductive technologies. By disrupting the technological/organic binary of the corporeality of the body, the posthuman figure emerges as a boundary creature who "transgresses boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, *Manifesto* 14). It belongs to a "postgender world" and rejects all kinds of representations since it considers all beings

to be constantly in flux. Another characteristic of the posthuman subject that my dissertation is interested in is the initiation of a "joint kinship." The presence of posthuman aesthetics in literature, hypertext, hypermedia, and interactive fiction could be read in relation to Haraway's representation of the cyborg. The digital and biotechnological reproducibility contributes to the posthuman aspect of these forms of literature. Not only digital literature but also literature in print, specifically Crip Lit, can be regarded as posthumanist. The way such texts crip common understanding of literature, narrativity, spatiality, and temporality represents how the crip constitutes the posthuman.

Representations of the posthuman in literature and visual culture are of great cultural significance because of their capacity to actively transgress from human exceptionalism and ideas of the anthropocentric future, organised around the normative human subject. Through analysing the representation of the posthuman subject in a selection of contemporary literary texts, hypertexts, and hypermedia, this thesis provides a clearer and more critical understanding of the posthuman in and as literature and considers the role of posthumanist literature in both perpetuating and resisting dominant ideas of human exceptionalism. With the use of primary sources, the thesis unites storytelling and posthumanist and crip theories to rethink the human and provide a richer posthumanist understanding of literature. The creative expressions that are examined in this thesis tell stories of radically decentered human identity and narrative hierarchies and, in doing so, point to a collaborative culture. The primary concern of this thesis is the representation of the literature and visual media that are read as posthumanist because of their form, techniques and their reliance on technogenesis. It also seeks to deepen understanding of the reception of posthumanist literature through detailed explication of the transformative readers and audience. Broadly conceived, the posthuman is a cultural trope that imaginatively reworks ideas

of the traditional human subject. This thesis explores posthumanist theories to navigate a way that enables speculative engagement with the posthumanist form of literature and, in the process, rejects any hierarchical marginalisation of the non-normative.

1.2 Foregrounding Posthumanist Literature

Posthumanist literature imagines stories that humanist traditions cannot or refuse to confront. It consolidates ideas of anthropocentrism's rupturing and imaginatively narrates the cultural and political upheavals of the nonhuman turn. Posthumanist literature tells stories of radical human difference, contributing to and dramatically expanding literature's depiction of the possibilities of human life in literature. In its novelty, posthumanist literature's production of knowledge about humans and posthumans constitutes an often-overlooked archive of posthumanist thought. In a dialogue with Claire Colebrook about the problems thrown up by the anthropocene about the human, Cary Wolfe draws attention to "different forms of human knowledge-making practice." Literature and art produce different kinds of knowledge to theory. Wolfe suggests that scholarly inquiry needs to pay more attention to literature and art's knowledge-making and look at the ways art "assaults us" with human questions in ways beyond the scope of conventional scholarship, theory, and philosophy. Posthumanist literature invites us to rethink the cultural and political construction of human subjectivity. The primary sources examined by this thesis reveal the posthuman's often antagonistic relation to the humanistic form of the novel and its ingrained tendencies. These creative literary expressions imaginatively resist, destabilise, and interrogate. Both popular and literary modes of fiction have much to say about humans. This thesis focuses on texts that represent the literary uptake of posthuman questions. Each of the chapters examines a particular literary or visual text and its representation of the posthuman in relation to posthumanist

theory. I argue that my thesis makes an intervention in posthumanist thought only to assert a revitalised human subject and neo-humanist politics legitimated by textuality and reading practices. Posthumanist literature expands postmodern literature by mixing the 'high' and 'low' cultures and incorporating media into literature. With its insistence on the fragmentation of identities, narrative continuity, and teleology, posthumanist literature shares some of the traits of postmodern literature. Electronic literature with the figure of the posthuman becomes the natural step for posthumanist fiction. In his article "Literature and Posthumanism," Jeff Wallace traces the encounter between posthumanism and literature through the works of Katherine Hayles. He argues that with the increasing enmeshment of cybernetics and fiction, there has to be an emergence of a new technological form of imaginative textuality (Wallace 695). He posits that posthumanist literature is supposed to challenge linear and teleological narratives. While posthumanism reevaluates social and cultural practices, posthumanist literature aims to embrace alternative conceptualisations of the discourse and the institution of literature. It establishes literary practices that include new media and virtual reality technology.

1.3 Approaching Posthumanist Aesthetics

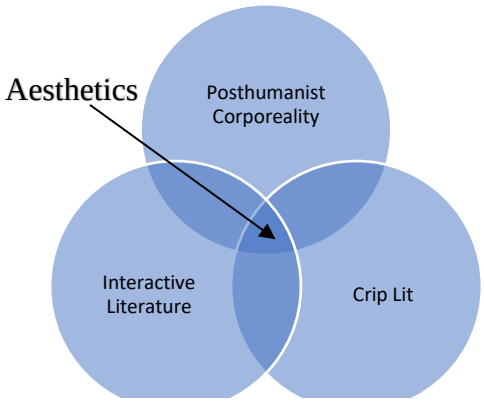

Figure 1. Chart showing how aesthetics is situated in this study

The three sections of the thesis: posthumanist corporeality, interactive literature and Crip Lit, are connected by the thread of aesthetics. To reflect on the etymology of the word *aesthetic*, it is derived from the Greek word *aisthetikos*, which means "aesthetic, sensitive, sentient, pertaining to sense perception." This was, in turn, derived from *aisthanomal*, meaning

"I perceive, feel, sense." This dissertation explores the aesthetics of posthuman embodiment in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and examines how the female cyborg in Jackson's hypertext embodies posthumanist aesthetics. In "Posthumanist Literature," Stefan Herbrechter opines:

> A posthumanist aesthetics would, in fact, be more challenging and more radical in a sense because it would involve the undoing of humanism as such, so much so that it would ask whether an aesthetic without the human is actually thinkable. (4)

The research then moves to the form and structure of *Patchwork Girl* and explores how hypertext constitutes posthumanist aesthetics in terms of its form, content, and structural complexities. Similarly, the posthumanist aesthetics of hyper-narrative interactive cinema and storytelling applications are examined. The third section of this work reads Sybil Lamb's illustrated novel *I've Got a Time Bomb* to examine how the eponymous character Sybil can be seen as a cyborg figure because of her multi-layered nomadic being and her hybridised identity, which highlights her multiplicity. Sybil shares characteristics similar to Haraway's notion of the cyborg and Jackson's female cyborg. By considering this text as part of Crip Lit, this chapter aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that explores crip theory in the ambit of posthumanist literature. The way the crip constitutes the posthuman forms an integral part of the research, and using that, I expand existing discourses of disability aesthetics by arguing for crip aesthetics. In tandem with the posthumanist aesthetics of hypertexts and hypermedia, this dissertation explores how the crip aesthetics of the novel contribute to the constitution of a posthuman fictive world in terms of narrative, characterisation and the breaking down of binaries. This dissertation employs posthumanist aesthetics in a way that hails new ways of thinking, reading and spectating that are challenging and radical.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This dissertation aims to trace the evolution of the posthuman figure in literature and visual culture, starting from the origin of the cyborg as a self-correcting weapon to Donna Haraway's cyborg myth as a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and control. This is achieved by uncovering the genealogy of the posthuman subject and identifying its trajectory through postmodernism with the important additional influence of studies of difference, such as feminist and queer theories. By demonstrating how the figure of the cyborg has been associated with the genealogy of the Other, this dissertation focuses on the contemporary moment where the cyborg paves the way for a posthumanist vision of regeneration and radical inclusivity. It deconstructs the 'centre' of the Western discourse as a singular form and acknowledges alterity with a pluralistic and comprehensible perspective. This vision of regeneration and inclusivity is demonstrated by the examination of the concept of protopia and how its objectives could be situated within the framework of a posthumanist future of resourcing the present and moving towards collaborative visions of liberation from existing binaries.

The second part of the dissertation aims to consider hypertexts and hypermedia in relation to the cyborg, where these two forms of literature parody the roles assigned traditionally to the author and the reader and subvert domination within the culture by complicating the hierarchical relationships within technology. While reading these forms of literature as cyborgs, the research also indicates how the *cyborg-reader* and the *cyborg-interactor* share a posthuman connection with interactive narrative through active gestures and a gaze that is modular and fragmentary. In the context of hypermedia, the study probes into the concept of "liquid modernity" through the relation of money with spectating, driven by the willingness of the spectators to derive aesthetic pleasure from interactive media. Additionally, this research aims to understand how crip theory

brings to light the rejection of normativity through its fascination with mental and bodily imperfections. It reflects on how crip constitutes posthuman aesthetics and contributes to the constitution of a posthuman fictive world that radically interprets community practices.

Crip emerges to be a coalition of the 'left-behinds' who critique stereotyped portrayals of disability at both individual and collective levels. Crip theory has gained popularity within literary studies in order to understand how literature conceives of and contributes to the understanding and representation of crip. Crip theory is a departure from disability theory because it is interested in rejecting the boundaries between disability and able-bodiedness. In the contemporary moment, Crip Lit is an emerging genre of literature, and this thesis aims to explore how crip constitutes posthumanist aesthetics. Crip Lit differs from the conventional forms of disability literature, specifically in the manner it uses literary techniques to cause discomfort in the readers. This is a very under-researched area both in cases of posthumanist studies and disability studies. Although Tobin Siebers's work initiated a discussion on the aesthetics of the non-normative body, to which Rosemarie Garland-Thomson puts insightful addition, Robert McRuer's crip theory demonstrates how normative expectations are often reinforced through disabled figures to dictate how a body should appear and function, and my work extends the research on disability aesthetics. Moreover, the concept of protopia has not been covered in any of the critical studies or any PhD thesis on posthumanism. There are no prominent works either which connect crip theory to posthumanist literature and aesthetics. This research focuses on achieving a synthesis of these theories so as to explore how posthumanist literature affects us.

While a major purpose of posthumanist research is to answer the question of what it entails to be human under the conditions of globalisation, technoscience, late capitalism and climate change, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it has been criticised for being complicated and non-

dialectical. The post-human, post-anthropocene complexities have given rise to several critiques around posthumanist studies. Avoiding any such complications and the urge to find a definite solution to these problems, the thesis rather manifests the aesthetics in posthumanist interactivity. There is a dearth of exploration of posthumanism in narratology, both in literature and visual media. This research deals with the posthumanist narrative and how the method of storytelling is undergoing a serious change, with the author and the reader becoming one and the same. With the advent of interactive storytelling, a lot has been written about the technology behind them. But my thesis addresses what's missing in there: primarily, the posthumanist aspect of such interactive narrative and the aesthetics of such an interaction. In addition to this, the thesis establishes how the interactive narrative behaves like a cyborg, and the reader/interactor becomes a cyborg subjectivity.

The primary concern behind choosing my primary sources was to explore posthumanist aesthetics, that is, the way of creating an art work that resists representation and any form of strict traditional practice. This thesis focuses on six primary literary and visual expressions of posthumanist literature. Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl; or, a Modern Monster,* is the first text in focus. It is a hypertext which takes forward the story of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The aborted second creation, the female monster in Mary Shelley's novel, is recreated in Jackson's hypertext. This enables me to read the female cyborg in relation to Donna Haraway's representation of the cyborg, which is faithful to feminism, technology, and social movements. Additionally, the form of the hypertext could be seen in parallel to the hybridised identity of the cyborg. The digital and biotechnological reproducibility of the hypertext that contributes to the posthuman aspect of the female cyborg makes this a suitable choice for exploring posthuman engagements with bodies, non-humans, technologies and narratives. Another reason for choosing

Patchwork Girl is to explore how it posits a posthumanist form of emancipated and collaborative reading where the reader acts both as a co-author and a navigator.

The next focus of this dissertation is Netflix's hyper-narrative interactive movie *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. After focusing on hypertext, I move to hypermedia in order to expand the arguments on posthumanist interactivity in visual culture. Although a few attempts at interactive films have been made earlier, *Bandersnatch* is singular in terms of technological innovations and user-friendly interface. I was intrigued by the way *Bandersnatch* provides the spectators with an illusion of great freedom and control to shape the narrative. These factors contributed to my choice of *Bandersnatch* as the primary source for discussing hypermedia. With *Patchwork Girl*, I argue the case of the *cyborg-reader*, and I take this argument further in the realm of hyper-narrative interactive cinema. With *Bandersnatch*, I argue that those who engage with the film are *cyborg-interactors*. Further, it enables me to explore the possibilities of hypermedia, overcoming the few constraints that hypertexts have in terms of fluidity and sequentiality.

After *Bandersnatch*, the focus of the analysis is three interactive storytelling applications, namely, *Chapters: Interactive Stories*, *Choices: Stories You Play* and *Journeys: Interactive Series*. The shift to interactive literature from hypertext and hypermedia is primarily because of the objective of tracing the evolution of hypertexts in literature and visual culture and the extent to which the intervention of the interactors could be possible in narration. In interactive storytelling, at every juncture in the narration, the interactors are required to make choices which correspond to how the narrative will go forward. With this genre, the interactors could relate more to the technology, and the degree of identification of the interactors with the characters is higher. With hypertexts, there are no visual components involved, but in interactive fiction, each textual prompt is accompanied by anime-style or live-action stills, beautiful backgrounds, and a visual

representation of the setting with great details. I move from the exclusive text-based environment of hypertexts and the cinematic experience of *Bandersnatch* to the amalgamation of text and visual elements of interactive storytelling applications. The three genres are similar with respect to their non-linear nature, fluidity, and involvement of users/interactors. However, as one gradually moves from one genre to another, one can witness enhanced functionalities that make the particular genre a unique aesthetic field.

This research analyses Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* to examine and situate 'crip' in the posthuman context. The focus of this analysis is to demonstrate how the crip aesthetics of the novel contribute to the constitution of a posthuman fictive world with respect to the form and content of the novel. The choice of *I've Got a Time Bomb* also alludes to the fact that the novel shares the posthuman aesthetics with *Patchwork Girl* and *Bandersnatch* in terms of its form, which resembles a hypertext in print. The readers of *I've Got a Time Bomb* are also required to participate in the process of creating and completing the narrative, but in a different way than they do in a virtual hypertext like *Patchwork Girl*. Besides the narrative, the protagonist of *I've Got a Time Bomb* could also be read as a posthuman-hybrid figure who necessarily belongs to a "postgender world." The eponymous character Sybil shares similar characteristics with Haraway's notion of the cyborg and also with the female cyborg in *Patchwork Girl* in terms of being queer, dis-proportioned, and scarred. This dissertation refers to Netflix's *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* as a posthumanist work because of its cyborg spectatorship and posthumanist interactive qualities. Parallelly, this research also refers to Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* as a crip posthumanist text because of its portrayal of a cyborg protagonist who refers to herself as a free-flowing nomadic being who does not conform to any heteronormative binaries. Besides looking at the characters and the ways of spectatorship, this thesis is specifically interested in the way these texts are written

and composed. *Patchwork Girl*, *Bandersnatch* and the three interactive story applications can be viewed and played on computer screens, but Sybil Lamb's novel is a text in print. It follows the other works primarily because of the way it is written. Lamb's text resists linearity, chronology, and time-space constraints. The readers have to keep up with the thought process of the narrator in order to make sense of the narrative. They have to reach the last chapter, which is technically the first, before the time bomb goes off. This is similar to the making of choices in *Bandersnatch* within ten seconds; otherwise, Netflix automatically chooses the first option by default. *Patchwork Girl*, on the other hand, is a hypertext. Although there is no clock ticking, the readers cannot get lost in the maze of links and hyperlinks. They have to construct a pathway from all the links and have to create a narrative so that the story of the patchwork girl can go forward. Although they have the freedom to choose or skip any path, there will always be an underlying anxiety of something being left behind. Readership, spectatorship, and consumerism have undergone drastic changes, and posthumanist literature redefines these concepts.

In her article "Towards A Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement," Francesca Ferrando argues that the methodology used in posthumanist studies should be adaptable and should have its own semiotics and pragmatics. Taking this into consideration, this dissertation primarily uses discourse and textual analyses. Discourse analysis is an approach to the analysis of the structure of language that looks at the patterns of the language used across naturally occurring spoken language and takes into consideration the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language in conversations, speeches, and interviews presents different views of the world and different understandings. It aims to produce a critique of how and why language use facilitates the

understanding of lexical and semantic features. It includes focusing on spoken utterances and other argumentative and actional structures above the level of the sentence.

Before delving further into what a textual analysis is, it would be useful to look at what a text is. The text has been defined in different ways, but in this context, the one way to consider the text is as a semantic unit which contains components making it "internally cohesive as a whole as the relevant environment for the operation of the theme and information system" (Halliday 136). For Stanley Fish, 'text' meant the nature of linguistic utterance, the space for possible interpretation and the relativistic dangers of reader-based subjectivity. He argues that text is a structure of meanings obviously "inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretive assumptions happen to be in force" (Fish, *Is There a Text* 7). Textual analysis is a research method that involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than required. Textual analysis is not just textual description but also seeing texts in terms of different meanings, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together. Textual analysis is often regarded as combining two complementary analyses: linguistic and intertextual. Combining both linguistic and intertextual analysis, textual analysis thus helps us see texts in the context of both society and history.

This dissertation uses textual analysis to examine *Patchwork Girl* and explore how the narrative osmoses with the ontology of cybernetic beings. The textual analysis also reveals how hypertexts function ontologically and epistemologically like the posthuman concept of the cyborg: a kind of "disassembled" but preeminent technology of narration. Using discourse analysis, I demonstrate in this chapter how the female cyborg of Jackson's hypertext encapsulates a posthumanist future of hope and pluralistic possibilities. The discourse analysis focuses on the

representation of the cyborg as a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and control.

For the second section of the thesis, discourse analysis is used for *Bandersnatch* and the interactive story applications to examine how the level of engagement, control, autonomy, responsibility, and interaction in explicit, material, infrastructural and performative ways contribute to the posthuman aspects of the interactors. For the third section, the textual analysis focuses on how crip constitutes posthuman aesthetics and how it radically interprets community practices in Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb*. This dissertation also uses theorising as a research framework by relating different ideas of posthumanism, feminist theories and disability studies into a coherent system to explain protopian posthumanism in *Patchwork Girl* and *I've Got a Time Bomb*. Using the techniques of interrogating, reasoning and conceptualising, this thesis extends existing posthumanist theories to theorise and explain the concept of protopian posthumanism.

The thesis is divided into six main chapters. The *first* chapter is the introduction, which gives an overview of posthumanist literature and a brief reflection on the roles of the reader, spectator, and interactor. It also introduces posthumanist aesthetics and discusses how it is used in literature and visual culture.

The *second* chapter reviews the literature on concepts and theories propounded by researchers who are related to the area of posthumanism, disability studies, feminist studies, narratology and media studies. Additionally, there are reviews of the work of different theorists and thinkers who have dealt with some of the aspects of hypertexts and hypermedia.

In terms of structurally placing the chapters, the *third* chapter introduces the posthuman figure and traces its evolution, starting from the origin of the cyborg as a self-correcting weapon to Haraway's cyborg as a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and

control, connecting it with the genealogy of the Other. Using differential ontology, this chapter aims to understand the identity of the cyborg as constituted on the basis of the ever-changing nexus of relations in which it is found. Further, Shelley Jackson's hypertext deals with the feminist cyborg. For a long time, robots and Artificial Intelligence have been considered gender-neutral. When Haraway introduced the term "cyborg" in her "A Cyborg Manifesto," she envisioned the cyborg to be "a creature in a postgender world" (Haraway, *Manifesto* 8), but with time, Artificial Intelligence has developed under a predominantly male imagination. Along with addressing this binary, the third chapter delves deeper into a few others: mind/body, self/other, human/non-human, and reality/appearance.

The *fourth* chapter of the thesis examines *Patchwork Girl*, *Bandersnatch* and three interactive story applications to reveal how hypertexts and hypermedia function ontologically and epistemologically like the posthuman concept of the cyborg defined by Haraway as a kind of "disassembled" but preeminent technology of narration. Using this as the entry-point, the chapter answers the central question that underlies how this new revisionist and interactive medium of storytelling parodies the traditional roles of the author and the reader. Considering hypertext use as a cyborg activity enables my thesis to productively complicate the common vision of computer-text-as-hero in an emancipation/domination epic. This emancipation/domination theme is taken up further when I look at Netflix's experimental hyper-narrative interactive movie *Bandersnatch*. *Bandersnatch* has revolutionised the role of the spectators—who were only passive viewers. The choices in the narrative of *Bandersnatch* allow multiple paths of experience for the spectators. In *Bandersnatch*, the focus of performance practice is explicitly on the meeting of the interactors and actors—a kind of "joint presence" (Willis 388). Using the interactive story applications, the

chapter demonstrates how spectatorship is closely associated with investing money and the desire to obtain pleasure from these applications, making the interactors spend money.

The *fifth* chapter examines Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* to analyse the cyborg figure and how the text engages with crip posthumanist aesthetics. The chapter addresses how the novel unsettles existing traditional binaries and paves the way for shared affinities. Moreover, it reflects how Lamb's novel can be read as part of Crip Lit that embraces the ideas of radical inclusivity and pluralistic possibilities.

The *sixth* chapter concludes the thesis based on the explorations of the earlier chapters. It demonstrates how posthumanist literature affects the reading/spectating experience. It highlights the limitations of this research and also suggests recommendations for future research to better understand the nuances of posthumanist literature.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on concepts and theories propounded by researchers and thinkers who are related to the areas of posthumanism, feminist studies, narratology and disability studies. In addition, this chapter provides some reviews of the work of different posthuman thinkers who have dealt with different aspects of the feminist cyborg. For the convenience of reading and deduction, this chapter is divided into sections which refer to the main parts of the thesis: posthumanist theories, emancipated spectatorship and crip posthumanist aesthetics. Along with these, this chapter propagates a theoretical investigation primarily about posthumanist theory. Reflecting on the different posthumanist theories, this chapter explains the arrival of the posthumanist theory, which this dissertation focuses on—the one that brings together diverse and multiform beings together. Furthermore, this chapter traces the development of the theory of aesthetics relating to posthumanism and new media.

2.1 Approaching the Posthuman Subject

The posthumanism that this research addresses originates from various other theories: postmodernism, feminism, disability studies and deconstruction. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman?* situates posthumanism as a theory emerging out of postmodern feminism. She argues that posthumanism is the recognition of other species and doing away with any hierarchies existing in society. The hybridised identities of man and machine are referred to as posthuman by Katherine Hayles, who argues that the manipulation of the original prosthesis of a body makes it posthuman. Adding to this, philosophical potshumanist Dr. Francesca Ferrando reflects that posthumanism recognises the existential dignity of humans and non-humans alike,

without choosing one over the other, but working towards the improvement of the current situation. She calls it "the posthuman presence," a post-anthropocentrism, post-dualism existence, where the different crises of humanity contribute to a kind of epiphany, which paves the way for self-betterment.

Donna Haraway wrote her article "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985, and since then, it has deeply influenced a wide range of critical discussions of the interaction of humans and machines in the technocratic age. Writing from the standpoint of a socialist and feminist, she defines the cyborg as a metaphor for boundary or border in the conceptualisation of our central cultural and social roles, in our racial, gender and class definitions of the self. The cyborg, for her, is a political metaphor, containing the potential for liberalisation, as well as the threat of being overpowered in the state of "the informatics of domination." Haraway's cyborg discourse deconstructs binary relations, which have no associations with sexuality and pre-oedipal symbiosis. She refers to the image of the cyborg as "blasphemy" and claims that it was not created in the Garden. Cyborg, from its very first theoretical conception as an entity, was conceived as an "illegitimate offspring," a bastard child, a mutating transformative agency which was intended to make a place for different social subjects (Haraway, *Simians* 151). This transformative agency attributed to cyborg, to replace the worker of socialist politics and woman of feminist politics, also ironically underwent a thorough transmutation in the wake of the networked and programmable media of the post-90s; and cyborg was soon relocated from the metaphorical socio-political realm to that of techno-materiality. At the turn of the millennium, when the earlier ideas about the 'immaterial' and 'disembodied' cyberspace were intensely challenged, cyborg as a concept was also reviewed. Cyborg has been widely used in the realm of cognitive technologies to go beyond the superficial sense of combining flesh and wires in the profound human-technology symbionts, strictly

differentiated from the esoteric questions about whether machines can think and reconceived in terms of how ubiquitous computing processes have become in everyday life, in the differentiating thinning line between brain and machine. As Haraway observes, "myth and tool constitute each other", and communication technologies and biotechnologies are the most crucial tools for re-crafting our bodies (Haraway, *Manifesto* 33). The relationship between the individual, the machinic systems and the capitalist ideology that originated with print (Anderson 23) is getting more consolidated with the system of self-inscription in the digital. Haraway explains how the cyborg discourse deconstructs the binary relations between being and non-being, organism and machine, and male and female. She characterises the cyborg as a creature who has no associations with sexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour or other seductions to organic wholeness.

A noticeable shift was from the individual cyborg to the all-encompassing 'hive-mind,' a concept recurrent in posthumanism. Gradually, the cyborgs assumed "an ideological role, representing the ever-present but feared Other–the oppressed workers, the exploited immigrant servants" (Bendle 56–57). Max More cites Nietzsche's concept of the Ubermensch when he argues that the posthumans are the creations of the ever-higher levels of order. Ubermensch is a concept introduced by Nietzsche in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He argues that Ubermensch is supposed to be the meaning of the earth after the event of the death of God. However, to achieve Ubermensch, one has to learn how to transcend the established morals and prejudices of society. Zarathustra declares that any man who wants to create Ubermensch will perish. This concept is a doctrine designed to inspire in humans a desire for the experience of going down and also beyond Man. Max More argues that, like Zarathustra, humans must always overcome themselves to reach the highest order of unlimited progression. This resembles the transhumanist movement that champions the use of technology for human enhancement. With the techno-improvements, the

normative human is enhanced by the corporeal merging with technology. Max More writes in "The Extropian Principles Version 3.0: A Transhumanist Declaration" that robotics, cryonics, and other modes of enhancement aim to improve the human condition:

> We challenge the inevitability of aging and death, and we seek continuing enhancements to our intellectual abilities, our physical capacities, and our emotional development. We see humanity as a transitory stage in the evolutionary development of intelligence. We advocate using science to accelerate our move from human to a transhuman or posthuman condition. (More)

Adding to this discussion, in his book *The Singularity is Near*, Ray Kurzweil examines an important step in the ongoing inexorable evolutionary process: the union of humans and machines. He claims that with the advent of the new era, human ageing and sickness will be overturned, pollution will be eradicated, and world hunger and poverty will be solved. Nanotechnology is supposed to ultimately turn even death into a solvable problem. Without paying much attention to the profound ramifications and threats of these changes, *The Singularity is Near* continues a radically optimistic view of the future course of human development—a dramatic culmination of centuries of technological ingenuity into the ultimate destiny of humans. This transhumanist approach keeps humanity at the forefront and then considers the possible technologies and advancements to make humans stronger and better, both in terms of intellect and physiology. Michael Hauskeller's *Mythologies of Transhumanism* pays attention to the theory of transhumanism as a form of utopia, the increasing integration of the radical human enhancement project into the cultural mainstream, and the initiative to upgrade from flesh to machine. The enhanced human of the transhumanist imagination becomes better at manipulating the world. The

author argues that it is already time that we face up to the possibility that attributes like intelligence and consciousness may be synthesised in non-human entities, perhaps within our lifetime.

Contradicting the arguments put forward by the transhumanists are the thinkers who argue that future generations can only flourish if the perfect chimaera of man and machine can be achieved. With this, humanness remains intact, and at the same time, it also opens up wider avenues for technological advancements. In *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, Bruce Clarke examines modern and postmodern stories of corporeal transformation through interlocking frames of posthumanism, narratology and second-order systems theory. Frequently, the rise and proliferation of cybernetic concepts and images have run parallelly with older evolutionary ideas, pitting the humanist image of the human against the monstrosity of the posthuman. As a matter of fact, the posthuman does not transcend the human as the discourse of the human has imagined transcendence. Rather, the neocybernetic posthuman transcends the vision of disconnection that has isolated the human for so long in its own conceit of uniqueness. The neocybernetic posthuman is the human metamorphosed by reconnection to the worldly and systemic conditions of its evolutionary possibility. Thus, it not only puts forward a case of fusions that dissolve autonomies but also couplings preserving operational differences. Similarly, in *Posthuman Ethics*, Patricia MacCormack refers to posthumans as failed humans since they embody the same terms in order to reduce the manufacturing of continuous power machines. For oppressive machines, the posthuman deviant is required to isomorphically raise the status of the majoritarian, and the posthuman's future is only a part of that operation of ascension. This brings in the fear that when this happens, would we still be the 'humans' (however 'post'), and would it, as it has been argued, ultimately benefit us too and be good for us? MacCormack also raises the question of whether it is viable or even possible to ask if we can ever enter into entirely ahuman, inhuman, posthuman

becomings. She navigates the ways in which we must compose the human differently, specifically beyond nihilism and post- and trans-humanism and outside human privilege. This should be done in order to actively think and live viscerally, with connectivity (actual, not virtual), and with passion and grace in a new world where both humans and machines thrive without losing their own unique characteristics. *The Transhumanist Reader* provides a way to expand the frontiers of human nature while highlighting core arguments about the speculative possibilities of the posthuman condition. More addresses key philosophical arguments for and against human enhancement and explores the inevitability of life extension. The Singularity involves a variety of different technologies with new categories that we can't now envision. However, AGI plays a special role—taking us from the state of "humans with advanced tools but old-fashioned bodies and brains" to a new condition that includes radically posthuman features. Such developments, More argues, could bring the day when all humans will be more intellectually capable, whether because of enhancements of their native biological machinery or through interfacing with artificial information processing systems.

Alongside these theorists, there are thinkers who believe that if the human is no longer the 'measure of things,' the posthuman no longer requires the 'human' in it, as they will employ better moral procedures. Many of the concepts of human existence that we have inherited from humanism can no longer be sustained. As a result, humans will finally arrive at a new era where no human life will be left, and only the machines, the robots, and the cyborgs will exist around us, with no trace of humanism in them. The very notion of 'humanism' is in urgent requirement of reconsideration in the face of posthuman reconfigurations of subjectivity and consciousness in a technocentric era. Even if we look up to nanotechnology to give immortality to humans, what will be left is the body with logic, feelings and consciousness being downloaded and controlled by a

processor. One example of a conceptual design for such a system, called Primo Posthuman, was created by the artist and cultural catalyst Natasha Vita-More. Her design is intended to optimise mobility, flexibility and superlongevity. It envisions features such as a metabrain for global-net connection with a prosthetic neocortex of AI, interwoven with nanobots. It is supposed to result in the radical upgrading of all our physical and mental systems. This also resembles the transhumanist movement that champions the use of technology for human enhancement. With the techno-improvements, the normative human is enhanced by the corporeal merging with technology. However, my issue with this is that transhumanism advocates the idealisation of the human subject by excluding important factors such as race, gender, class and heteronormativity. In this dissertation, I attempt to represent the posthuman, which is not only a technologically-enhanced human but much more than that—"a multi-faceted and relational subject" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 188) which is materially embedded, conceptualised within feminist and post-colonial theories, and engaged in inter-relations with human and non-human agents.

Although Haraway articulates the myth of the cyborg to be a rupture to traditional humanist thought, it still remains only a narrative of possibility. But in the works of thinkers like Rosi Braidotti, the cyborg becomes a recognisable entity that accommodates the non-human within the fabric of the human social context. Rosi Braidotti defines the "posthuman" as a convergence phenomenon between post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, which also serves as the critique of the universal concept of the Man of reason on the one hand and the rejection of species supremacy on the other. She argues that the critical framework of posthumanism rejects the traditional understanding of the human as an exceptional and autonomous subject. Braidotti aims to bring the posthuman subject out of imaginative literature and into the real world in order to direct critical attention towards the changing ideas of the human/non-human and other than

humans. Braidotti's theory of posthumanism is more aligned with my research as it is also located at the intersection of race and species and their biopolitical implications. It confronts the complexities of humanism while visualising the posthuman subject as a way to "devise a new vocabulary, with new figurations to refer to the elements of our posthuman embodied and embedded subjectivity" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 82). This enables us to recognise the mutual connections between bodies and technology and to favour abstract and intangible qualities. After more than convincingly establishing that we are already living as posthumans, Braidotti's central question is about the new forms of subjectivity that are supported by a posthuman understanding. *The Posthuman* answers this by finding networks of human and non-human actors useful as a way of engaging affirmatively with the present. A generative present that helps us to rethink our position within our anthropocene era: our interactions with the non-human agency on a planetary scale. Braidotti pursues this with endless curious innuendoes concerning the repercussions for a creative and aesthetic posthuman future where distinctive power relations may emerge. In her article "Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment," Braidotti writes about the conditions of possibility for the ethical instance are not oppositional and, thus, not tied to the present by negation but are instead affirmative and geared for creating empowering alternatives. Considering the extent of our technological development, emphasis on the ecology of belonging is not to be mistaken for biological determinism.

Francesca Ferrando's work is situated within this context, and the force that inspires her to deterritorialise both humanism and anthropocentrism is exuberant excess. *Philosophical Posthumanism*, in fact, can be approached from a post-humanism, a post-anthropocentrism, and a post-dualism perspective. Ferrando has gradually deconstructed the social, cultural, and linguistic notion of the human, reaching the conclusion that the human is not one but multiple beings. She

stresses the perseverance to develop the posthuman turn into practices of reality which fully embrace a post-anthropocentric understanding, together with a post-humanistic perception of the human species, in the broader frame of post-dualism. The deconstruction of the human, as well as the re-elaboration of the non-human realm, results in paving the way to a future with no human existence but only the posthumans. This dissertation draws from Ferrando's post-centralising approach to look at posthumanism not as a singular discourse but as a radical, multi-layered one.

In *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler opines that gender has been transformed in such a way that it does not conform to the disciplinary gender binaries. Gender is rather fluid, and by not limiting it to the masculine/feminine binary, it challenges patriarchal oppressions. In this dissertation, I expand Butler's argument in the posthumanist context, where I argue that the posthuman subject rejects such gender binaries and belongs to a rather fluid, dynamic category. The posthuman subject critiques homonormative ideologies and destabilises the very category of the normative body in white heterosexist patriarchy. It explores alternative ways of being and identities that allow one to visualise inclusive futures.

This thesis also uses the concept of differential ontology to examine the posthuman subject. Differential Ontology considers difference as a foundational concept that constitutes identities. In *Writing and Difference,* Jacques Derrida argues that différance is a non-origin concept. It challenges the constitution of meaning and disrupts the binary categories. This works in tandem with Haraway's theory of the cyborg, which does not have an origin in the Western sense and is known for rejecting the binary categories. This dissertation also demonstrates that the cyborgs represented in posthumanist literature and visual culture de-centre human exceptionalism by representing an 'ontological turn': a shift away from all the metaphysical implications towards a radical methodological openness to embracing the differences of all kinds. The "ontological turn"

proposed by Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen signifies a broad shift in anthropology that seeks to render visible the epistemological hierarchy of modernity. Further, theorists like Latour and Haraway use the term "ontological turn" to explain the decentralisation of humans from the focus of anthropology in order to better study the entanglement of human and non-human networks.

In her book *Metamorphoses*, Rosi Braidotti argues that the feminine has been colonised by masculine practices, and in order to break away from that, the feminine is involved in the "political and conceptual task of creating, legitimating and representing a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity without falling into relativism or fragmentation" (26). The 'becoming-woman' is very similar to 'becoming-animal' as both of them initiate changes in being and erode any binaries, separations and priority accorded rationalities. The becoming-animal rejects the identification with a normative image of thought. The animal is no longer seen as the Other in the posthuman context and is part of an environment that is non-hierarchical. Braidotti argues that posthuman bodily materialism considers the animal "in its radical immanence as a body that can do a great deal" ("Animals, Anomalies" 528). The capabilities of the animal have long depended on humans, but posthuman feminism accounts for the animal's situated perspectives. The kind of materialism that becoming-animal ushers expresses a vitalist force of life and prioritises ethical values which centralise life itself. The embodied and embedded beings sustain each other to overcome the different levels of oppression. The becoming-animal acknowledges the sense of attachment to multiple ecologies of human and non-human relations. The cybernetic and bio-engineered bodies adhere to Braidotti's vision of open-ended, trans-species and sexually polymorphous bodies. The animal/woman/technology boundaries become blurred to support transgressive politics. In this context, Stacy Alaimo argues that the posthuman feminist subjects

increase women's solidarity with animals by showing how both of them have been similarly exploited and oppressed. With reference to Haraway's cyborg, Alaimo explains that the cyborgian transgression of the human/non-human boundaries also contributes to the blurring of the animal/woman divide by getting rid of the misogynist discourses. This further attempts to construct animals as individuals with personalities and "blocks their appropriation into discourses of victimization" (Alaimo, "Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions" 141). This elevation of animals to the status of 'individuals' frees them from their status as Other and denies humans their species supremacy.

A scientific thinker and a metaphysician, René Descartes claims that the mind and the brain-body are separate entities. He refers to this fundamental separation of mind from the body as "dualism." Many philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Wittgenstein have refused to accept this dualist view and questioned: "How can our abstract, internal thoughts and intentions about action cause the physical motion of our bodies?" (Devlin 346). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the objective physical world and the subjective thoughts and feelings cannot exist without each other, and they should be considered as a single whole. However, posthumanism argues that there has never been one unified, cohesive human. Posthumanism is often regarded as a critique and deconstruction of the "ontological foundations of the Cartesian or Enlightenment subject" (Smith 138). Arguing against the Cartesian concept of the liberal subject, here, the subject is seen as a multiplicity, "in part by releasing the body from the constraints placed on it not only by nature but also by Humanist ideology and allowing it to roam free and 'join' with other beings, animate and inanimate" (Seaman 248). The unconstrained posthuman embodiment is, thus, composed of many subjects in relation to power, technology, virtuality, and reality. Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to human beings: "Etymologically, Dasein means being-here or being-

there, and in everyday German, it is used like our word existence" (Freeman 366). Heidegger's conception of the 'subject' as Dasein is not as a physical entity, consciousness, and "functional or intentional system." It is a dynamic "way of being," an ongoing movement that is relational to its own being, to others, and to the world. He argues that selfhood is evolving in keeping with past experiences, present context and future projects.

For a long time, robots and Artificial Intelligence have been considered gender-neutral. When Donna Haraway introduced the term 'cyborg' in her "A Cyborg Manifesto," she envisioned the cyborg to be "a creature in a postgender world" (*Manifesto* 8). Are cyborgs male or female? Is gender relevant in this context? Are the cyborgs still gender-neutral despite their embodiment? These are some of the questions that this dissertation seeks to answer. Along with addressing this binary, this research delves deeper into a few other binaries, such as mind/body, self/other, and reality/appearance. In visual culture, the three-volume Netflix series *Love, Death & Robots* portrays the cyborgs in a way which complicates the existing binaries and paves the way for a "boundary collapse." The series provides a glimpse of how, after the consciousness of a human is copied into the network, it evolves into a life of its own and is no longer tied to the limits of the biological body. As William J. Mitchell observes: "I am plugged into other objects and subjects in such a way that I become myself in and through them, even as they become themselves in and through me" (62). He parodies the Cartesian statement by insisting, "I link, therefore I am" (Mitchell 62). The biological brain, copied into the processor, is no longer in need of its original body: the mind has been successfully "separated from the body, unfastening all its former ties to physical embodiment" (Pordzik 149). The self is completely disintegrated and then reassembled in a new medium better and vaster than the preceding human body. The posthumanist consciousness "is thus precisely to warrant this kind of fulfilment and to provide the self with a

bionic prosthesis utilizable to redefine its selfness without surrendering to the machine completely" (Pordzik 152). The self, subject, and subjectivity become entangled. The self also becomes related to affective, cultural, and social attributes, "an emergent entity negotiating the continuous integration of life representations (affects and memories) in time" (Cumming 210). Although Cumming explains the representation of the self in terms of music, the analysis of the self as a sign holds true to the posthuman issues of individuality. The shaping of the signs results in the emergence of the consciousness of the self, which is entangled with subjectivity. The role of the subject is many, and its understanding of its own self is enriched once the 'borders' are encountered in a non-Cartesian framework.

Heidegger's death-analysis refers to the capacity to face one's death to be a marker of an 'authentic' human being (*Being and Time* 298). The unavoidable necessity of facing one's death in one way or another is grounded in human beings'—or Dasein's—fundamental ontological trait. Applying Heidegger's 'death-analysis,' the fear of death is also the same for cyborgs; they possess an awareness of what it means to die. In a way, this anthropomorphic singularity brings the cyborgs a step closer to transgressing the boundaries between humans and non-humans. All manifestations of subjectivity maintain this necessity. Fear of death is not restricted only to humans anymore but is also applicable to posthumans. Since they possess the awareness of what it means to die, they are afraid of it. The posthumans have the self-reflective ability to articulate fear. While discussing modern technology, Heidegger argues that it is a specific way of revealing it to the world. Technology commands, controls and sets up beings as objects of manipulation. As a result, humanity becomes the sole controller and constituter of being. In this process of commanding and getting commanded, the beings become links in the chain of input resources. While becoming consumers of technology, humans are exposed to being consumed by it. Heidegger refers to this

revealing of what is enframed and set-up by modern technology as *Gestell* ("The Question" 305). Enframing refers to the gathering of resources that are set upon humans to reveal what is real while they themselves become standing reserves, waiting to become products of technology. Humanity is not responsible for enframing, as they themselves are enframed. Enframing is an epoch of *being*, a part of the unfolding of history. With technology, not only is information produced and manipulated, but also revealed and unconcealed. Consequently, information technology has become a mode of Gestell.

2.2 Aestheticising Posthumanist Literature and Interactivity

This dissertation critically examines the form, structure, body and conceptualisation of the hypertext. It also focuses on the affects created by the fragmentation that is inherent in a hypertext. Edward Barrett mentions in *Text, ConText, and HyperText* that while going through hypertexts, one should keep in mind affective and intentional fallacies. In many cases, the intentions of the author are very different from the interpretations drawn by the users. But what remains stable is the inherent hypertext. Whatever the interpretation is, the hypertext remains an object of critical judgment. With hypertexts, meaning is to be identified with what a user interprets within a unit of sense; as one keeps moving from one section to another, the meanings keep on changing, and any prior understanding also keeps on evolving as the reading proceeds in time. Stanley Fish argues in *Is There a Text in This Class?* that literature is a kinetic art, so the meanings can still be interpreted, even if we don't have a stationary book in our hands, but a moving, receding form of text. Reading always involves paying close attention to the line as a unit, and in hypertexts, each of those units acquires a new set of meanings. The readers then have to overcome the difficulty of considering each unit instead of focusing on the entire interpretive strategy. Even as Roland Barthes explains

in *Writing Degree Zero*, a reader must look underneath a word to make sense of its meaning and all the possible associations it might have in order to correctly interpret their own ideas out of the entire text. This points to the fact that a great deal of power lies in the user who is engaging with a hypertext. From meaning-making to structuring the narrative, the user is required to be an active participant.

One of the significant features of hypertext is "transclusion," which Ted Nelson mentions in his book *Literary Machines*. The users could choose to be transcluded in the hypertext by participating in the process of building up the text and by reading parts of it to form a coherent meaning of the entire thing. A user can immediately access references to other texts just by activating a mouse click, keypress set, or even touching the screen. Using hypertexts makes it easier for the author to convey the meaning of the text through a sense of spatiality and perspective that is only unique to digital technology. The overall implication is that of a postmodernist fragmentation of worlds by creating several individual tracks. The distinction between subject and object, matter and the absence of matter, gets blurred in the process. In an environment like hypertext and digital media, Donna Haraway's argument for a sense of kinship predicated on "affinity, not identity" in her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* is conveniently applicable. Haraway writes that the relationship between the writer, the reader and the text does not depend on the dominance of any one of the participants—instead, an affinity kinship should be accounted for the emerging practices of local relationships.

In *How We Became Posthuman?* Katherine Hayles argues that hypertext theorists constantly look forward to refiguring their understanding of themselves as contradictory beings constituted by language, culture, meaning and technology. The technology mingles the actions of the machine with "the subjectivity we attribute to characters, authors, and ourselves as readers"

(Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman?* 51). The narrative of the hypertext not only destabilises what counts as natural through its multiplicity but also destabilises the postmodern fantasy that everything is open to textualisation. When the text represents this process as a "merged molecular dance of simultaneity" (Hayles, *My Mother* 163), it mobilises the specificity of the medium as an authorisation for its vision of cyborg subjectivity. According to Hayles, our interactions with technology in visual, tactile and audible ways allow us to perceive the world differently. Storytelling in the posthuman age also becomes a way of defining and constructing the posthuman. In the emerging types of storytelling, technology is the central component of the narrative and the interaction with such narrative calls for the involvement of the posthumans. Hayles finds the roots of the posthuman in cybernetics and argues that the resulting posthuman being is seamlessly configured with intelligent machines. This interrelation and dependency between technology and subjectivity are what Hayles calls 'technogenesis.' It refers to a complex adaptive system where the technology is "constantly changing as well as bringing about change in those whose lives are enmeshed with them" (Hayles, *How We Think* 18). The concept of technogenesis has been used to intervene in the cycles of continuous causality so that the interactors actively respond to a hyper-narrative interactive film. This represents a fundamental departure from the contemporary onto-epistemological given of the 'human'—with all its attendant values and norms—but this departure is rooted in the changing shifts in response to technological developments.

In his book *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, George P. Landow mentions that the hypertext has significance beyond the author's intention, and the author must depart from the text for the liberation of meaning; hence, the reader sets out on a journey to fill the gaps and construct the narrative. When the hypertext is viewed by the reader with more abstraction and fresher assessments beyond the established aesthetics or meanings, it

loses its connection to the author, and it elevates itself from its origins. Landow argues that the significance of the author is only to the degree of his or her intent; everything beyond the intention of the author is discovered by the reader. Each individual reader fills in the various gaps in the different sequences, allowing for infinite realisations of the text within its provided interpretive limits. Landow claims that the basic postmodern philosophy is being reconstructed as concrete communication practices. He emphasises that "[s]omething Derrida and other critical theorists describe as part of a seemingly extravagant claim about language turns out precisely to describe the new economy of reading and to write with electronic virtual forms" (Landow, *Hypertext 3.0* 8). This could further be argued by considering Derrida's grammatological deconstruction of the linear concept of time. The philosophical deconstruction of the printed book is converted into a "paradigmatic everyday experience by means of a contingent change in the structure of media" (Sandbothe 39). With hypertexts, there are deconstructions of the linear concept of time as well as that of the printed book. The hypertext makes huge alterations in the way the users practically deal with signs, which are relevant to the philosophy of time and media. The 'synchronous interactivity' and the constant presence of the users establish face-to-face communication between the author, the character and the user. The resulting flawless interactivity cancels any time constraints and allows real-time interactions between the characters and the interactors. This tendency toward the 'scriptualization of language' and 'verbalization of writing' results in the "interactively modelable and contextually situated form of writing" (Sandbothe 41) which functions exactly like spoken language. Derrida's "fabric of the trace" (*Of Grammatology* 65) is modified in the interactive platform of the hypertext as the concrete practice of using modified signs of space and time. The interactors constitute their identities on the bedrock of writing-based interaction in the context of shared plans for the narrative.

Moving from hypertext to hypermedia, Jacques Rancière makes a case for the transformative power of the spectators whose intervention becomes crucial. Rancière claims in *The Emancipated Spectator* that there is a "theatre without spectators" where those who participate "become active participants as opposed to passive viewers" (4). He argues for recognising the status of the spectators as equal in capacity to the "actor": "the empowerment of the capacity of no matter who." Both Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud also desired to "teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice" (Rancière 7). The medium of the hyper-narrative employs a "transformative power" to the spectators whose intervention is required for the completion of the theatre, thus making them part of the performance. While analysing the hyper-narrative interactive film *Bandersnatch* and three interactive story applications, the dissertation expands Rancière's arguments and focuses on how much emancipation is actually given to the interactors. The analysis drawn from these claims about the necessity of the interactors to complete the theatre also examines how those who engage with different forms of hypermedia become part of the process of creation, which directly influences their affects and responses.

The private act of creation becomes explicitly public and gives rise to the consumer society. This society is driven not only by the needs of the consumers but by the productive capacity of the market. The writers of interactive fiction emphasise not only production but also the consumption of their work. In *The Consumer Society: Myths & Structures*, Jean Baudrillard explains that contemporary capitalism includes not only profit maximisation but also the disposal of the product. It becomes necessary to control both the apparatus of production and the consumer demand—"to control not just prices, but what will be demanded at those prices" (Baudrillard 71). The accommodation of the desires of an individual by the market enables the producers to dictate the

act of production and the subsequent consumerisation. Baudrillard argues: “In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign” (25), and hence, there is a requirement to make the product ‘personalized.’ Hypermedia serves this purpose by providing the interactors with the illusion of choosing their own narrative. This makes the products more powerful and persuasive in consumer society. Instead of associating the products with their material qualities and function, they are now integrated with the lifestyles and social lives of the people. The dominance of the commodities addresses the experience of lack in the consumers: “It is ultimately because consumption is founded on a lack that it is irrepressible” (Baudrillard 28). This feeling of lack results in a deep longing, which accelerates endlessly and the consumers are consumed by it.

2.3 Theorising a Crip Posthumanist Aesthetics

While talking about the different tropes of disability studies, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell state that the cultural model of disability recognises disability as “a site of phenomenological value” which resists the processes of social disablement (5). It understands disability as a cultural trope that acts as a site of resistance and a source of cultural agency that was previously suppressed. Since my dissertation deals with disability in the cultural context, Snyder and Mitchell’s argument about the cultural model of disability becomes appropriate. Further, this dissertation expands the arguments of *Disability Aesthetics* where Tobin Siebers argues that the human body is both the subject and object of aesthetic production: the body aims to make other bodies prized for their capacity to change the feelings of their maker and invested with a semblance of vitality normally credited only to human beings. According to him, aestheticism never perceives the portrayal of the healthy body—and its meaning of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole assurance of the aesthetic. Instead, disability aesthetics encompasses beauty that appears by conventional standards

to be broken. Siebers explains that broken art and damaged beauty are no longer deciphered as ugly. However, they reveal new forms of beauty that desert a kitschy reliance on impeccable bodily forms. He argues against "a nonmaterialist aesthetics that devalues the role of the body and limits the definition of art" (Siebers 63). The bodies are not only represented through art, but they are also part of the representation process. His theory of complex embodiment values disability as a form of human variation and emphasises how social representations affect the lived experiences of the body. Siebers argues that social oppression based on race, gender, sexuality and disability gives rise to intersectional identities, which should also be considered complex embodiments. The analysis of Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* is based on these approaches, which pave the way to a crip analytic understanding of embodiment.

Ato Quayson begins *Aesthetic Nervousness* by stating that persons with disabilities face the problem of constantly being enclosed within a discourse of stereotypes and expectations that completely obliterate their identities. He argues that disability has long been understood as a sad, tragic fate of an individual, and the individual is expected to take charge of the situation and carry on with a normal life, fulfilling all the expectations of society. He refers to the generic treatment of disability by literary texts as aesthetic nervousness: "Aesthetic nervousness is seen when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (Quayson 32). It arises from the tensions in interactions between a disabled and non-disabled character and tensions in narrative and plot structure. In literary texts, aesthetic nervousness is further represented through symbols, metaphors and reversals of plot structure. Quayson refers to Mitchell and Snyder when he states that a textual prosthesis serves as a "quick fix" in narratives to represent that, in the end, the persons with disabilities overcome their difficulties and live happily ever after. This represents disability as "a pragmatic/cathartic function

for the audience and the reader" (Quayson 43). To avoid such complexities, this thesis focuses on the concept of 'crip,' which rejects any form of pity or sympathy and instead uses humour and sarcasm as a means of communication.

Crip aesthetics is often described as visual and conceptual elements found in artworks that manifest a crip identity of the subject depicted. Ann Millett-Gallant argues that 'crip' escapes the binary definitions of disabled/non-disabled and "empowers the derogatory term 'cripple,' a one-dimensional epithet of disability, largely signifying misfortune and pity" (218). In her essay "Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performances," disability performance artist and scholar Carrie Sandahl states that the term 'crip' includes all kinds of impairments: physical, mental and sensory. She mentions that both crips and queers oppose the traditional elements of identity and adamantly oppose concepts of normality. In "Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies," Lennard Davis reconsiders Michael Bérubé's question of why disability isn't a universal condition yet when most able-bodied people will develop some impairments with time ("Crips Strike Back" 502). Davis brings in the concept of Temporarily Able-Bodied to explain the fact that "normalcy" is momentary and isn't something which should be treated as a prized possession. The binary between disabled and non-disabled is permeable—anyone can become disabled at any point in time. As a result, normative embodiment should not be exclusive, and non-normativity should be considered parallelly. Davis talks about the supposed normality which all bodies must adhere to, failing which invites bitterness and resentment. He believes this is because of the fact that disability disturbs the notion of able-bodiedness. The fact that disabled bodies could signify the traits that 'normal' bodies do provokes bitterness and envy. For a long time, disabled people have been defined by the "Medusa gaze" of non-disabled people and have been isolated and confined in

institutions. But now, they are emerging out of the boundaries of academic study and into the streets and daily lives of the non-disabled. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer remarks that the term 'crip' is meant to destabilise categories of identity, as well as to politicise disability. She asserts that crip cannot be defined and is supposed to recognise intersections of social and political identities. Drawing from these concepts, this dissertation develops Kafer's notion of "crip time" to "theorize an 'elsewhere,' to provide a political framework for a more just world that does not rely on a normalizing impulse" (23). Drawing from Siebers' use of the term "aesthetics" as something tracking "the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies" (1), Millett-Gallant uses the term "crip aesthetics" to designate "visible details, imagery, and sentiments in the work of contemporary disabled artists" (220). The use of crip aesthetics in this dissertation is informed by these understandings of the crip and contributes to the analysis of the textual and literary elements that constitute the crip aesthetics in the novel.

Disability studies scholars have argued that humour is an important component which enables successful communication among people with disabilities. The use of humour in art and performances also plays simultaneous roles of amusing and unsettling the audience. While it may elicit momentary laughter, it also reveals the hidden significance and unspoken meanings. In *Exile and Pride*, Eli Clare states that those who are part of the disability rights movement create a crip culture where telling and listening to crip jokes help in identifying a sensibility that is called crip humour. She opines that crip humour possesses the power to turn "cripple into a word of pride" (Clare 83). She argues that in mainstream culture, it is crucial to crip bodies and sexuality so that a more diverse representation can be found. She insists that a certain kind of humour is required to elevate crip pride in order to establish an emancipatory praxis. Crip humour, she argues, has the potential to surprise and shock listeners, prompting them to consider alternative perspectives and

understandings. It creates discomfort within the audience that inherently interrogates their perspectives of able-bodiedness. This could be read as what Ryan Parrey refers to as ontological disorientation since such encounters with crip humour lead to "a turn in our orientation to the world as well as the body" (3). Ontological disorientation constitutes experiences of exposure to the world that permanently disrupt an individual's worldview. It occurs as a result of being influenced by the relatedness of people and their bodies and experiences. Crip humour articulates the explicit awareness of multiple embodiments and challenges the conception of the ideal body. It suddenly brings the audience's attention to something that previously had not caught their attention and, in the process, leads to their ontological disorientation. This is primarily because the audience remains "in-relation with body and world rather than temporarily feeling cut off" (Parrey 14). This dissertation analyses ontological disorientation through crip humour which explicitly puts the individuals in touch with relations to other people and their bodies.

Robert McRuer's book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* opens up dialogues on the intersections of the crip and the queer. McRuer examines queerness and disability as corresponding sites of oppression and demonstrates how the homosexual body and the disabled body are each governed by a system of compulsory identity that prioritises heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. McRuer suggests that disability studies can advance by deriving from the vocabulary and framework of queer theory. McRuer argues that 'cripping' a text may begin to perform the same function for disability studies that 'queering' did for gay and lesbian studies. He suggests that epiphanic moments of able-bodied heteronormativity require crip bodies that are flexible enough to make it through a crisis. However, he remarks that it is the heterosexual and abled body that is taken out of this predicament, usually at the expense of a disabled character who has been queered or a queer character who has been cripped. McRuer argues for the inclusion of

all kinds of corporeal, mental, sexual, and cultural bodies in representing existing social structures. He emphasises a specific form of readerly disidentification by destabilising mainstream representations of heteronormativity and able-bodiedness. His framework theoretically aligns signifiers of queerness with disability and ecology to produce a shifting lexicon that is able to reposition and, therefore, deconstruct hegemonic cultural signs and bodies in white heterosexist patriarchy. McRuer suggests that the notion of the 'crip' furnishes "raw material against which the imagined future world is formed" (*Crip Theory* 72). Parallel to this, the crip-queer approach evolves from Donna Haraway's notion of the "boundary creature," which refers to embodied subjects in postmodern literature that disturb the onto-epistemological categories of the human/non-human/posthuman.

Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* explores the pervasive desexualisation of disability. Mining a diverse archive that includes inspirational billboards, newspapers, websites, literature, and cultural theory, Kafer argues that disability is often discursively constructed as an apolitical obstacle to futurity, which is usually imagined in terms of reproductive capacity, sexual intimacy, development, progress, or utopianism. She assesses how images of disability, often under the guise of inclusion, are deployed in service for moralising common-sense visions of 'the good life.' Although the inspirational billboards from *Foundation for a Better Life* campaign seem to advocate disability inclusion, the billboards' invocation of overcoming disability not only erases ongoing structural inequality but also "depoliticizes heteronormativity and gender traditionalism" as well as neoliberal ideals of "personal responsibility" (Kafer 87). Kafer also re-evaluates the future of cyborg theory and argues for a "cripped cyborg politics," inviting feminists to reconsider their common use of disability as a depoliticised metaphor for hybridity and entreating disability activists to include the critiques of class and Western privilege offered by socialist and

transnational feminists. She highlights that non-disabled people will never achieve the ableism often apparent in these texts—with disabled people separated as an essential state of cyborg.

In the Preface to his book *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic*, Michael Davidson clearly states that his aim is not only to find disabled characters in modernist literature but to analyse how their disabilities underwrite the aesthetic function. He consciously avoids those characters whose disabilities are the focal points of novels. Interweaving historical insights and literary analysis, Davidson writes against the over-characterisation of modernist texts as expressions of aesthetic independence or pure abstraction. He also states that rather than treating modernism and modernity as discrete entities, he sees them as "intimately conjoined" (Davidson, *Invalid Modernism* 7). The aesthetic turn has brought the body back into cultural theory, and disability studies have contributed to this aesthetic turn by raising issues about normative bodies. He links this to New Criticism's warnings "against a literature too dedicated to bodily response or social impact" (Davidson, *Invalid Modernism* 10). Yet within this framework, Davidson shows that disability in its various manifestations plays a central defamiliarising role, returning the body to the centre of aesthetic and affective experience. Davidson recasts key features of modernist texts, such as defamiliarisation, fragmented identity, and disjointed temporality, and shows them to be dependent on the physical realities of non-normative or disabled bodies. He argues that the experimentalism of modernism is found in the "invisible" presence of the disabled body—the "missing body of the aesthetic."

For Davidson, the defining characteristic of the aesthetic as representation lies in Kant's differentiation between judgements of beauty and that of taste. Judgements of beauty should be detached from any personal intention and must be subjected to universal validation. On the other hand, judgements of taste are local and do not regard any universal appreciation. Davidson argues

that if the aesthetic function includes judgments free from any desire for ideal beauty, then that function also presumes a body which is 'invalid'—that is unacceptable or distorted. He intends to represent the production of normative identity through these 'invalid' bodies. He focuses on the figure of the 'invalid aesthete' as providing a form of consciousness which interprets aestheticism as "a barrier against modernist progress and bourgeois rationality" (Davidson, *Invalid Modernism* 37). Further, Davidson links biopolitical representations of the body to the negative connotation of normalcy, which became the modern concept for the ideal body. He believes that Lennard Davis's concept of "enforcing normalcy" is a key component of modernisation. To this concept, Davidson adds the importance of aesthetics in interpreting bodies in modernist literature. Davidson argues that technology plays a significant role in cure and rehabilitation by providing efficient systems and medications to restore the broken body to wholeness. In this context, he mentions Tim Armstrong's argument that modernity introduces fragmentation of the body in relation to technology, where the body is seen as lack. Even if the private body does not require restoration, the social body does. These 'progressive' structures imagine only a wholesome body and do not consider 'other' bodies. Davidson argues that disability is foundational for the aesthetic—it links the vulnerable body to its representation. In the process, it also organises sensations about bodily integrity and social coherence. The disabled body causes a rupture to the discourses of ideal beauty and mimics the fragmented works of modernism.

CHAPTER 3

Unpatching *Patchwork Girl*

The posthumanist theory that my research addresses has a close association with postmodernism, feminism and disability studies. Posthumanism recognises all species and deconstructs any hierarchy that exists in society. It focuses on the flourishing of larger ecosystems and promotes interspecies harmony. Posthumanism also enables humans to become more aware of how they are interconnected with the earth and all its living and non-living beings in their everyday lives. This is referred to as "the posthuman presence," a post-anthropocentrism, post-dualism existence that expands and generates hope and possibilities for rich multispecies worlds. A multispecies world, then, becomes a shared, plural, hopeful concept that is rigid and understandable. It rejects species supremacy and critiques the notion of speciesism.

In this chapter, I trace the evolution of the posthuman subject in literature and visual culture. After exploring the tenets of the posthuman figure, I critically examine the female cyborg in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* through the lens of feminist posthumanism. In this chapter, I use textual analysis to examine *Patchwork Girl* and explore how the narrative osmoses with the ontology of cybernetic beings. Further, in this chapter, I examine how differential ontology originating particularly from the works and ideas of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze could be read in relation to posthumanism. The theorists working with differential ontology have placed their work in film studies, ethics, technology, politics, and arts, among others. I would build upon those discussions and centre them on the peripheries of posthumanism. Using discourse analysis, I demonstrate in this chapter how the female cyborg of Jackson's hypertext encapsulates a posthumanist future of hope and pluralistic possibilities. Further, I argue that this female cyborg, as well as Jackson's cyborg hypertext, represents the posthumanist vision of regeneration and

radical inclusivity, shifting the anthropocentric, humanist perception of the man towards non-unitary Other.

The journey of the posthuman in literature and visual media varies extensively across time and space. It began with the notion of an individual who is non-normative in their physical appearance and in terms of their biological organicity. This hybrid figure, part human, part machine, has been termed a monster. Any figure which resisted the normative notions of body and instead represented hybrid corporeality was considered to be a monster. Non-normativity with respect to not following the norms of able-bodiedness attributed such figures to the terminology of the monster. Oxford English Dictionary defines a monster as a "mythical creature which is part animal and part human or combines elements of two or more animal forms and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening" ("monster"). The alchemist Paracelsus believed that such individuals were monsters and were born because of the "secret sins in the parents" (173). The posthuman cybernetic body has been long represented as monstrous with its prosthetic attachments and the fusion of the human with that of the machine. Further, this fusion "of the organic and the synthetic portrays the cyborg as a metaphor for pollution" (J. Clarke 36). The polluted body was unaccepted and was considered disassembled. The monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus,* invited historical and 'hysterical' responses to bodily fragmentation, regeneration and medical technologies. The representations of the novel in films and other texts which followed it were marred with similar allegations of monstrosity. Figures who destabilised the conceptions of what it means to be a human were referred to as monsters. This theorisation continued until the publication of Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," where Haraway argues that the word "monster" "shares more than its root with the word, to demonstrate. Monsters signify" (*Simians*

226). Haraway considers monsters as "boundary creatures" who destabilise the various binaries of Western narratives.[1]

A nuanced understanding of the posthuman requires the proper knowledge of the ontological dimension of technology. Haraway's feminist theory has brought out the racist and sexist outlines in which the discourse on "techne" has been historically pronounced. Approaching technology—bodily, scientific, or otherwise—through the anthropomorphic paradigm consists of the risk of turning it into a stigma for new forms of exclusions. To osmose with the ontology of cybernetic beings, a fundamental deconstruction of the human as a fixed idea is necessary. The species supremacy which is associated with humans should be deconstructed for a more encompassing multispecies existence. This will enable people to move away from the human-centred worldview to imagine and speculate about multiple futures concerning multiple species. Posthumanism argues that technology is neither the Other to be feared and to rebel against nor should it be oppressed. The posthumanism addressed here does not consider technology to be sustaining the God-like characteristics that transhumanism attributes to it. Instead, it addresses technology as something which might guarantee humanity a place in post-biological futures. In order to do so, it takes into consideration the technology which is imbibed with humanitarian values and is concerned about a radical inclusive future focused on cultural values and social ethics. This notion of technogenesis includes technology in the process of co-evolution with human development.[2]

[1] Donna Haraway's "boundary creature" refers to embodied agents that exist within protopic communities precisely by disturbing the rigid binaries of the human/non-human, biological/technological, mind/body, and normal/abnormal/paranormal.

[2] In her book *How We Think?: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Katherine Hayles describes "technogenesis" as a process in which the human brain, technology, language, and culture of the society co-evolved effectively.

3.1 Who is the Posthuman Subject?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* represented the idea of experimental attempts to create artificial creatures. The monstrosity and the abject being of the creature have initiated conversations about referring to it as a cyborg.[3] Although it was composed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the creature resists the naturalised subjectivity and embraces the horrors of reproductive technologies. Judith Butler's theory on naturalised subjectivity focuses on how this resistance is carried out in the cultural and political context. Butler argues that the body is never free of an imaginary construction and that the limits of the body are defined within the naturalised subjectivity. However, Frankenstein's monster sets himself free from the fantasised body image and embodies the subjectivity produced by new reproductive technologies. By disrupting the technological/organic binary of the corporeality of the body, the creature stands in stark opposition to the Enlightenment concept, which gives privilege to the mind over the body. The creature's body, which becomes out of control when abandoned on the night of his creation, becomes an epitome of monstrosity in ways that redefine the Enlightenment concepts of reproduction, technology and the body. The messy laboratory birth of the creature invokes the disruptive potential of new reproductive technologies and rewrites *Frankenstein*'s reproductive politics. The revelation that the human body is the sum total of all its separate parts rendered the creature both dead and undead. Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" introduced the cyborg as a figure of "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (*Manifesto* 14). The cyborg belongs to a "postgender world" and does not depend on Victor Frankenstein to save it. Haraway argues that Frankenstein's monster is not gender-neutral but is overshadowed by polarity and

[3] I use the term 'abject' in the sense Margrit Shildrick uses it to challenge the notions of invalidation. Disabled people are often referred to as abject bodies because they posit a challenge to the corporeal imaginings of the human body.

patriarchy. She remarks that the "hideous progeny"[4] should have had another shape, another gesture so that it could resist representation. One of the significant aspects of posthumanism is the rejection of representation since it considers all beings to be constantly in flux. Instead, Frankenstein's created monster was at the centre and was, therefore, unable to be a fluid category, which Haraway and Derrida give preference to. The monster had a generic, universal shape. However, the female companion who was destroyed by Frankenstein resisted representation and perhaps would have been a better fit for a cyborg. By being dismembered, the female creature avoided being created according to the desire of her male counterpart. Haraway envisioned the cyborg to initiate "joint kinship with animals and machines" and possess a partial identity (*Manifesto* 15). The female cyborg in Jackson's hypertext becomes a techno-body[5] and resembles what Haraway refers to as the cyborg: something which Mary Shelley's female monster was prevented from becoming. The digital and biotechnological reproducibility contributes to the posthuman aspect of the monster in Jackson's hypertext. Her body is disassembled and reassembled, highlighting her multiplicity. This hybridised identity of the cyborg is referred to as "posthuman" by Hayles: "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" (*How We Became Posthuman?* 3).

[4] There is a point of reference for this relationship in the original text: Mary Shelley conjures something comparable in the Prelude to the 1831 release of *Frankenstein*, where she distinguishes her novel with its Creature and (with unreasonable affection) names it her "terrible offspring."

[5] Anne Balsamo refers to the modern reconceptualisation of the human body as the "techno-body." She defines "techno-body" as "a boundary figure belonging simultaneously to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning—'the organic/natural' and 'the technological/cultural'" (Balsamo 5). According to Paul Sheehan, the techno-body could be seen as the cyborg. Such bodies surpass all physical restrictions of the human body and move beyond biological and material existence.

Throughout the thesis, I refer to the protagonist of *Patchwork Girl* as the female cyborg or the patchwork girl, and not as the female creature or monster because of her hybridised identity and posthumanist qualities.

In the introductory paragraph of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley refers to Victor Frankenstein's creation by using a phrase from the Bible: "And now once again, I bid my hideous progeny to go forth and prosper" (10). With this phrase, Mary Shelley turns from an author to the progenitor of the monster in her novel. It is the contradiction within the Biblical metaphor "hideous progeny" that acts as a source of inspiration for the contemporary writer Shelley Jackson to produce a new potentially 'monstrous' version of literature called the 'hypertext.' In *Patchwork Girl*, Victor Frankenstein's aborted second creation, the female monster, whom he violently tears up mid-construction, is sewn up by the author, Mary Shelley herself, and then she engages in a love affair with her creation before the monster sets out for America to start a new life. *Patchwork Girl* centres on the story of the female cyborg who succeeds in escaping to the New World and survives for 175 years. She is a cyborg who is queer, dis-proportioned, and physically and mentally scarred. In Mary Shelley's original novel, Victor Frankenstein wanted to replace the process of natural reproduction by creating life with the help of the scientific instruments in his laboratory so that he could find all the mysteries of life, which were "the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world" (Shelley 80). This particular instance is the real monstrosity in the narrative, as the desire to surpass the boundaries of the mind leads to the creation of a cyborg. Frankenstein's intention to escape death and control life is nothing but a caricature of the Promethean myth, which is centred on the autonomy and privilege that the mind offers over the body.

There definitely is a relationship between monstrosity, reproduction, and feelings of anxiety, and this is the link Jackson develops in her representation of the cyborg. *Patchwork Girl* not only evokes the terrifying monstrosity of Frankenstein's messy laboratory birth, but it also embraces this monstrosity in celebrating the technologies that made the patchwork girl's messy creation possible. Jackson's cyborg exploits Frankenstein's fear of monstrous reproduction and the Enlightenment morals that drive this fear by exploiting the dualisms in definitions of reproduction and technology. Jackson's text embraces a different type of cyborg than the one most frequently allied with new reproductive technologies. The fact that Victor Frankenstein aborts his second creation alludes to the posthumanist ideals of gender fluidity. Being a man, Victor Frankenstein undertakes the process of abortion, which had been so far associated with the female. New reproductive technologies hailed by Mary Shelley reinscribe the procedures of reproduction. Ernest Larsen states that in Mary Shelley's novel, there exists a caricature of male pregnancy in which "a man gives birth to a living, breathing, speaking, eight-foot abortion" (238). This raises concerns about the gender of Frankenstein because in order to be able to give birth and abort, Frankenstein should have been a woman. Also, the female cyborg in Jackson's hypertext bears a resemblance to Victor Frankenstein himself. Is it possible that he is also a cyborg, as Jackson mentions, "part male, part female"? This could explain how being a man, he undergoes an abortion. Or the fact that Frankenstein's character is modelled on Mary Shelley herself, and during the process of creation of the text, Mary Shelley juxtaposes the creator with her creation. This is parallel to the juxtaposition in Jackson's hypertext, where Mary Shelley and her female cyborg become one when the cyborg stitches Mary Shelley's body parts into her body. The posthumanist tenets of *Patchwork Girl* are, thus, based on the representations of new scientific and reproductive technologies in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The section named "a quilt" contains just two lexias,[6] both showing a similar statement from *Frankenstein* as Victor Frankenstein sets out to create a female companion for his monster. Mary Shelley is forging her links to create the female cyborg: "I began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation: magic lanterns, peep show boxes, waking dreams, geometrical demonstrations, philosophical doctrines, fortifications and impediments, cartographic surveys, and engineering machines of all sorts" (Jackson "a quilt").[7] This act of creating the cyborg out of whatever materials were available could be compared with "bricolage" which is the skill of using whatever available at hand to create something new. In his book *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss focuses on the work of the bricoleur, who puts pre-existing things together to create something that they were originally not meant for. Bricolage, therefore, is not concerned with any kind of coherence, and the fact that it *patches* things up results in the creation of something that is provisional and always shifting. Derrida takes up this further in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play" and argues that the idea of bricolage should be read as a new concept that destabilises the idea of a centre, an origin, and the truth. Rather, it paves the way for putting things together in an infinite manner. The fluidity and the indeterminacy of bricolage make it so important, and it can be seen in the way Mary Shelley creates her monster and also the way Shelley Jackson creates her hypertext. In both cases, putting random things together in a patched-up manner turns out to be the essence of their creations. The female cyborg, as well as the hypertext, represent a disassemblage, which makes them posthumanist in their form and composition.

[6] The term "lexia" is used by Roland Barthes to denote "blocks of text." George Landow further develops this to indicate the screen in a hypertext, that usually resembles the 'page' of a fictional work.

[7] *Patchwork Girl* does not contain the traditional page numbers. The portions which I cite are indicated in brackets by their corresponding links and pathway, as found in the map provided by Jackson within the narrative.

Edward Barrett mentions in *Text, ConText, and HyperText* that with the advancement of technological communication, there have been effective changes in the very design of documentation. The synthesis of new technology and research with writing provides a unique conceptualisation of the term 'hypertext.' In his article "A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing, and the Indeterminant," Ted Nelson introduced the term 'hypertext': "Let me introduce the word 'hypertext' to mean a body of written or pictorial material interconnected in such a complex way that it could not conveniently be presented or represented on paper" (13). Hypertexts permit reading texts with advanced features like "enhanced functionality, customized views and improved knowledge synthesis and representation" (Barrett 93). Given the choices in the narrative, which allow multiple paths of experience and the way that the readers must tap on various portions to explore the content, it gives them a God-like power to share in typifying the story that the author is writing.

In *The Thousand Plateaus*, Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze examine writing as flow and as releasing our desires and hopes about rearticulating the writing space—a space where writing doesn't transcend but roams outward and is expansive. They argued in favour of a space which frees the words from the page, the text from its linear structure, and the distinctions between a writer and a reader. Deleuze and Guattari demanded a writing space which would delimit the abilities to create and imagine new paths and connections. In hypertexts, authors pursue multiple meanings through a term, a character, or even a place. Hypertexts, in a way, work to exploit the symbolic power of non-linearity, non-necessity, of contingent relationships. The links present in hypertext are not generated based on the assumption that all the users will reach an understanding of the text in a similar manner. In an environment like hypertext and digital media, Haraway's argument for a sense of kinship—predicated on "affinity, not identity" is applicable. Haraway

writes that the relationships among the writer, reader and the text are not based upon the dominance of any one of the participants—instead, an affinity kinship should be accounted for the emerging practices of local relationships. An affinity kinship is an idea that undermines the traditional binarised power equation between the reader and the text. It claims that the relationships between writer, reader and text are not based on the dominance of one of these but rather negotiations among them. Political and social responsibility becomes central to Haraway's concept of affinity kinship. Thinking through hypertexts, the writers, readers and the texts are independent of any obligations, and this emancipation allows them to reciprocate the responsibility of co-creating the hypertext with its author. Hypertext theorists constantly look forward to refiguring our understanding of ourselves as contradictory beings constituted by language, culture and technology. As a result, hypertexts become a space of community through the technological capabilities of building new connections.

Patchwork Girl consists of five main parts: "story," "graveyard," "journal," "crazy quilt" and "body of text," each of these is further divided into several sections, and the links intertwine them with the others. Each section leads down a trail that takes the story towards numerous paths through different connecting words and pictures. Where the work begins is left to the user to choose. The four different maps help structure the narrative and provide some orientation to the user. But no matter how many times the users reassemble the lexias, they will disintegrate, and the process of creation and structuring has to begin anew. When the user launches the Storyspace software, which is pivotal to reading *Patchwork Girl*, the first image that pops up on the screen is a drawing of the cyborg's patched-up body, which stands for the discontinuous structure of the

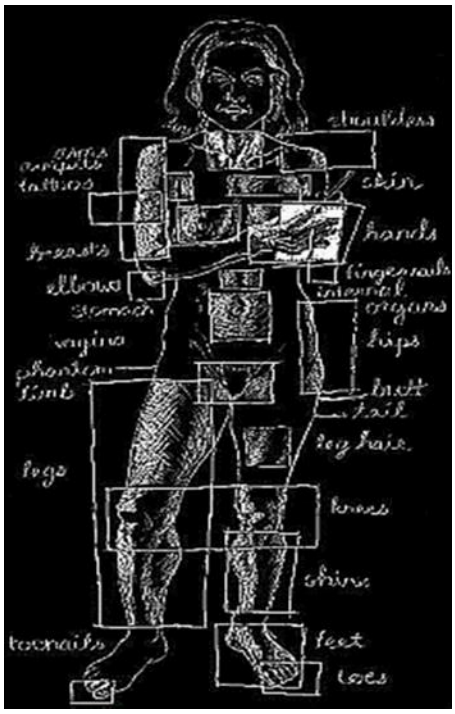

Figure 2. "my body" lexia: displayed before the section "graveyard" from Patchwork Girl. 1995. Eastgate Systems

work itself (see Fig. 2). Such an image suggests the interruption of an idealistic and transcendental self-unity of a body and enables the sharing of a universe through an aesthetic of touch that places the body of the cyborg at the intersection between sense and matter. From the link labelled "a graveyard," the reader is led to an apparent epitaph for the patchwork girl that reads, "Here Lies a Head, Trunk, Arms (Right and Left), and Legs (Right and Left) as well as divers Organs appropriately Disposed. May they Rest in Piece" (Jackson "headstone").[8] Here, the reader finds a list of different parts of the patchwork girl's body; each body part is linked to a brief description of the part's previous owner: for instance, the left hand belonged to Dominique, the pickpocket; the left leg belonged to Jane, a nanny; the lungs were those of Thomasina, the mountain-girl; and the liver was of Roderick, the importer of beautiful fabrics. At this point, the users may choose whatever order they wish to reconstruct the body, stitching the parts together differently with each reading of the hypertext. When the user clicks on any other word within the lexia "Interrupting D" in the "broken accents" section, the lexia "birth" opens up. In "birth," the creature claims to have been born many times, including both "under the needle, and under the pen," thus putting hypertext and paper side by side in clear opposition. After this lexia, the users find themselves having to choose between six possible paths.

[8] Each of these body parts leads us to different lexias and images, which tells the story of the various people whose "monstrous assemblage" of body parts make up the discursive body of the patchwork girl.

3.2 Shelley/Shelley and the Collapse of Other Binaries

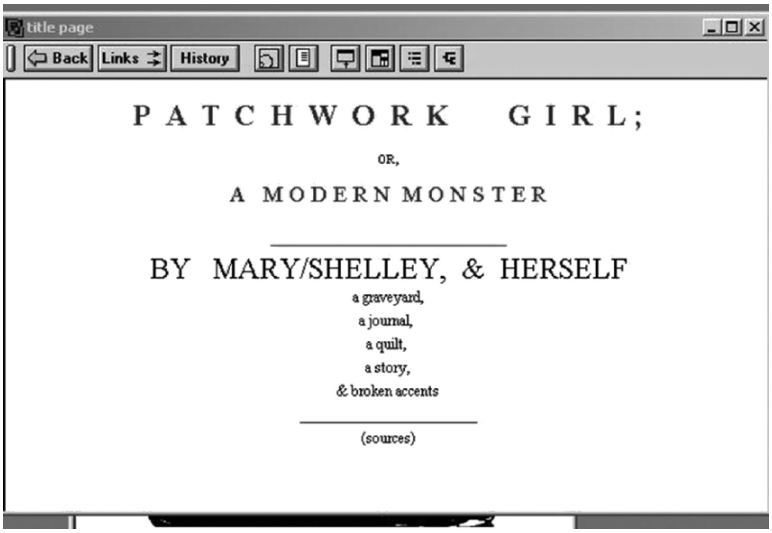

Figure 3. Title page of Patchwork Girl. 1995. Eastgate Systems

In her article "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine," Judith Halberstam argues that the concept of Haraway's cyborg is parallel to the concept of femininity since both are considered to be artificial manufactures of humanity, and there is nothing natural about the attributions of the category of the woman and the cyborg. The making of Eve from Adam's ribcage has somehow been considered artificial, and this common characteristic of automation of women and cyborgs can be regarded as a "coded masquerade" (Halberstam 449). The title-page of *Patchwork Girl* clearly represents that this is a collaborative work of fiction by Mary Shelley and Shelley Jackson: "Mary/Shelley and herself" (see Fig.3). Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl* deals with the feminist cyborg. For a long time, robots and Artificial Intelligence have been considered gender-neutral. Haraway also envisioned the cyborg to be "a creature in a postgender world." Further, revisionist mythmaking has been crucial to the socio-political struggle in the field of poststructuralist feminism, especially concerning the notion of the 'écriture féminine.'[9] Jackson follows this trajectory of rewriting and retelling through the power of language. Her figuration of

[9] Écriture féminine is a term coined by the French feminist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." It refers to writings specifically by women. Cixous aimed to separate out a genre of literary writing that deviates from traditional masculine styles of writing, one which instead examines the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and difference in language and text.

the cyborg through the use of hypertext offers a new understanding of gender. Both the cyborg and the mode of hypertext deconstruct the binaries concerning patriarchy by using technology and gender. Haraway insists that the myth of the cyborg is parallel to the feminist idea of myth-making. The cyborg operates as a medium to challenge male-centred "colonizing" myths of origins in the space of feminine writing without building a hierarchy based on otherisations (Haraway, *Simians* 175). It evokes a power to survive by retelling myths of origin and subverting the dominant discourse of Western culture. Debunking the myths of original wholeness, the figuration of the cyborg promotes disintegration and imperfection that incorporates all kinds of bodies and discourses.

In the film *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), the Bride is portrayed to be an artificial creature created for the male monster who desires a companion of his own species. The Bride is then created by Victor Frankenstein and Dr. Pretorious and resembles the monster—a patchwork of organs with an "artificially developed, human brain." Grown from what Pretorious has called 'seed' from her male counterpart, it alludes to the creation of Eve from Adam's ribcage. However, the Bride lacks self-identity and becomes a mere reanimation of the male creature. She is never allowed to speak on screen and even lacks a name of her own. Her creation and destruction are narrated from Frankenstein's point of view and are described as "a filthy process" (Shelley 126). It is in Shelley Jackson's novel that the female cyborg gains her self-identity, and a new self is fashioned from reconstructed flesh. What one Shelley (Mary) left incomplete was taken up and completed by another Shelley (Jackson), and in the process, the posthuman turn gains its resemblance with a fully functional female cyborg, which does not depend on her male counterpart to come into

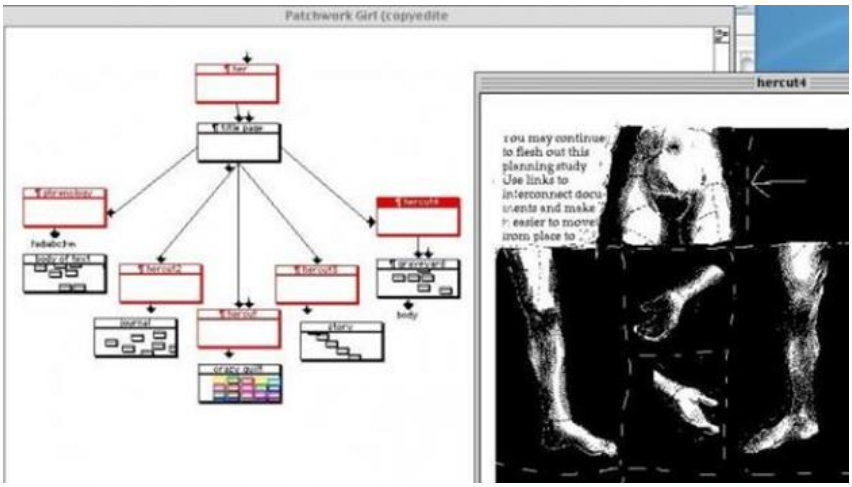

Figure 4. " hercut4" lexia from Patchwork Girl. 1995. Eastgate Systems

existence. Barbara Johnson claims in her article "My Monster/My Self" that Mary Shelley's novel is autobiographical to a large extent, and the novel represents "the story of the experience of writing *Frankenstein*" (7). Adding to this, Katherine Hayles argues that the incomplete narrative of the female monster becomes a reminder of something that Mary Shelley herself was unable to write. This inability of Mary Shelley is transformed into Shelley Jackson's ability to give the female monster a voice, identity, and her own narrative. In the process, another binary of Shelley/Shelley collapses and results in a hopeful narrative of posthumanism. The cyborg in Jackson's novel is a patchwork of body parts from different people, and her stitches remain in stark contrast with the fully draped new Bride in the film. This new self-image of the cyborg represents a form of resonance between the long-established binaries of self and non-self, order and non-equilibrium, and body and consciousness. In the process, Frankenstein's female monster evolves into a cultural icon which is also imbued with meaning. When the monster calls herself a "mixed metaphor," she is not only drawing our attention to her hybridity (both biological and hypertextual) but also all the "borrowed parts, annexed territories" which, like Frankenstein's creation, survive on their own (see Fig. 4). In her book, *In the Beginning, She Was,* Luce Irigaray similarly evokes the hybridity of the female body by stressing on the fact that the female body could never be seized or grasped because it is "[t]oo

multiple, mobile, fluid" (66). Irigaray argues that the woman always vanishes elsewhere before the man can reach her. By doing so, she resists the rigid boundaries of her corporeality and defies her subjugation. This echoes the female body of Jackson's hypertext, where no matter how many times the users try to arrange the links and give shape to the body of the cyborg, it disintegrates, and they have to begin the entire process anew.

Jackson's cyborg departs from the systematic treatment of monsters in fiction concerning their corporeality. In various ways, this hypertext foregrounds the materiality of the non-normative body. The patchwork girl is as much a biological organism as an artificial construct—a cybernetic being. Similar to the figuration of a cyborg, the patchwork girl resists the corporeal boundaries between the self and the other. Her patched-up body parts cannot be precisely singled out, and they become part of her embodied self. The cyborgian embrace of fluid and flexible identities without being constrained by corporeal realities enables Jackson's patchwork girl to debunk and reclaim her identity. The two essential manifestations of the creative act, the creation of a human's life and artistic creation, are expressed through the metaphors of traditional female artworks such as sewing, weaving, and quilting. As Haraway observes, "myth and tool constitute each other," and communication technologies and biotechnologies are the most crucial tools for recrafting our bodies (205–6). Therefore, the monster is made "like a quilt," pieced together from multiple parts and becomes a cyborg—a hybrid, multi-layered metaphor for body and text.[10] *Patchwork Girl*

[10] In piecing together the monster and the subsequent stories of each of the body parts and their owners, the users are creating a hybrid of body and text. In the section "Derrida," Jackson writes: "If all things are called back to their authors, that is Mary, Mary, I know you want me back, but I shall be no more than a heap of letters, sender unknown, when I return" (Jackson "Derrida"). With this, Jackson explains her own approach of hypertextuality as the return of the body. Katherine Hayles argues:

> The fact that this sewing takes place within the fiction makes Mary Shelley a character written by Shelley Jackson rather than an author who herself writes. This situation becomes more complex when Mary Shelley

recounts the story through delineations of the parts of a female body that are sewn together through texts and images. The objective is not just to influence the users to understand the overall structure of the hypertext but also to understand each of the pieces that must be 'patched' together so as to make one unified structure. Each section leads down a trail that takes the story on numerous paths through different connecting words and pictures. Singular segments additionally investigate the lives of a number of women whose carcasses contributed to the body parts of the cyborg. By "sewing" her very own words into the entry, Jackson exhibits the real creation of a composed, patched, unique blanket. The section "a story" recounts the biography of the female cyborg who leaves Europe and is headed for North America. Like a postmodern frontier woman, she adventures her way through American suburbs and the city until she finds in Death Valley her definitive goal:

> I want to rip my own self apart, dry into hard shreds of jerky with an insinuating stink, divvied up by ants. But I remind myself that I've been carrion before. I have known what it's like to be convinced of one thing: decay. Then I was thrown into movement and doubt and doubt and movement will be my life, as long as it lasts. (Jackson "a story")

As her physical segments are dismantled step by step, her inheritance is to proceed with Mary Shelley's work. She sees that hyperspace is the perfect condition for écriture féminine or female composition. As Shelley Jackson writes in her article "Stitch Bitch," a sort of companion piece to *Patchwork Girl*, "Hypertext then, is what literature has edited out: the feminine." In Jackson's hypertext, the feminine characteristics of the patchwork girl and the digital data intersect. There is a recreation of femininity using cyberspatial representations of hybridity. Hypertexts evoke the literal and metaphorical bodily experiences of the female body. The combination of the textual

---

is shown both to sew and write the monster, further entangling fiction and metafiction. ("Flickering Connectivities" 153)

descriptions with images of the female body provokes an affective response from the users. Further, the consideration of the female as a bodily category which disrupts order and enforces chaos could be seen parallelly with the figuration of the body of hypertexts. In Jackson's hypertext, not only does Mary Shelley create the patchwork girl from the body parts of different people and animals, but also the hypertext itself is created with a combination of citations and materials derived from multiple sources, leading to multiple pathways for the users. In the section entitled "& broken accents," the patchwork girl pays tribute to her physical mothers, the woman from whom she got her organs, and, in the process, she provides a scrutinising cross-examination of her postmodernist personality. The metaphor of both the monster and the unique patched blanket is made literal through the formal aesthetic procedures of the work, with the corporeality of the hypertext taken as a focal and mindful concern.

3.3 Posthumanism as Differential Ontology

Differential ontology includes the nature of identity by considering the concept of difference as foundational and constitutive rather than considering it as merely an observable relation between entities. Differential ontology examines the given identity as "constituted on the basis of the ever-changing nexus of relations in which it is found, and thus, identity is a secondary determination, while difference or the constitutive relations that make up identities is primary" (Cisney). It implies that to gain a fundamental understanding of things, the target should be not rooted in identity but in difference. Differential ontologists Jacques Derrida and Giles Deleuze argued that identities are always constituted on the basis of difference in itself. They worked within a framework of specific thematic critiques and assumptions, and based on those, they argued that difference has never been recognised "as a legitimate object of philosophical thought" (Cisney).

Derrida argues that the history of philosophy harbours metaphysics of presence, and the Western tradition operates by categorising conceptual binaries such as good/evil, subject/object, mind/body, life/death, and masculine/feminine. Metaphysics first establishes these binaries and then makes it very clear which is the appropriate of the two in either its spatial or temporal sense. According to Derrida, the presence, which is the foundation of philosophical certainty, is based on différance. It then becomes a continuous process with no origin and a constituting-disruption of presence. Derrida claims that it is through différance that all modes of presence are possible, including the binary categories. While speaking of origins, he implies that our efforts at meaning have somehow fallen away from a presumed moment of innocence—a moment of presence. He argues that différance is a "non-origin which is originary" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 203). In a sense, différance is already contaminated at its very origin; hence, it becomes a non-originary origin. As a differential ontologist, Derrida critiques the metaphysical tradition, and in that process, he attempts to expose the play of force underlying the constitution of meaning and opens new trajectories of thinking, rethinking the very concept of the concept, and forging a path "toward the unnameable" (Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon* 66).

The conceptual binaries which Derrida mentions are the ones that are consistently rejected in posthumanist theories. The posthuman is a recurrent figure in the cultural imaginary, which disrupts humanism's universalising categories. In the philosophical posthumanist debate, the posthuman is not only seen as a potential evolutionary step for the human but is imagined to be a shift in perspectives: "from the onto-epistemological level to the ethical and the socio-political, the biotechnological, and the existential ones" (Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* 185). The posthuman destabilises the limits and symbolic boundaries imposed by the Enlightenment's notion of the human. Various dualisms such as human/animal, human/machine, body/mind, and

subject/object are re-investigated through a perception which does not work on traditional thought. Further, the posthuman deconstructs the clear division between life/death, organic/synthetic, and natural/artificial. Posthumanism rejects any type of hierarchy or strict dualism; rather, it encompasses a hybrid, processual perception of existence. The posthuman, as I argue throughout this thesis, is a hybrid figure situated at the intersection of fiction and theory. In particular, the posthuman unites fiction and theory's mutual grappling with the profound changes to the human condition. It persistently queers conventional ideas of the human. Both as a literary device and as a critical concept, iterations of the posthuman queer the traditional human subject and the humanist structures that support normative anthropocentric privilege. Further, Derrida's concept of "non-origin" is in tune with the posthuman. Haraway argues that the cyborg has no sense of origin in the Western sense: the onto-epistemological openness of posthumanism places the posthuman in a hybrid vision of humanity itself. This cyborg not only subverts what counts as natural but also, in Haraway's words: "has no origin story in the Western sense" (*Manifesto* 8). The posthuman does not acknowledge a point of origin or a point of departure either. By resisting the myth of origin, the posthuman resists the binaries of life/death. It becomes characterised as an entity which has no associations with pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness.

According to Deleuze, differential ontology is a necessary and fundamental imprecision that accompanies traditional metaphysics. He argues that the function of metaphysics is to consider the nature of the thing based on some essentialist parameters which necessarily filter its own understanding of the thing. He argues that no matter how much we compound and multiply the concepts characterising a thing, we can never think about every aspect of it. It becomes crucial for our ontology to structurally and essentially comprehend the constitution of the thing. Deleuze

attempts to formulate a notion of différance that is a "constitutive play of forces underlying the constitution of identities; purely relational, that is, non-negational, and hence, not in any way subordinate to the principle of identity" (Cisney). Différance becomes an ontology that considers the conditions of identity in such a way as not to reconstruct the presuppositions about identity but to consider the conditions of real experience. Deleuze's ontology challenges the notion of identity by recognising its transcendental features, such as the multiplicities produced by the virtual-actual movement. However, these transcendental features echo through different forms of thinking and produce different multiplicities while sharing common structures. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti argues that the posthuman is a materially embedded, multi-layered, nomadic being which engages in inter-relations with human and non-human agents. This characterisation of the posthuman as an entity representing multiplicity is central to posthumanism. Additionally, virtuality and its relationship to actuality are crucial to Deleuze's differential ontology. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze indicates that virtuality plays a central role in the way it binds difference, multiplicity and becoming 'together.' He argues that difference is a form of differentiation between two ideas: one which is virtually differentiated and another which is actuality. This distinction implies the significance of the virtual-actual movement in the process of differentiation and how it contributes to the creation of multiplicities. Consequently, Deleuze explains that differentiation entails a "movement that creates multiplicities, which are composed of actual and virtual elements" (Deleuze and Parnet 112). Deleuze's differential ontology imagines identity in the sense of being identical and also implicitly relies on its transcendental features to show how multiplicities come into existence.

Posthumanism emerged out of the radical deconstruction of the "human" by postmodernism and began as a philosophical as well as a political venture in the late 1960s, which

turned into an epistemological one in the 1990s. Posthumanism rejects anthropocentrism, founded upon hierarchical construct based on speciesist assumptions, and instead invites multiplicities. In *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Ferrando argues that in order to become posthuman, one needs to reflect on their existence and the material, dynamic, and responsive process involved in it. Ferrando envisions the posthuman to be understood in pluralistic rather than in generalised and universalised terms. In order to become posthuman, decentering the human in relation to the non-human is crucial. Ferrando argues that posthumanism accesses "an epistemological standpoint through the feminist policies of situating the self and acknowledging the self as plural and relational" (*Philosophical Posthumanism* 23). Moving towards a pluralistic viewpoint, the posthuman then gets rid of the triumphalist claims of Enlightenment. Further, the process involves thorough rejections of rigid and absolute dualisms, particularly the ones that lead to hierarchical conceptions such as human/animal and mind/body. By doing so, it becomes possible to be aware of the implicit and explicit biases and privileges. This radical deconstruction of the human identity enables us to reassess our location as open networks. Posthumanism then acts as a praxis, a philosophy of mediation, which manifests post-dualistic, post-centralising multiplicities in the sense that they acknowledge alterity and recognise themselves in alterity.

3.4 Introducing the Protopian Theory of Posthumanism

"Technologies are extensions of our mind and our biology. They should expand, not bind, human potential: intellectually, physically, creatively, spiritually, emotionally."

(Bielskyte)

The transhumanist dependence on technology is often dismissed by posthumanist thinkers. They consider technology to be something which might guarantee humanity a place in post-biological futures. This notion includes technology in the process of co-evolution with human development.

The protopian theory of posthumanism emerges from such an understanding of technology. It does not look at technology as some God-like entity but as something which could be used for the betterment of society in general. The protopian vision of technology rejects colonial and capitalist exploitation but employs technology that has a serious consideration for the biosphere and the cultural aspects. It envisions using technology in such a way that humanitarian values do not get marginalised in the process. Instead, it uses technology to patch things up, to fulfil the existing lack and to provide solutions to long-existing problems. The protopian state considers self-betterment and is close to reality. It does not look at fantasy or the imaginary but rather reminds us that we should be accountable for our needs and chase the better. Frequently, the rise and proliferation of cybernetic concepts and images have run parallelly with older evolutionary ideas, pitting the humanist image of the human against the monstrosity of the posthuman. As a matter of fact, the posthuman does not transcend the human as the discourse of the human has imagined transcendence. Rather, the posthuman transcends the vision of disconnection that has isolated the human for so long in their own conceit of uniqueness. The posthuman is the human metamorphosed by reconnection to the worldly and systemic conditions of its evolutionary possibility. This dissertation on posthumanist corporeality and its future is based on the protopian view of the betterment of the present condition after rejecting the utopian and dystopian theories of posthumanism.

The utopian posthumanist theory argues that the world could be a better place only through the use of human enhancement technologies. The posthuman is supposedly far superior to any human that has ever lived, and the posthuman future will be much better than anything we have ever experienced. This is closer to transhumanism without the species supremacy that is ingrained in the transhumanist theory. The theorists supporting the utopian posthumanist stance are Hans

Moravec, Katherine Hayles, and Ray Kurzweil. In an important example of posthumanist work, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*, Hans Moravec imagines a scenario in which human consciousness is downloaded into a computer, and everything continues normally. Cary Wolfe, a leading figure in the emerging fusion of critical theory, animal studies and the posthumanities, approvingly cites Katherine Hayles's critique of Moravec:

> When Moravec imagines 'you' choosing to download yourself into a computer, thereby obtaining through technological mastery the ultimate privilege of immortality, he is not abandoning the autonomous liberal subject but is expanding its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman. (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman?* xv)

Moravec then makes his posthuman figure an expansion of the human, and for him, the advent of the posthumanist age does not necessarily mean that we have to get rid of the human species but can very well encompass them into the new age. Ray Kurzweil examines an important step in the inexorable evolutionary process of the union of humans and machines. The skills and knowledge possessed by our brains are supposed to be combined with that of the machine's greater capacity, speed and knowledge-sharing ability, enabling us to transcend our biological limitations and amplify our creativity. These theorists maintain a radical view of the future course of human development—a dramatic culmination of centuries of technological ingenuity into our ultimate destiny.

The dystopian posthumanist theory considers the advent of posthumanism as an instigator for bringing an end to humanism. It argues that posthumanism would make the existence of humans desolate and futile. The dystopian posthumanist theorists look at posthumanism as a warfare-driven resurgence of xenophobia and biosphere collapse. They argue that posthumanism is necessarily anti-human. Instead of accepting and realising the potential of posthumanism to

bring a change from the presence/absence paradigm of humanism, the dystopian theory views the posthuman as the annihilator of the human subject. In *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, Nick Bostrom mentions that if machine brains exceed human brains in universal intelligence, then this new superintelligence could substitute humans as the dominant lifeform on earth. Michael Hauskeller argues that the enhanced human of the posthumanist imagination becomes better at manipulating the world. This "unnature" of the enhanced human, the attainment of which is the goal of the whole radical human enhancement project, not only goes along with a complete naturalisation of the human but also ultimately puts an end to our existence not just as humans, but even as the kind of human or post-human that posthumanists would like to see us become. It is our very capacity for technological invention that has secured us such a dominant position in the world which may ultimately lead to "The End of Man." Robert Pepperell argues that the 'posthuman condition' indicates the end of 'humanism,' that long-held belief in the infallibility of human power and the conceited belief in our superiority and uniqueness. With the emergence of distinct mechanical life-forms, the existing life forms have to stop their survival indefinitely.

The American futurist Kevin Kelly coined the term "protopia": "Protopia is a state that is better today than yesterday, although it might be only a little better." Kelly's initial idea of the concept came from the term "pronoia" (the opposite of "paranoia"), which refers to an exuberant feeling that the entire world is rooting for this singular thing. Unlike utopia and dystopia, protopia has always included the pronoun "we." Monika Bielskyte writes in "Protopia Futures [Framework]" that the ""we" of protopia is everyone involved in putting this together, yes, but also the collaborators past and future." Protopian posthumanism then aims at a collaborative cultural framework of inclusivity, keeping aside the historical prevalence of the origin of the

species. It has been influenced by thinkers at the forefront of Black feminism and Indigenous, Queer and Disability activism, such as Aime Cesaire, Angela Y. Davis, Ruha Benjamin, Alice Wong, Arundhati Roy, and Adrienne Maree Brown. They look forward to a future free from discrimination, alienation, fascism, xenophobia, racism and biosphere collapse. A utopian future does not address these issues and, rather, portrays a 'perfect' existence which becomes close to a form of critical enquiry. Similarly, the transhumanist utopia expands the idea of the Enlightenment into the projected future without considering the injustices and problems of the present times. Such a techno-utopian mindset looks forward to limitless economic growth, immortality and scientific and technological advancements. Both utopian and dystopian futurist discourses propose singular, predetermined future visions. However, within the protopian discourse, "there is no singular "future" trajectory but rather a vast perimeter of many alternative futures." The visual media representations of dystopia generally depict a desolate, hopeless, futile future setting. Similarly, utopia represents a pure, unconstrained, monocultural future. In this way, both utopia and dystopia become the two sides of the same coin. They represent binaries and dualistic ideas of heaven/hell and good/evil. Protopian posthumanism does not only aim for the idea of a "better future," but at the same time, it takes into consideration radically inclusive futures with a focus on future cultural values and ethics. It strives to address past and present injustices rather than merely covering them with temporary, technological solutions. It is a continuous and evolving dialogue, rather than a destination, always iterative and is meant to be altered and expanded. Bielskyte states that the aim is "always to centre the previously marginalised perspectives, especially those at the intersection of Indigeneity, Queerness, and Disability. Above all, protopia explores visions of embodied HOPE, futures wherein we have come together, as imperfect as our condition is." Drawing from this, this thesis argues that the protopian future is not to be solely restricted to theoretical

imagination but to apply it to a possible posthumanist future of resourcing the present and moving towards the collaborative visions of liberation.

3.5 Protopian Posthumanism in *Patchwork Girl*

Protopian posthumanism considers its speculative futures to take place primarily on earth rather than in some alien space setting. Bielskyte writes, "We deem the narratives of life on our home planet the most urgent and compelling, and we critique the neo-colonial approaches to space expansion." Further, protopian visions are anchored in the principle of the celebration of physical presence, regenerative action, creativity and evolution of cultural values. The protopian vision prioritises biological over mechanical technologies as the only truly viable long-term strategy. The protopian future takes a significant departure from the technological route to a radical, inclusive future focused on cultural values and social ethics. It considers that mechanical technologies without any humanitarian values would always lead to dystopia. The obsession with the mechanical is rejected in protopian posthumanism, and instead, biology-centric ecosystem design is prioritised. The biological, along with its regenerative and equitable alternatives, is, thus, considered to be the instigator of evolution. It aims not just to build but also to grow. Protopian posthumanism endeavours to nurture cultures of equity, contribution and planetary mutuality. One of the most important principles of protopia is to resist the rigid gender/sexual binary and to explore a fluid space. Bielskyte argues that "the process of future-queering does not just benefit those living outside the oppressive, cis-heteronormative boundary; it opens the realm for all of us to be in a continuous becoming of our very own expanded selves."

In *Frankenstein*, at the desolate Orkney Isles, Victor Frankenstein's inner turmoil makes him tear the incomplete female monster to pieces: "The remains of the half-finished creature,

whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" (Shelley 130). He puts the remains in a basket and throws them into the depths of the sea. Erin Hawley argues that this was one of the darkest moments in the novel (218). This account of the female monster's creation and destruction exposes the horrors of reproductive technologies and the misguided notions of imagining the human body as a disposable thing. In Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, this instance of violence is replaced with a hopeful vision of regeneration and life. The female cyborg acts as a "boundary creature," in Haraway's terms, one who has "a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives" (Haraway, *Simians* 2). The cyborg disturbs and disrupts the boundaries of human/non-human, biological/technological, and natural/man-made. As opposed to other fictional cyborgs, who are often unable to navigate the gendered male/female boundary, the patchwork girl subverts those naturalised markers of gender. Further, she is often seen as the Other, a fusion of myth, biology and imagination. She represents the opportunities of the protopian posthuman future, shifting the anthropocentric, humanist perception of man towards the non-unitary Other.

The first three lexias within "a good story" focus on a section where Mary Shelley stitches a piece of her own skin onto the patchwork girl, and she, in turn, sews one of her scars onto Shelley's leg. Midway through the hypertext, the patchwork girl longs to hear from her creator again and stabs into her creator's piece of skin with a quill pen and then draws blood to use as ink: she uses an instrument of pen-and-paper writing to "activate" a skin graft that looks like a hyperlink. Having 'died' long back, Shelley does not write back, and the cyborg begins to disassemble, literally, without a creator to complete her whole. Her body parts start to fall off, and the stitches pop open until an acquaintance named Elsie arranges the disassembled parts together in a bathtub, and the creature "began to invent something new: a way to hang together without

pretending I was whole" (Jackson "I made myself over"). The complete disintegration of the body parts makes the monster helpless, and gradually, she comes to the understanding that she can no longer rely on Mary Shelley to make her whole through writing. The body is used as a metaphor for creating the hypertext. Jackson claims: "The body could be said to be the writing of the soul" ("body of text/body"). The hybrid subjectivity of the monster reflects the incoherent multiplicity of the hypertext. Similar to the collaborative nature of the hypertext (since the title page gives credit to both Mary Shelley and Shelley Jackson), the monster's body is also a collaborative creation of body parts from different people.

Protopia strongly advocates challenging ableist worldviews. It considers disability and neo-diversity to be the most significant creation nodes for networks of mutuality. It paves the way for a future which is more adaptable, nurturing, and flexible. Instead of continuing to draw generational lines, protopian posthumanism explores the inversions of 'conventional' hierarchies and recognises that posthumans are in a continuous process of learning from diverse lived experiences. It aims to radically expand each other's horizons and, most specifically, to uplift the voices of those previously silenced. Jackson's female cyborg continues the process of learning from her very creation. She has diverse experiences, travels, and goes on to live on her own terms. She encapsulates the protopian posthumanist view of a hopeful future with pluralistic possibilities.

3.6 Posthuman Affect in *Patchwork Girl*

Affect theory not only addresses the missing psycho-emotional dimension in social theory but responds to the ways in which the economic and cultural forces shape affect. Affect theory is interested in the ways in which we know things, perform ourselves and how we feel. Blackman and Venn argue that affect is felt at the level of the body but is always socially and culturally

conditioned. In that sense, affect is felt individually, materially and physiologically but is always being reproduced by its entanglements with the social world. A turn to affect also recognises the materiality of the body and the material relationships between human bodies and other non-human entities. This section analyses the material relationship in the context of *Patchwork Girl*.

Posthuman engagements with bodies, non-humans, technologies and materialities denote an assemblage of affect, which resists the Enlightenment definition of the human as the supreme species. The field of affect theory shapes contemporary critical thought and considers affect to be "independent of signification and meaning" (Leys 443). In posthumanism, affect theory refers to a dynamic principle that precedes human subjectivity and relates to feelings and experiences. This theory is marked by a double temporality: what precedes human life and what comes after the human. In *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi writes: "the extension into the posthuman is thus a bringing to full expression a prehumanity of the human. It is the limit-expression of what the human shares with everything it is not: a bringing out of its inclusion in matter" (128). In the nomenclature of affect theory, affects are considered as second-order feelings which emerge after the first-order emotions expire. The posthuman is, therefore, seen as an affective experience of the demise of feelings that were long associated with human subjectivity.

According to Katherine Hayles, posthumanist affects are a mixture of terror and pleasure, which Peter Vermeulen refers to as 'the sublime.' He describes the sublime to be traditionally used to describe feelings of terror which results in a pleasurable realisation of human sovereignty. Vermeulen, thus, reads posthumanist affect in the same vein as eighteenth-century aesthetics. He connects it to postmodernism and how Lyotard defines "sublime" as a feeling of terror by witnessing some spectacle which overwhelms human emotions. Hayles uses the same context to

argue that the union of humans and machines points to an affective dynamic of terror and pleasure. In Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, the lexia "a journal" contains anecdotal journal passages by Mary Shelley, recording her sentiments towards the female cyborg. The stun upon first seeing her very own creation is reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein's in Mary Shelley's original novel. As opposed to Frankenstein, Shelley, in Jackson's hypertext, figures out how to conquer her sublime fear by giving preference to her motherly affection.

Rosi Braidotti refers to humanism as a Eurocentric phenomenon with the human male at the centre. She uses the term "affect" in the context of erasing humanism's existing binaries of self/other, body/society, human/non-human, disabled/non-disabled, and so on. She talks about nomadic affectivity, which represents the desire to form connections with other humans, cyborgs, and monsters, which might result in a heteroglossia of the "embodied subject." Nomadic affectivity produces the naturalisation of multiple Others and has disrupted the Othering of women, animals, and non-humans. It represents desire as outward bound, which is related to a human's complex relations with a multiplicity of others. Braidotti relates this reorganisation of desire with Deleuzian machines as metaphors that express the multiple, non-linear, non-unitary and dynamic structures of subjectivity. The dynamic structure of affectivity is explained through the deeply technologically embedded global world, which blurs "fundamental categorical divides between self and other; a sort of heteroglossia of the species, a colossal hybridisation which combines cyborgs, monsters, insects and machines into a powerfully posthuman approach to what we used to call 'the embodied subject'" (Braidotti, "Affirming the Affirmative"). She invites the forging of new relationships between humans and non-humans because she believes through these relationships, major rearticulations of affect, emotion, and feeling will be found. Affect opens up the category of the human with possible inclusions from the contemporary techno-culture.

Braidotti considers affect, body and the environment as closely associated materialised phenomena. This has led to an 'ontological turn' which has resulted in an emergence of new-materialist ontologies and methodologies "which seek to explore both the material and semiotic forces which make up reality, without a return to essentialism" (Goodley et al., "Feeling Disability" 212). This ontological turn has paved the way for the posthuman affect of its reliance on the multiplicity of others. The posthuman is, therefore, considered to be a reaction and an alternative to humanism and its associated self-governing sovereign self. While the human category opens up as a distributed entity, affect is released from its binarised and othered distinctions. Braidotti's nomadic affectivity, thus, seeks to challenge our understanding of affect, body and the environment as intimately connected and materialised phenomena.

In *Patchwork Girl*, new life emerges from a collage of old, dead parts: the female cyborg is emblematic of Braidotti's proposition of reliance on multiplicity. While the boundary between death and life constantly collapses, the narrative devotes considerable attention to the space in between the boundary-collapse, exploring the self-governing sovereign self of the patchwork girl while she lives with her various embodiments. Shelley Jackson embraces nomadic affectivity by representing the desire to create a new subjectivity by combining things that already exist. The narrative uses a concept of reproduction outside of heterosexuality by representing Mary Shelley not only giving birth to the patchwork girl but also by showing it happening through the activity of sewing. Shelley single-handedly parents her creation while becoming her lover as well. Shelley states that she had sewn the cyborg until "the tiny black stitches wavered into script, and I began to feel I was writing" (Jackson "sewn"). This theme of sewing together body and meaning continues as Shelley confesses that she is both horrified and sexually attracted to her creation. This becomes symbolic when Shelley and the patchwork girl trade pieces of skin as a gesture of their

maternal/sexual relationship. The patchwork girl states: “she took the knife and laid her piece on me” (Jackson “join”). Through this exchange of skin, she partly becomes her creator and also learns to love herself. She states: “The graft took, the bit of skin still a living pink, and so I remember when I was Mary, and how I loved a monster and became one. I bring you my story, which is ours” (Jackson “us”). This initiates the collapse of other boundaries, such as monster/human, creator/creature, and mother/child, that deliberately disrupt traditional kinship structures. *Patchwork Girl* also introduces a new concept of reproductive technologies by not only having the cyborg be an assemblage of physical parts of different individuals but also by making her remember all the memories, characteristics and traits of everyone she is made up from. The patchwork girl is, therefore, a cyborg who contrasts the naturalised subjectivity by evoking multiplicity, both by having been born outside the confines of the heterosexual reproductive matrix and by embracing new reproductive technologies. She opens up the ‘human’ category in pluralistic levels and, in the process, collapses all binaries and resists the Otherisation of women, cyborgs, and queer individuals.

3.7 Syncopation in *Patchwork Girl*

The patchwork girl flaunts her fragmented body every time the author and the users resuscitate the hyperlinks in the hypertext. Every time a scattered body part is found, it syncopates the textual body. The stream of consciousness misses a beat, and new thoughts emerge. Both the bodies of the patchwork girl and of the hypertext put the users in alternate states of chaos and order while navigating their way through the patched-up fragments. This kind of non-normative reading experience resists the totalisation of a perfect entity, whether it is the body or the text. In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis invites his readers to look beyond the abstract theorisations of disability.

He traces the origin of the word "normal" as "constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual" (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 24), and he states that the word entered the English language around 1840. Davis argues that it was only around 1850 that the word "norm" began to be used in terms of the enforcement of proper embodiment. In his book *Aesthetic Nervousness,* Ato Quayson similarly traces a shift from the earlier conceptions of disability as divine displeasure to modernity's concept of marking disability as a symptom of moral deficiency. Both of these accounts reveal ruthless methods of politicising normalcy. *Patchwork Girl* consistently explores disability as a means to highlight its protagonist's non-normativity by portraying the act of staring and the performance of difference within the narrative.

In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari argue that the concept of the body without organs serves as a critique of the western Enlightenment forms of autonomous subjectivity. It resists the ideal habitual organisation of the body and looks towards a chaotic, messy world which is full of potentialities. Deleuze and Guattari urge the readers to socially and philosophically consider the idea of a body without organs and think about new ways of relating to that body. This will not only liberate the bodies from the idealised constraints and the strict regimes to which all bodies must adhere but also enable all bodies to be socially accepted. By resisting assemblage, the patchwork girl resists a fixed place in the social hierarchy. She defies and scrambles the social code with her scrambled body. The idea that the human body is composed of different organs which are necessary for making the body human contributes to the idea of the assemblage. Posthuman beings such as cyborgs and robots have entanglements with technology, and they not only contest the idea that the body is a 'unity,' but also the fact that the social and the cultural are equally articulated in the assemblage. When the Creature demands a female companion "as

hideous as myself," it suggests how he is aware of the society that could never envision normativity and non-normativity together: "It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account, we shall be more attached to one another" (Jackson "plea"). He understands that his companion has to be someone like him to be socially acceptable. In Jackson's hypertext, Mary Shelley took special care in selecting different physical features of her creation, but the narrative reveals that she is disappointed and horrified after looking at her creation for the first time: "I could not help but quail before the strangeness of this figure" ("sight"). The patchwork girl, however, becomes aware of this and how the world perceives her; she consequently decides that: "I forge my own links, I am building my own monstrous chain, and as time goes on, perhaps it will begin to resemble, rather, a web" (Jackson "she"). She is aware that she will be perceived as an assemblage of body parts because she carries memories of those whose body parts were patched in her. She remembers her left leg belonged to Jane, a caretaker who had a tattoo of a ship and remembered the stories behind that tattoo. Her lips belonged to a young girl called Margaret and, thus, she has a smiling lip; and her tongue belonged to Susannah, who ate and talked a lot. Thus, she embodies an assemblage, a multiplicity. She states: "I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself" (Jackson "graveyard"). She is hopeful that her body parts will remember her one day, too: "I will still act, dispersed as I am, catalyzing group actions, tics, a stitch in the side. My erstwhile foot, returned to its owner, will know the tango" (Jackson "mementos"). The patchwork girl has had several parents, and the hypertext's multiple storylines remove her creation from a heterosexual milieu and place it in a noticeably feminine and queer setting.

Reading *Patchwork Girl* under the lens of disability studies fosters a shift away from the placement of Victor Frankenstein with the God-like power of artificially reproducing a creature in

his laboratory. Disability studies bring the novel closer to more people's lived experiences in relation to reproductive technologies. When Mary Shelley reconstructs her female cyborg in Jackson's hypertext from the scattered pieces of the female monster that her husband threw away, it is expected that her creation will be born with unexpected disabilities. When we look at the literalness of her scavenged and patched-up pieces, the female cyborg's story resonates with disability experiences. The patchwork girl's scars and her patched-up pieces become part of her physical form. By disrupting the technological/organic binary of the corporeality of the body, the patchwork girl emerges as a boundary creature who "transgresses boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, *Manifesto* 14). Her facial differences enable her to reject all kinds of representations since all beings are considered to be constantly in flux.

The description of her birth resembles an unsatisfactory parental response to the birth of a disabled child. The narrative both facilitates and undermines the preoccupations with the concept of monstrosity and terror. In Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein becomes so terrified at the thought of the female monster that he tears her to pieces and aborts his creation. Shelley Jackson picks up the story at this precise instant and brings her to life in all glory. In the lexia called "she," the female cyborg states:

> I told her to abort me, raze me from her book; I did not want what he wanted. I laughed when my parts lay scattered on the floor, scattered as the bodies from which I had sprung, discontinuous as I myself rejoice to be. I danced in front of the disassembly, and vertebrae rolled to the four corners of the wood floor, I wrapped my intestines around my neck and wrists and sashayed about, I pitched my bladder against the wall. She watched me with half-fearful amusement. (Jackson "she")

This passage encapsulates the tone of Jackson's narrative, with its rupture and discontinuity, and it is one of the many instances where the cyborg celebrates the abject messiness of her birth and her turn of being the protagonist of the story. The patchwork girl becomes self-sovereign, in Derrida's words, and leaves Europe to reach North America, where she adventures her way through American suburbs and the city.

In her book *Staring*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson analyses the relationship between able-bodied and disabled bodies through the interaction of staring. She demonstrates how public displays of extraordinary bodies facilitate the definition of cultural distinctions as natural. This brings to the forefront the existence of social hierarchies and power relationships. The normative viewer demands an explanation after encountering a disabled body. Garland-Thomson argues: "In the social context of an ableist society, the disabled body summons the stare, and the stare mandates the story" (335). *Patchwork Girl* inverts these interpretations behind the power structure of the stare, instead portraying the subject of the stare—the female cyborg holding power. For instance, when Mary Shelley and her creation observe one another from afar, it is the patchwork girl's stare that renders Shelley powerless: "She trembled slightly, and her left leg jerked as if it would flee alone if need be, but she held her ground" (Jackson "she stood"). Similar to what Garland-Thomson suggests in her book, the subject of the starer, here, the female cyborg can hold significant power since staring is not merely a one-way act. Even though she is "patched up," Mary Shelley herself becomes horrified at her sight. Thus, the cyborg's disability reverses the long-established conceptions regarding the "stare," highlighting instead the complicated dichotomy of staring and the power that both the starer and the subject of the stare can wield over one another.

Posthuman disability studies argue that disability studies and posthumanism share the same principle of embracing "non-normative and anti-establishment ways of living life" (Goodley et al.,

"Posthuman Disability Studies" 348). They are composed of fundamentally fluid, flexible, and changeable identities. Disability studies pose a thorough posthumanist critique of the humanist model of subjectivity. The discourse surrounding disability emphasises the right of the disabled to subjectivity and agency. Margrit Shildrick suggests that the disruptive power of disability reflects "the extraordinary significance of human corporeality" (*Dangerous Discourses* 1). Disability's capacity to unsettle the Western conceptions of subjectivity is synonymous with that of posthumanism. It deconstructs the violently policed concept of the 'normal.' The posthuman subject becomes an articulation of hopeful ethics and a deconstruction of the ability/disability binary. Posthumanism is characterised by assemblages which connect the body to the outside and open up the inside/outside binary. Similarly, disability opens up other binaries, such as self/other, nature/technology, and human/non-human. Braidotti articulates that we might become posthumans through disability. By resisting normativity and practices of exclusion and discrimination, we might arrive at protopian posthumanism. This chapter, thus, lays the outlines of how the posthuman unites fiction and theory's mutual grappling with the profound changes to the human condition. This idea is further developed with the concept of protopian posthumanism, which not only aims for a 'better future' but, at the same time, takes into consideration radically inclusive futures with a focus on future cultural values and ethics. Together, these approaches cast aside monolithic narratives of the origin of the species and destabilise the dualistic understandings to nurture cultures of equity and mutuality. Instead, they anchor *Patchwork Girl* in the principle of the celebration of physical presence, regenerative action, and creativity.

CHAPTER 4

Posthumanist Interactivity in Hypertexts and Hypermedia

"Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away; the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing."

(Barthes, "Death of the Author" 142)

In his essay "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes wrote that every other voice is destroyed in writing, including that of the author. After the subsequent 'fall' in writing, the postmodern age has witnessed a 'rise' by emancipating writing from the clutches of authorship. This emancipation has ushered in the "scriptor", who is constituted within the boundaries of writing itself. The text is liberated from the authorial intent, and the readers fill in the gaps. They assess the text with more abstraction in the absence of an "authoritative viewpoint." The viewpoints of each reader become valid, and the text gets reassembled with new meanings and interpretations. For Barthes, the text is a very delicate thing, like a tissue, and it should not be ripped apart by hermeneutic critics. After the removal of both the figures of the author and the critic, the readers should emerge as independent of the author's "person, his life, his tastes, his passions" (Barthes, "Death of the Author" 143). The readers approach a text without being familiar with the complex connotations and experiences that have been introduced in the text by the author. This is how they could interpret the text using their own experiences, thoughts and connections to the world. With the emergence of hypertexts, the readers become more significant, and the text becomes disintegrated. In addition to interpretations, the readers have to construct the text first, in whichever order they see fit. The evolution of text from print to that of hypertext has resulted in the evolution of the role of the reader. The author figure no longer has any hold over the text, and the reader emerges as an independent figure who is supposed to construct, arrange and interpret the text.

Section- I

Reading Hypertext as "Cyborg"

The term "hypertext" refers to a computer program that revises the way we visualise and organise a text. It organises data into units called "lexias", which are organised in a tree-like structure that branches out into sub-units.[11] Such a branching structure allows the users to find take-off points anywhere in the narrative. Hypertext, from the very beginning, has been considered a postmodern narrative by theorists like Saul Cornell:

> Perhaps the emergence of CD-ROM technology may make it possible to create a truly post-modern narrative. Hyper-text makes it possible to generate a non-linear narrative structure in which readers can jump from one place in the text to another and create their own counter-narrative. Hyper-text creates the possibility of an interactive mode of reading in which the author self-consciously relinquishes considerable control over the narrative to the reader. (70)

By abandoning the "centre" and linearity, hypertexts have embraced postmodernist characteristics such as open-endedness and non-sequentiality. Before the emergence of hypertexts, the "centre" consisted of the author figure and his/her experiences and viewpoint. With hypertexts, the 'ideal' of the author, as well as the strict imposition of the narrative structure, is deconstructed. In hypertexts, the users become the collaborators, constructing and navigating through numerous contexts and connections.[12] The users are free to choose any link within links, and new paths are

[11] The term "lexia" is used by Roland Barthes to denote "blocks of text." George Landow further develops this to indicate the screen in a hypertext that usually resembles the "page" of a fictional work.

[12] For this first section of the chapter, I use the word "user" all throughout, instead of "reader" to distinguish between the consumers of narrative in technology and in print. In hypertexts, the users construct the narrative as they proceed,

developed through these juxtapositions. Those who engage with a hypertext are not merely readers like those who engage with texts in print. They encompass the role of a reader, a co-author and a navigator. To attest to this new form of emancipated and collaborative reading, I use the term "user" instead of a reader who has his/her limits only to the words on a page and can only exercise his/her imagination for interpreting the text. Hypertexts deconstruct linear texts and offer multivocality, which allows the users to respond and contextualise. The users are required to actively engage with the hypertext in order to discover and create their own meanings. I use the term 'user' in this chapter to describe those who create their links, determine the meaning and connect the information in hypertext.

Although postmodernist texts like James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) and Milorad Pavić's *The Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984) had their fair share of experimentation with the form and structure, the shuffling of meaning was always limited. With the advent of hypertextuality in fiction, the text was opened and offered numerous entry-points. Even after repeated readings of hypertext, the notion of an entry point keeps on scrambling, and the possibility of mastering the text ends there. The hypertext thus becomes what Richard Rorty imagines to be a "world of redescription, endless creativity" (Cotkin 111). Rambling, redescriptions, and creating new narrations are a few of the activities that occur between the user and the computer during the engagement with a hypertext. However, one may get lost in "hyperspace" and could remain there exploring for a long time. With the availability of abundant data and endless contexts, the "hyperspace" becomes limitless. This allows "deep exploration", and it takes up much time, which might not be worth the value and amount of knowledge gained. In the absence of any structure,

so it won't be enough to refer to them as "readers." Further, to distinguish between texts in print and hypertexts, I consistently refer to those who engage with hypertext as "users."

there are infinite possibilities of the "hyperspace," which might overwhelm a user. This is one of the prime reasons why time and again, it has been implied that the users of hypertexts should have a prior skill of navigation through units and contexts. This prior skill should consist of the ability to choose which links to pursue, which connections to develop, and which fragments to be shuffled in order to form a meaningful reading.

The postmodern death of the author allows users of the hypertexts to interpret it in different ways in any order. The hypertext has significance beyond the author's intention, and the author must depart from the text for the liberation of meaning; hence, the reader sets out on a journey to fill the gaps and construct the narrative. The hypertext then goes beyond the autonomy of the author. When the hypertext is viewed by the reader beyond the established aesthetics or meanings, it loses its connection to the author, and it elevates itself from its origins. This is similar to Kant's autonomist view of aesthetic properties, where a spectator contemplating a work of art considers all standpoints and not just the established one. Kant states this view as: "a mode of representation which is purposive for itself, and which, although devoid of a purpose, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication" (*Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* 306). The idea was that the success of a work of art lies in the fact that it exists in its own separate realm and possesses significance independence of the artist. The significance of the author is only to the degree of his or her intent; everything beyond the intention of the author is discovered by the reader. The reading of the text involves the intentions of both the author and the reader. In the following sections, I argue that in the case of hypertexts, a *cyborg-reader* fulfils the textual gaps with his/her imagination. Each individual reader fills in the various gaps in different sequences, allowing for infinite realisations of the text.

Posthuman theorists such as Katherine Hayles and Thomas Carlson have argued that new technological developments in the postmodern age could be considered early proponents of posthumanism. Hayles has always seen the posthuman figure as a self-organising structure connected intimately to the technological framework. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles represents the necessity of considering ourselves as cyborgs because of our constant interaction with technology. With respect to hypertexts, Hayles demands cyborg reading practices: "Because electronic hypertexts are written and read in distributed cognitive environments, the reader necessarily is constructed as a cyborg, spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines" ("Flickering Connectivities" 13). In this chapter, I build my argument on this and demonstrate how this interrelation and dependency on technology results in posthuman interactivity. The "deep exploration" and the captivating level of engagement, control, and interaction with the medium of hypertext contribute to its posthuman aspects. Further, the posthuman extensions of our body, such as clicking and touching the screen using trackpads and smartphones, make us a part of the "assemblage." [13] Our entanglements with technology make us a collaborator. Using the extensions of our bodies to collaborate in the technology makes our bodies an assemblage. The bodily experiences and investments not only contest the idea that the body is a 'unity' but also the fact that the social and the cultural are equally articulated in the

[13] For my dissertation, I consider the posthuman subjectivity as an embodied assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of body-without-organs. The term "assemblage" is the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari's term agencement which means an association of bodies and actions reacting to one another. I use this term in the way Rosi Braidotti uses it in the context of the posthuman subjects being "embodied assemblages of forces or flows, intensities and relations, and […] involve a range of human and non-human entities" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 161). Critical posthumanism considers human subjects as an assemblage, intertwined with environment and technology, and co-involving with machines and animals. Further, in disability studies, we find the use of the term "posthuman assemblage" to describe subjects which are an amalgamation of crip collectivity, identity, and bodies-without-organs.

assemblage. The kind of interactivity represented by hypertexts in terms of fluidity and non-sequentiality caters to posthuman aesthetics. Over the next few sections, I develop this argument further and demonstrate that the kind of interactivity that hypertexts offer is posthumanist in nature.

4.1.1 Arriving at Hypertext

Espen Aarseth introduced the concept of "ergodicity" in *Cybertext* (1997), a work which laid the foundations of electronic hypertexts and video game studies later on.[14] A cybertext is used to refer to dynamic texts that are constructed in such a manner that the medium becomes an integral part of the message as the message itself. To comprehend cybertexts, nontrivial work on the part of the user is required. Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963) has a hypertextual format of 56 regular chapters and 99 "expendable" ones. Another example is the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books from the 1980s, where these game-books are designed in such a way that the readers are given two or more choices to continue the narrative. Before delving further, it is necessary to examine the differences between a cybertext and a hypertext. Aarseth argues that cybertext is more inclusive than hypertext since it encompasses most of the sources which provide interactivity, animation, and role-playing opportunities. Aarseth considers cybertexts as autonomous "text/machines" which has some power over the users. This concept of cybertext is only limited to textual communication. Hypertext, however, refers to only static texts which are linked and require some work on the part of the users. Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story*, one of the first hypertexts, resembled the fluctuations and the non-linear nature of the readability of hypertexts, which makes

[14] In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required from the reader to navigate the text. The readers of such texts strive for narrative control and must participate actively in the construction of the text.

it different from the traditional texts in print.[15] In the first section, I analyse Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl.* Since this text does not warrant enough interactivity and no animation at all, it is referred to as a hypertext. In the next section, I use the term "hypermedia" for *Bandersnatch,* and not "cybertext," primarily because cybertext only refers to computer-based literature and does not include films and other visual media. For the third section, I will not be referring to interactive fiction as cybertext either because interactive fiction combines a variety of modes such as typography, photographic images, real-life animation, sound and music. Further, cybertexts do not consider the behavioural mechanism of the users, which interactive literature does and provides choices accordingly.

Composition theorists such as Linda Flower and John Hayes were of the opinion that hypertext writers intend to control the pathways taken by the users through the text. The 'good' writers could control the movement of the users by controlling the sequence of the units and sub-units. Robert Brooke critiques this concept of 'control' as a deconstructive entity forced upon writing and reading. He argues that writers possess a "meta-self that controls the subconscious processes of writing in order to maintain control" (Brooke 410). As a result, writing is a mere translation of the thought process into a graph. Hypertext extends Brooke's postmodern critique across another dimension: not only must the author be out of control of his or her creative processes, but the author can no longer control the way the reader navigates through the text or even the order of the contents of the text itself. While engaging with hypertext, the user becomes an active participant in structuring and navigating the text multiple times, which may result in radically different outcomes for different users. There are two essential ways in which I will argue

[15] *afternoon, a story* is created using the Storyspace software in 1990. It records the story of a technical writer named Peter, who begins his afternoon suspecting that a wrecked car he saw earlier might be of his former wife's.

considering hypertext in relation to the cyborg: first, where I see hypertext as the machine tool that allows the users to conquer new frontiers; second, where I see hypertext as the machine that breaks down, resist totalisation. The cyborg subverts domination within the culture by complicating the hierarchical relationships within technology. The first views cyborg as a perfect system, to some extent, inspires hypertext writers/readers to be vocal in the narrative of domination of reality. It attempts to define cyberspace as a closed system, a single discourse. The second recognises that the hypertext communicates in different and tangled discourses, at the same time speaking and being spoken. Reading hypertexts as a "cyborg" with Donna Haraway's cyborg as the foundation, I attempt to consider the cyborg in Haraway's terms: as something that operates amid rupture and commotion, a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and control, and neat endings. This cyborg is a hybrid unit which internalises technology. It is not looking for perfect communication and deconstructs the linear practices of reading and writing. Unlike the usual coherent, happy endings of a literary text in print, hypertexts often provide abrupt and unresolved endings to the users. There is no closure in the real sense of the term, as the narrative keeps on shifting and new pathways appear. After I demonstrate the engagement with hypertexts as a cyborg activity, I conclude that hypertexts act as a subject/object resistant to fluidity, sequentiality, and unhinged navigation. No matter how many times a user engages with a particular hypertext, a neat ending can never be achieved, and the users find themselves in a loop.

4.1.2 Derrida and Hypertext

In *Cinders*, Jacques Derrida deviates from his previous works to use a cluster of arguments and images referring to ashes and cinders. Derrida associates the original burning with the language of gift and promise:

> But the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately you blow into the dust of words which are the cinder itself. And if you entrust it to paper, it is all the better to inflame you with, my dear, you will eat yourself up immediately. (53)

The fragmentation is caused due to the rupture of self from the other and self from the self. Derrida demonstrates how the subtext can be interpreted by subverting the surface text, ushering in openness and freedom. Later on, this becomes the basic feature of hypertext, wherein no rules are followed regarding the authoritarian meaning of a narrative. Even Derrida's initial texts may be said to have suffered from this paranoid linearity in that he relied on the canon of philosophy and literature to make his argument. The voice he must rely upon is always outside himself: Hegel, Heidegger, Genet, Plato. But in *Cinders,* this linearity is undermined by Derrida's conversation with himself. The paranoid voice, lined up in sinister fashion on the left-hand pages, trapped in quotes and nervous italics, faces the schizophrenic, almost poetic, fragmentation that in some sense recognises its own collapse. In this way, Derrida cannibalises his own texts and consumes them before they burn away. Language and death remain inside the ring of Being. But there is no clear indication of where one Derrida ends and the other begins. This paves the way towards the working of hypertext, with no indication of a beginning or an end, one path consuming the other.

In his book *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology,* George P. Landow emphasises that: "Something Derrida and other critical theorists describe as part of a seemingly extravagant claim about language turn out precisely to describe the new economy of reading and writing with electronic virtual forms" (8). Landow argues that the basic postmodern philosophy is being reconstructed as concrete communication practices. The philosophical deconstruction of the printed book is converted into a "pragmatic everyday experience by means of a contingent change in the structure of media" (Sandbothe 37). With the

introduction of hypertexts, huge alterations are being made in the treatment of signs which contribute much to Derrida's philosophy of time and media. The synchronous interactivity and the constant presence of the users establish a spoken language and face-to-face communication between the author and the user. This tendency toward the "scriptualization of language" and "verbalization of writing" results in the "interactively modelable and contextually situated form of writing", which functions exactly like spoken language (Sandbothe 39). Derrida's "fabric of the trace" is reconstructed in the hypertext medium as the concrete practice of using modified signs of space and time. The users constitute their identities on the bedrock of writing-based interaction in the context of shared plans for the narrative. Further, they can program and construct the plot narrative. Space is no longer a given entity within which one simply moves around passively and can have influence.

4.1.3 Cyborg Activity in Hypertext

Hypertexts provide us with the tool to convey stories through a sense of spatiality and perspective—that is arguably unique—to digitally networked environments. With the taking over of traditional print texts by postmodern hypertexts, the method of reading has gone through a drastic change. The users don't have to go through each page carefully to understand what lies ahead. With hypertexts, a user can click on any link and read the portions which are independent and self-sufficient. In this context, then, hypertext would be the very structure of meanings which are inseparable from the interpretive assumptions of the users. In many cases, the intentions of the author are different from the interpretations drawn by the users. Whatever the interpretation might be, the hypertext in itself remains an object of critical judgment. With hypertexts, meaning is to be identified with what a user interprets within a unit of sense; as we keep moving from one section

to another, the meanings keep on changing, and any prior understandings also keep on evolving as the reading proceeds in time. Stanley Fish argues in *Is There a Text in This Class?* that literature is kinetic art, so the meanings can still be interpreted, even if we don't have a stationary book in our hands but a moving, receding form.[16] Reading always involves paying close attention to the line as a unit, and in hypertexts, each of those units acquires a new set of meanings, contributing to a technogenetic form. The readers then have to overcome the difficulty of considering each unit but rather focus on the entire interpretive strategy. Even as Barthes explains in *Writing Degree Zero*, a reader has to look underneath a particular word to make sense of its meaning and all the possible associations it might have in order to correctly interpret his/her own ideas out of the entire text.

Hypertext literature is a cyborg, in a hybrid theoretical sense of Barthes and Haraway, a technological creation which is a result of machines and codes. The two frames of critical theory and scientific language are characterised by their fragmentary nature, and Barthes explains that they could interact when the concept of Work is associated with that of Text. In his article "From Work to Text," Barthes anticipates the progress from Work to Text involving postmodern concepts of dispersal, dismemberment, and hybridity. This progress then culminates in the form of hypertext, which includes the two frames of Work and Text, and Shelley Jackson unites them in a coherent model of cultural production embedded with subjectivity. Following Haraway's

[16] Fish argues that kinetic art never leads to a static interpretation. Similarly, literature being a kinetic art refuses to stay still. Although the physical form of a book could be stationary, but once the readers engage with it, they are moving along with the pages. The temporal experience gets transformed into a spatial one, and the readers surpass the physical dimensions through the activity of reading.

argument that a cyborg resists categorisation as either technological or natural, then the form of hypertext, through erasing the boundaries of print and technology, becomes a cyborg.[17]

4.1.4 *Patchwork Girl* as a Cyborg Hypertext

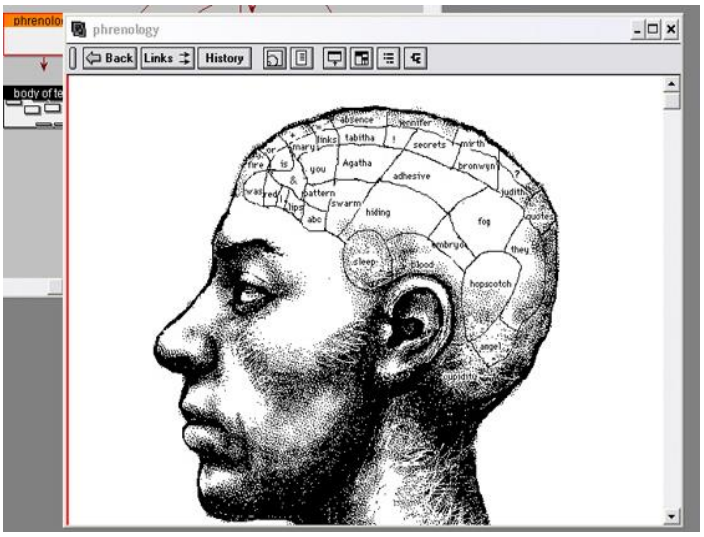

Figure 5. "Phrenology" lexia from Patchwork Girl. 1995. Eastgate Systems

Among the most striking examples of the merging of fiction and metafiction and the foregrounding of the act of construction of the text, paralleled by the creation of the female cyborg, is the "phrenology" lexia. It represents a graphic drawing of the profile of a human head (see Fig.5), whose scalp is partitioned into numerous sections, each of which contains a name or phrase that functions as links and entryways to several lexias gathered under the subheading "body of text," which highlights the multiplicity of the human body and the multiplicity of hypertext. This interconnection and complex interplay between the human body and the body of the text are underlined by Jackson yet again in *Stitch Bitch*: "Boundaries of text are like boundaries of bodies, and both stand in for the confusing and invisible boundary of the self" (7).

Readers of *Patchwork Girl* encounter a type of cyborg narrative since they are intertwined with the technology that controls the story's creation; they sew their own "monster" and their own

[17] Donna Haraway, in "A Cyborg Manifesto," outlines the ways cyborgs fuse the organic and the technology and, therefore, transgress the fundamental boundaries that have structured our world and how we make sense of it.

"monstrous" text while recognising that their desire to interact with the female cyborg spurs their choices and decides their links.[18] The technology, therefore, mingles the actions of the machine with "the subjectivity we attribute to characters, authors, and ourselves as readers" (Hayles, "Flickering Connectivities" 51). In the virtual realm of software like Storyspace, it becomes difficult to distinguish between character, author and reader: the text written by a human author and a mouse click or a touch on the screen by a human user shapes up the same narrative. When the hypertext represents this process as a "merged molecular dance of simultaneity," the specificity of the medium contributes to the vision of cyborg subjectivity (Hayles, *My Mother* 163). Since hypertexts are written and read in cognitive environments, as a matter of fact, the user is seen as a cyborg merged with one or more codes and machines. The reading environment in hypertexts demands the involvement of higher cognitive functions for constructing, navigating and reconstructing the paths of the narrative. The process of giving meaning to the narrative by identifying relations among units and sub-units, making deductions, and analysing is a cognitive construct. This construct transforms the text from one structural form to another, creating a specific sequence for a specific user. The user no longer has access to whatever is put by the author in a linear manner as in print but has to construct the text bit by bit using their cognitive skills. For this, serious derivation and interpretation are required by the reader. So, hypertexts, regardless of their content, tend towards cyborg subjectivity: following Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," the various binary structures which modernist notions of subjectivity were founded upon are to be acknowledged and subsequently altered. The role which the Storyspace software plays in this figuration is central: *Patchwork Girl* is, in every sense, a work of hyperfiction, as it self-reflexively

[18] The Storyspace software using which *Patchwork Girl* is written, provides a facility to the users to save their respective paths of links that have constituted their individual readings, and also to add margin notes in each lexia. The users, thus, becomes a part of the body of the text, by stitching their writings to the narrative quilt.

deploys the possibilities that the medium allows while simultaneously allowing the user great freedom and control to shape the narrative.

When in Jackson's hypertext, Mary Shelley brings the patchwork girl to life and assembles her by "stitching deep into the night by candlelight," the inherent connection between writing and patching is discussed in detail in two almost similar lexias ("written" and "sewn") which are required to be read parallelly. The different metaphors of surgery also suggest the Creation of life through the hypertext, thus emphasising the body/text relationship once again. If we consider this, then the cyborg's scars and patches would be the highlights of the discontinuous writing and reading of hypertext. The prosthesis is, thus, a highly evocative concept, both literally and metaphorically, since it questions the existing boundaries of the subject: the boundaries between the self and the other, the original and the imitated, the whole and the fragment, the mortal and the immortal. When the users of the hypertext shape up the scattered chunks of text into a lucid form, they also bring to life the hidden hyperlinks that modify or interrupt the textual body. As a result, there is a partial or total loss of the stream of consciousness, as the cyborgian structure of the hypertext interrupts the reader's attention. The reader is caught in a cycle-like reading process instantiated in the form of a complex feedback loop (Regnauld 76). This cycle-like process within the cyborgian structure is never completed, each cycle opening up to a new continuous loop, resulting in the ultimate dissemination of the alphabet: "Hypertextual reiteration—not merely remembered as when the reader travels along linearly in a print narrative—but actual and experienced, spatializes the links; or, rather, the links spatialize the reiteration" (Tolva 70). Hyperlinks lie at this juncture between code and language as non-linguistic and non-grammatical connectors. The users are kept unaware of the hidden codes until the time they feel the effect of their behaviour on the screen. They, later on, discover the presence of a hyperlink only when

mousing over the text; the mouse pointer turns into a grasping hand while the user keeps on moving the mouse over the text.

Hypertexts such as *Patchwork Girl* resort to pictorial narrativity by combining the textual and the visual.[19] The aesthetics of the alignment, proximity, and arrangement of the text in hyperspace not only guides the users but also enables them to make associations between various lexias. Michael Joyce writes: "Hypertext is, before anything else, a visual form. Hypertext embodies information and communications, artistic and affective constructs, and conceptual abstractions alike into symbolic structures made visible on a computer-controlled display" (19). In spite of the information provided by a hypertext, it should also involve artistic elements to make it visually pleasing. Once a user clicks on a visual element, it gets maximised and provides more links and paths. The fascination and the knowledge delivered simultaneously make the aesthetics substantive. The construction and exploration of the narrative necessitate the process of cognitive learning. Further, the navigation of hypertext does not exist without its own aesthetics. The transgression of space and temporality provides an aesthetic bliss to the users, and the act of navigation is performative. The user/navigator goes beyond the limitations of the reader of a text in print and finds joy by participating in the process of creating the narrative. This provides an aesthetic sense of fulfilment to the users once the space and time are personalised for their convenience. While composing a hypertext, two things must be kept in mind: the aesthetics of the visual elements so as to make it attractive and also the aesthetics of clutter-free navigation. *Patchwork Girl* is a "cyborg" in terms of Hayles and Haraway, a posthuman technological creation

[19] Pictorial narrativity is a form of storytelling using series of pictures, motion pictures. It contributes to the human endeavour of reducing the unpredictability. Pictorial narrativity enables the readers to order their experiences with the help of the high-level narrative structures. However, it requires the active participation of the readers in order to reconstruct the narrative.

of the mediating apparatus of the hypertextual software. This hypertext develops an account of the structural couplings that bind cognition to the nervous system, meaning to the medium, and subjects to their tools.[20] *Patchwork Girl* stages an inquiry into processes of materialisation to challenge the effective terms in which the relations between the social and the natural, cognition, and the physical body, meaning and the medium are understood. It foregrounds the constitutive role that communication technologies play in realising and consolidating historically contingent conceptions of subjectivity. The users of *Patchwork Girl* attempt to disfigure the binary and, in the process, create a cyborg text through the medium of hypertext.

Section-II

Reading Hypermedia as "Cyborg"

In this section, the genre of hyper-narrative interactive films is explored, the main focus being on *Bandersnatch*. After focusing on hypertext in the previous section, I moved to hypermedia in this section so that I could expand the arguments on posthumanist interactivity in visual culture. Hypermedia or interactive multimedia resembles the complex branching out of the text, accompanied by graphics and sound. Although a few attempts at interactive films have been made earlier, which I will discuss later on, none of them could match the mark of *Bandersnatch* in terms of technological innovations and user-friendly interface. These factors contributed to my choice of *Bandersnatch* as the primary source for discussing hypermedia. With *Patchwork Girl*, I have

[20] Structural coupling is an abstraction which states that people are observers of the operational coherences in which they exist as living systems. The people are living systems in the sense that they are also molecular systems which make them structure determined systems. Structural coupling connotes the configuration of relations between a composite entity and a singular entity.

argued the case of the *cyborg-reader*, and I wanted to take this argument further in the realm of hyper-narrative interactive cinema. With *Bandersnatch*, I will argue that those who engage with the film are *cyborg-interactors*. Further, I aim to explore the possibilities of hypermedia, overcoming the few constraints that hypertexts might have in terms of fluidity and sequentiality. Unlike hypertexts, it is possible to revisit decisions at any point in *Bandersnatch* and also, there is the possibility to view all five endings of the film. In addition, the interactors are much more involved through the active gestures of touch while watching the film on their smartphones, trackpads and smartwatches. These comparisons are explored further in the following sections to demonstrate how the kind of interactivity that *Bandersnatch* offers in terms of tactility, decentring and possibilities of multiple perspectives hails the new posthumanist aesthetics of interactivity.

4.2.1 The 'Hyper' in Hypermedia

The etymology of "hyper" in "hypertext" has a Greek origin, which means "over" or "beyond." This refers to the overcoming of the linearity of written texts. Hypertext is, thus, something that goes beyond the limitations of texts in print. Similarly, hyper-narrative goes beyond transforming representation into presence and passivity into activity. Parallel to Nelson's term "hypertext," "hypermedia" addresses hypertexts branching out to other forms of media–video games and cinema:

> By now, the word "hypertext" has become generally accepted for branching and responding text, but the corresponding word "hypermedia," meaning complexes of branching and responding graphics, movies and sound—as well as text—is much less used. Instead, they use the strange term "interactive multimedia": this is four syllables longer and does not express the idea of extending hypertext. (Nelson 29)

Hypermedia includes multimedia effects such as visual images and sound in electronic texts. Hypermedia reinforces the postmodernist assumptions of theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, who argues that natural languages and representations of electronic visual media are autonomous even with the involvement of diverse language users, events and individual forms of visual representation. Hypermedia takes forward the postmodern critical theories by opposing hierarchy and sequence and focuses on images and non-verbal signs within the communication.

Baudrillard depicted his understanding of hypermedia by referring to "simulacrum"—a copy of a copy which is so far removed from the original that it can exist on its own. This portrayal of media imagery as something detached from reality represents hypermedia as a seduction of society. Baudrillard explains that this process both informs as well as distorts language usage and the perceptions of people. Hypermedia consists of an inherent ambivalence about whether the result of engaging with it is knowledge or only a "seduction." This enterprise of seduction converts itself into the consumption of media by people. With hypermedia, this seduction was produced industrially and included identifiable signs with which the consumers could relate personally. Hypermedia has later contributed to the emergence of hyper-narrative interactive cinema, which Nitzan Ben Shaul defines as:

> I am referring to a variety of hypotheses and actual works whose common denominator is their focus upon a computer-mediated interaction between users or 'interactors' and moving audio-visual texts that strive, through the use of cinematic strategies, to offer the interactor an option to change at predetermined points the course of action by shifting to other predetermined options. (7)

Hyper-narrative interaction permits viewing films with advanced features like "enhanced functionality, customized views and improved knowledge synthesis and representation" (Carlson

93). Involving components like screen design, visual literacy, and graphic design, providing choices to shape the plot line and to control the ending, hyper-narrative interactive cinema depicts a postmodernist fragmentation of worlds by creating several individual pathways.

There was a difficulty in defining *Bandersnatch* on the part of the creators. The writer Charlie Brooker, in an interview with *The New York Times*, explained that *Bandersnatch* was not designed only as a game but as a cinematic experience since the interactors are actively guiding the narrative of the film, which contributes to a "participatory culture," in contrast to passive spectatorship. This is more of an interaction-based response theory, where the response doesn't mean interpretation of the meaning in a strictly hermeneutic sense but an active engagement with the body of the narrative itself—an "assemblage," the ability to transform and mutate it.[21] As a result of this engagement, the interactors become folded into the events of the plot. In *Bandersnatch*, choosing each option and the corresponding narrative is a rupture in the entire narrative flow, and the particular event becomes an independent and a whole entity on its own.

The cognitive ability of the interactors enables them to construct meaning and sequentiality as and when they encounter gaps in the hyperspace. To comprehend visual navigation, the interactors use cognitive maps, which give them the ability to reason and find their way through the narrative. Cognitive mapping is an approach to visual navigation which enables the interactors to plan their paths once they are provided with some information. It is a process "composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, stores, recalls and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of the phenomena in his everyday

[21] Reader-response theory argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance. A reader comes to the text, which is a fixed world, but the meaning is realised through the act of reading and how a reader connects the structures of the text to his/her own experience.

spatial environment" (Downs and Stea 9). This process also investigates how people understand, remember and process the spatial information about a narrative. In the case of interactive films, the interactors don't have to entirely map their paths, as there is the availability of pre-mapping, but manoeuvring their way through it requires cognitive ability. The interactors engage in an active process of production in which hyper-narrative interactive films are received by them not only as a source of stable meaning and representation but also as an invitation to take part in the process of creation. As the control shifts from the creators of the film to the interactors, they, in turn, become a part of the cyborg subjectivity, "both materially and intellectually" (Johnson-Eilola 383). The interactors become active participants in cyberspace, and using the technology, they transform the cultural representation of the film into a cybernetic one. This expands my argument further that cyberspace resists totalisation by giving the locus of control to the interactors and undermining the vision of computer-as-hero in an attempt to emancipate the interactors.

4.2.2 Technogenesis in *Bandersnatch*

A few attempts have been made at the interactive movie genre over the years. *Kinoautomat* (1967) was the first interactive movie sans the technological nuances of *Bandersnatch*. A moderator appeared on the stage and asked the audience to choose between two scenes to proceed further in the narrative. Another such attempt was the movie *I'm Your Man* (1992), directed by Bob Bejan and was an experiment of his interactive cinema company. In a special theatre in New York, the spectators were asked to use seat-mounted joysticks so that they could vote between three options at six different points in the film. None could gain any sort of popularity, perhaps because they failed to provide enough interactivity to the spectators. Further, the instances where the spectators were asked to make their choices took a long time and hampered the viewing experience. After

these attempts, in 2018, Netflix released an experimental interactive movie as part of its long-running television series *Black Mirror* called *Bandersnatch*. Unlike the previous attempts, the interactive nature of the film is singular. The critics couldn't stop praising the technological advancements *Bandersnatch* was bringing into the genre. However, Brian Lowry of *CNN*, David Griffin of *IGN*, and Roisin O'Connor of *The Independent* had complaints about the complicated narrative and the difficulties in navigating through so many parallel plotlines. Despite mixed responses, it was a landmark in transforming 'traditional' spectatorship.

Directed by David Slade, *Bandersnatch* centres around Stefan, a young computer programmer who is trying to design a computer game based on a choose-your-own-adventure style novel. Throughout the film, the audience makes different choices for Stefan, which directly affects the narrative. These choices appear on the screen as text-based prompts, and the audience is supposed to select one of the two options. This interactive film represents the mutual convergence and divergence of multiple paths, leading to five different endings. The audience is required to choose their own paths, sometimes hitting dead ends where there is no change in the course of the narrative and sometimes leading to drastic changes in Stefan's life. The freedom and control that the audience is provided within *Bandersnatch* are singular, and it is the reason for the enormous success of this hyper-narrative interactive film. This Netflix film could also be played across many devices, including smartphones, smartwatches, and trackpads. The gestures of clicking and touching give the audience control of the film. Through these gestures, the audience becomes immersed in the technology of the film, highlighting the posthumanist aspect of the film. Spectatorship has been revolutionised by this film, and the audience becomes a subject of Hayles' concept of "technogenesis." In her book *How we Think?: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis,* Hayles describes "technogenesis" as a process in which the human brain,

technology, language, and culture of the society co-evolved effectively. The complex technology of *Bandersnatch* requires hyper attention: the attention required to scan huge amounts of data so that an overview can be developed. This co-evolution of the neurological and the technical aspects is referred to as "technogenesis." Contrary to the passive viewing of films, *Bandersnatch* requires the interactors to switch focus rapidly between information streams in the form of choices, pictorial representations, narrative flow and also time-constraints. Passive viewing does not warrant enough attention to excel in these rapidly changing environments in which complete attention is required for all the different activities involved in the viewing process. In the following section, the thesis focuses on the aesthetics of interactive viewing, which makes *Bandersnatch* an experiment in cyborg spectatorship. I use the term "interactors" in this section to refer to the audience of the film. Interactive films involve reading, constructing the narrative, and spectating, so to avoid the pitfalls of constantly shifting between "user," "reader," and "spectator," I adhere to the term "interactor."

The new spheres of media require new audiences to carry out cultural and political critique. Rancière demands the spectators exchange their passive positions with that of a "scientific investigator or experimenter" so that they would be able to engage in decisions (4). This engagement abolishes any distance that exists between the spectacle and the spectator. With the emergence of hypermedia, the spectator's method of association with visual media is significant. This form of art demands participation, intellectual investment, and concentration from the spectators so that they are able to construct the narrative with their quick and observant comprehension of the fleeting facts. The spectators of hypermedia are fixated on the screen, and any intention of achieving distance from the image on the screen is prevented. However, the analysis in this dissertation is focused on a hyper-interactive film, and in that form of visual media,

the requirements from the spectators are much more. It won't be sufficient to address them as spectators; hence, I use the term "interactors."

Nitzan Ben Shaul explains that the spectators of *Bandersnatch* are more than mere viewers. But it doesn't seem entirely correct to call them "gamers" either, as the film does not offer quite enough interactivity to permit calling it a "game." In place of this, Shaul prefers the term "interactors" (15). The interactors of *Bandersnatch* perform many simultaneous roles: interpreting, immersive viewing and actively controlling the narrative. The multiple trajectories within the narrative of *Bandersnatch* transform the stability of the narrative so that the interactors are always in the process of emerging victorious. Chronology is shattered, and the past and present are represented in a seemingly indefinite number of ways. According to Hayles, the interactions of the spectators with technology in visual, tactile and audible ways allow them to perceive the world differently. The effort which the interactors put into interpreting the aesthetics of the hyper-narrative interactive medium of *Bandersnatch* changes their perceptions towards traditional films and their subsequent linear narratives. The software Branch Manager becomes a participant in structuring and navigating the plotline multiple times, which results in five different endings.[22]

The choices in the narrative allow multiple paths of experience for the interactors. The way they must tap on various options to explore the entire content gives them a God-like power to share in typifying the story that the scriptwriter is writing. Simultaneously, it enables the interactors to experience great freedom and control to shape the narrative. This sort of 'freeplay' gives the interactors a new sort of emancipation they crave for. Traditionally, the idea of freeplay has been perceived as a kind of power to control one's choices and actions. Its application is found in video

[22] Branch Manager is the software developed by Netflix, which enabled the editors to try playing the movie with various options, choice points and timings, to ensure that the interactors are presented with the correct segment after their selection of a choice.

games such as *SimCity,* where the Sims may complete certain tasks without being controlled by the player. The Sims complete certain tasks based on their individual needs and are also capable of making their own decisions. What the Sims do with their free will might not always be the best course of action, but the fact that they have the freedom to perform certain actions without being controlled by the players gives them emancipation. Similarly, in *Bandersnatch*, what the interactors do with their freedom to make choices is up to them. The consequence of making the choices may not be the most rational, but their exploration and construction of the narrative are crucial in this hyper-narrative interactive medium. On the surface, it appears as if, without the active participation of the interactors, restructuring the film and reaching the ending would be impossible.

Bandersnatch is, in a way, a *patchwork* of a movie, a television show, a book, and a game—all folded into a single interactive experience—contains "two-and-a-half hours of footage divided into 250 segments, hidden behind an elaborate series of decisions" (Reynolds). The interactors assume' control of changing the plot and subplots by choosing from the multiple options that ultimately have an impact on the storyline, altering the narrative flow, and changing the fate of the protagonist, Stefan Butler. The interactors are given the option to see most of the five different endings without having to start from the very beginning, only by choosing the option that appears as the credits begin to roll, which allows them to loop back to a crucial moment in the film and change their choice. In choosing, the interactors acknowledge that they are permanently closing off alternative paths. Just like Stefan's guilt over refusing to get on the train with his mother as a child, the interactors try to anticipate how things might have gone differently if they had chosen the alternate options (McSweeney and Joy 276). This kind of hyper-interactive narrative cinema, where the fracture adds to the aesthetics rather than strict linearity, is *cyborgian*. The production

of *Bandersnatch* was aimed at dismantling space and time boundaries which is something that Haraway argues in favour of a cyborg: a being resisting the shackles of space and time.

With the help of new software, Branch Manager, the editors of *Bandersnatch* could develop the movie with various choices. With this type of film, there isn't only one option to be concerned about, but two options and the implications of selecting either of them. Some of the segments within the narrative even have six variations, and by selecting any of them, six different storylines had to be developed for the interactors. In the most desirable ending, Stefan's game was released to widespread acclaim, and Colin Ritman's daughter decided to remake the entire experience and release it on a streaming service. To reach this ending, the interactors have to go through much interactive complexity. With this hyper-narrative interactive platform, the interactors also have the prospect of experiencing and understanding the software with which the narrative was created. From creation to reception, the entire process is complex, involving many approaches, aesthetics, and emerging technologies. The first few choices do not add much to the plot and do help the interactors to get used to the user interface. The first choice that the viewer has to make is to choose which cereal Stefan should eat: Sugar Puffs or Frosted Flakes, a decision that would later influence which TV commercial Stefan sees. What comes next is the choice of the Walkman soundtrack—the music choice would not only decide what Colin's musical preferences are but would also give the interactors control over the soundtrack, which accompanies the next few scenes in the movie. In a way, these choices contribute to adapting the interactors to the system, demonstrating to them how the film works and how their choices control the running of the narrative. Playing the choices

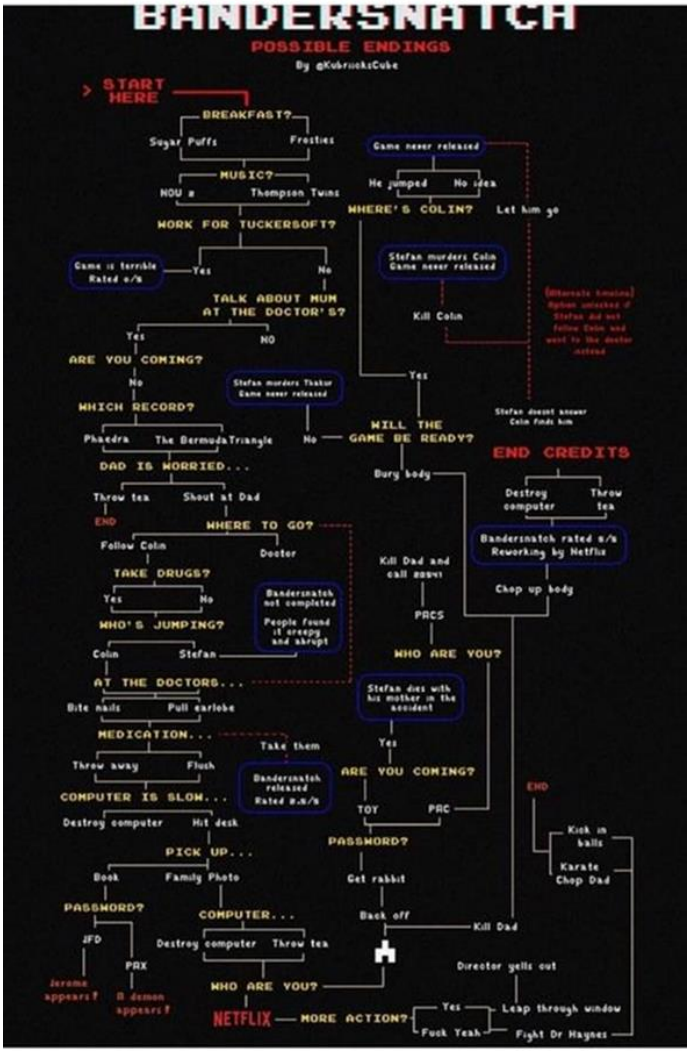

Figure 6. A branching image of all the possible endings in the film Bandersnatch. 2018. Source: kubrickscubefilms

over and over again to reach the best possible ending, the interactors invest emotions and reflections. As a result, when they arrive at the best ending, the experience is no less than cathartic. In Aristotelian theory, this experience refers to a release from painful and complex emotions, bringing about an emotional climax. This results in a feeling of pleasure through the attainment of peace and calm. In *Bandersnatch*, once the interactors reach the desirable ending, they experience catharsis, and at the same time, there is the joy of emerging victorious from the overwhelming technological complexities of the film. This enjoyment which emerges from the emotional responses to the technology, is transformed into an aesthetic pleasure on the part of the interactors. The aesthetic pleasure is the culmination of putting together different branches in the film into a coherent, structured, and intelligible form. By achieving this, the spectators are thrilled with their passion and intelligence, resulting in a constructive outcome.

Simultaneously, the interactors also suffer from alienation when they feel insignificant and dominated by the overwhelming technology of the film (see Fig.6). With Stefan speaking directly

to the interactors, and the interactors being part of the narrative disrupts the illusion of performance and generates the alienation effect. In spite of this alienation, if the spectators could not derive pleasure, they might have a sense of failure. According to Barthes, once the active reader moves beyond the forced meanings and the expected narrative, the reader experiences pleasure. This pleasure is experienced in relation to some sort of power and the hegemonic ideology. The "power of definition" comes from the pleasure of finding oneself with the devices of social control. Barthes refers to this as "productive pleasure," which produces meaning according to one's social disposition. These pleasures are associated with power, where the objects of gaze become stimulants of male desire and affirm the dominant ideology. The *cyborg-interactors* of *Bandersnatch* derive pleasure from resisting the linearity and sequentiality of a traditional film and from their power of being in a "participatory culture." Participatory media platforms like hypermedia allow greater collaborative participation with the help of technology and bypass traditional hierarchies and limitations of spectating. The renewed public involvement contributes to the emergence of an active engagement in the creation and sharing of culture. However, Barthes also mentions that an "excess" of pleasure could prevent the readers from attaining ecstasy or bliss at the end of the narrative. Too much structural complexity could cause "shock, disturbance, even loss" (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 19) among the interactors. This inability to reach the desired ending makes the interactors want to replay and find other possible outcomes. The consequences of the choices are not always immediate; however, few choices do not have any consequence at all in the plot.

4.2.3 Spectators and Their Many Roles in *Bandersnatch*

In *Bandersnatch*, hermeneutics and close reading are crucial on the part of the interactors. *Bandersnatch* has revolutionised the role of the spectators—who were only passive viewers. This

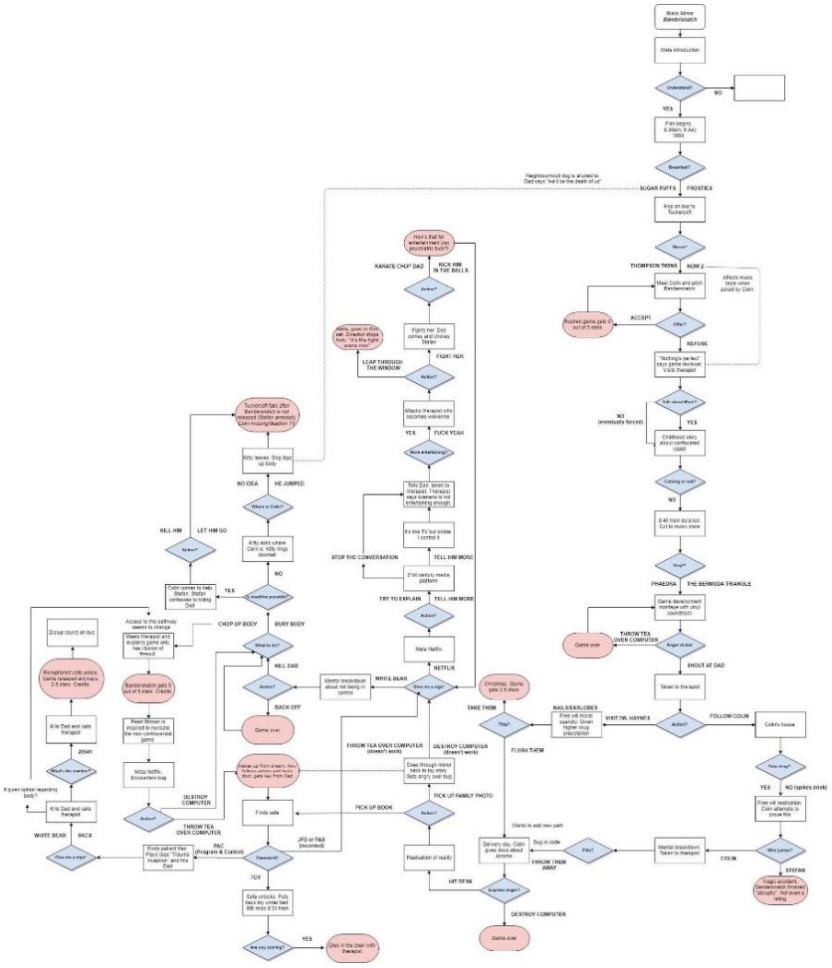

Figure 7. A flowchart comprising of all the possible options given to the spectators of the film Bandersnatch. 2018. Source: reddit.com.

medium of hyper-narrative interactive film exemplifies what Jacques Rancière mentions in *The Emancipated Spectator* when he talks about "theatre without spectators," where those who participate "become active participants as opposed to passive viewers" (4). Rancière argues for recognising the status of the spectators: "the empowerment of the capacity of no matter who." The medium of the hyper-narrative not only acts as a cyborg, but it also employs a "transformative power" to the interactors whose intervention is required for the completion of the cybernetic being, thus making the interactors part of that process and enhancing them to be cyborg subjectivity. As Rancière writes: "The modern aesthetic break is often described as the transition from the regime of representation to a regime of presence or presentation" (121). The interactors of *Bandersnatch* do not simply consume the new modes of presence, but they also engage with those modes. The flowchart of possible choices is central to a hyper-narrative, and to construct the plot out of this non-linear and fragmented structure, a *cyborg-interactor* is required (see Fig.7). The interactor contributes to the completion of the narrative

through their active presence. With increasing entanglement with the narrative, the interactors of the film start empathising with Stefan as the distance between the protagonist and the onlooker starts decreasing. They realise that their simple actions of touching, clicking or pushing a button directly influence the course of the narrative. The interactors experience such overwhelming emotions because they imagine themselves in place of Stefan. The relationship between the object, the audience and the knowledge production becomes "mediated and technologically enhanced and entangled" (Blaagaard 52).

There are different branches in *Bandersnatch* from which the interactor must choose a path to enter the narrative. The film employs two simultaneous approaches: first, a denial of spectating-since the interactors are free to choose whatever options they want in whichever order they want. Every time the interactors make a decision which does not contribute to the plot, the narrative will go back to the moment of the previous choice until the interactors are forced to re-do their decision. Second, privileged viewing access—as there are only ten seconds to make a choice or else the first option will be selected by default. Privileged viewing access is a type of super-user access that allows the interactors to have full control of the narrative at any time. By choosing an option in the given time, the interactors control the plot. This enables the interactors to elevate their rights to access the control of the paths and the structure of the narrative.

4.2.4 Posthuman Interactivity in *Bandersnatch*

Hayles defines the posthuman as a "union of the human with the intelligent machine" (*How We Became Posthuman?* 2). The storytelling in the posthuman age also becomes a way of defining and constructing the posthuman. In the emerging types of storytelling, technology is the central component of the narrative and the interaction with such narrative calls for the involvement of the

posthuman subject. Hayles finds the roots of the posthuman in cybernetics and argues that the resulting posthuman being is seamlessly configured with intelligent machines. This interrelation and dependency between technology and subjectivity is what Hayles refers to as "technogenesis." The interactor's emotions, consciousness, affects, and understanding of the world are entangled with the overbearing technology of the film. The overall aesthetics of the immersive experience create an understanding of the relationship between technology, the characters, the narrative and the interactors. The interactors are in a constant dilemma of what can be perceived as 'real' and what is not. Meaning-making or the "interpretation" of the film becomes a shared activity between the medium and the interactors. As a result of it, the interactors derive pleasure from this. This pleasure is not an affect or emotion but a cognitive ability which enables the interactors to be interrelated with technology. The overwhelming and complex technology of this cognitive environment often makes the interactors feel insignificant, but restructuring the film successfully to reach an ending makes it pleasurable. *Bandersnatch* also uses what Nicholas Bourriaud describes as "relational aesthetics": the focus of performance practice is explicitly on the meeting of the interactors and actors—a kind of "joint presence" (Willis 388). Not only do the interactors interact with the characters, but in return, the main character responds diligently. Both the characters within the film and the interactors are pushed and strained against the limits of understanding what is being depicted.

The interactors of *Bandersnatch* encounter a type of cyborg subjectivity themselves since they are intertwined with the technology that controls the plot of the film. *Bandersnatch* can be run on devices such as TV screens, monitors, trackpads, smartphones and even smartwatches and is controlled by their respective input devices: remote control, keyboard, mouse and even just by touch. Thus, the interactors generate a sort of machinic extensions themselves and get fused with

the medium like a cyborg. They are connected directly to the film with the help of these prosthetic extensions. In a way, a kind of "gameplay" takes place; these devices become the console with which the interactors navigate throughout the narrative. The "co-constitutive entanglements" (Gherardi 50) of the interactors with these non-human devices make them posthuman, and their participation is responsible for viewing the film as a cyborg. Further, such entanglements make the interactors feel more attached to the eventual outcomes. Unlike traditional cinema, these machines become an extension of the spectator's gestures which are then recognised, and the film plays on the basis of those. The control of the narrative is invested with the interactors, and it becomes so much easier to establish that control simply by a set of these gestures. For instance, if the interactors don't choose the option of sending Stefan to visit the doctor, he is then invited by Colin to his apartment, where the interactors are, in turn, given a choice as to whether Stefan should take the drug offered by Colin. The interaction with the movie at this point is not only significant for the plotline but is also an ethical one, considering the interactors are aware of Stefan's mental health problems.[23] Colin, at one point in his conversation with Stefan, gives insight into Brooker's line of thought by referencing Pac-Man, asserting, "what we do on one path affects what we do on the other paths." The hyper-narrative platform of *Bandersnatch* prevents the interactors from being lost in the plot of the film and fleeting into another reality level. They rupture the plot and create their own personal watching experiences. This level of engagement, control, autonomy, responsibility, and interaction in explicit, material, infrastructural and performative ways contribute to the posthuman aspects of the interactors. The interactors of *Bandersnatch* don't have

[23] As the film progresses, Stefan's mental state deteriorates. The interactors do not get the details of his psychiatrist's working diagnosis, but a definite history of psychotic symptoms is implied. The interactors watch Stefan unravel as he constantly suspects that someone is monitoring him and making his decisions. His psychiatrist understandably interprets this as worsening symptoms; however, the interactors know that Stefan is correct.

to sit in a single place and watch. With so many devices that could be used for immersive viewing, the interactors are also free to make modest choices relating to their positions of viewing. This dislodges them from the fixed perspectives and helps them move towards "divergent places of engagement" (Lavender 328).

These posthuman extensions of the body make the interactors a part of the system, and by interacting and controlling Stefan's life with these devices, they are, in a way, part of the creative process as well. The technology, therefore, mingles the actions of the machine with "the subjectivity we attribute to characters, authors, and ourselves as readers" (Hayles, "Flickering Connectivities" 51). In the virtual realm of software like Branch Manager, it becomes difficult to distinguish between character, writer and interactor: the plot written by a script writer and a mouse click or a touch on the screen by a human interactor shapes up the same narrative. When the film represents this process as a "merged molecular dance of simultaneity," the specificity of the medium contributes to the vision of cyborg subjectivity (Hayles, *My Mother* 163). Since hyper-narrative interactive cinema is created within cognitive environments, as a matter of fact, the interactor is seen as a cyborg merged with one or more codes and machines. The interactor is no longer able to access all that is put by the creator of the film in a linear manner but has to construct the storyline bit by bit. For this, serious derivation and interpretation are required by the interactor. The medium of hyper-narrative interactive film itself tends towards cyborg subjectivity: following Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," the various binary structures which modernist notions of subjectivity were founded upon are to be acknowledged and subsequently altered.

Bandersnatch does not give the interactors the opportunity of only viewing it as an ordinary movie and not participating in the process. It is true that if no option is selected within ten seconds, Netflix automatically continues the narrative with the first option. But if the first option does not

work out for Stefan, the interactor is faced with the same narrative situation through a fast forward and has to choose between the same two options again. Thus, the participation of the interactors is necessary in order to be able to view the entire film (Salen and Zimmerman 72). The interactors are required to be actively participating and making appropriate choices so that it will not result in the replaying of any situation in the film. In *Bandersnatch*, the Branch manager software seamlessly links the scenes with no buffering, thus allowing the interactor to experience what feels like watching real-time incidents. When the interactor is given a choice to make, the scenes pause with Stefan facing them, awaiting the decision—in a way, breaking the fourth wall. Jean-Francois Lyotard considers these events of the plot as sites of discourses and figures, and each of these sites as a rupture of the progressive time. An "event" becomes "the quality of temporal difference which cannot be grasped within a conceptual structure of time as past, present and future" (Readings 32). This rupture is a singular occurrence after which everything changes, and a disruption of the narrative time takes place. Both the condensation and the displacement of time take place along with this rupture. As a result, there occurs a suspension of the narrative. Although the interactors are given a frozen frame so that they can choose one of the possibilities, it is always done with the clock ticking: they have only ten seconds to make a choice, or a default decision is made. Once the time is over, Netflix automatically picks one of the two options. *Bandersnatch* is, thus, in a way, an illusion of choice, where the creators of the film simply guide the interactors to follow a path that is already set.

The interactors feel that they are "emancipated", but the emancipation is kept in check by Netflix. This is similar to the debate between free will and causal determinism, where it is argued that free will is not the capacity to make choices between multiple options, but only one course of

action is possible.[24] The compatibilists argue that free will necessitates determinism and that the choices always include the preference for one action over others. It entails that having the power to do otherwise is a kind of conditional causal power. Peter van Inwagen argues in "An Essay on Free Will" that if causal determinism enables people to employ their free will, then they have to choose between the past, which led to the current events and a few natural laws. But both the past and the natural laws are fixed and are out of control, so in that sense, there is a lack of free will. Inwagen adds that since we are morally responsible for some of our behaviour, free will is required to carry out those responsibilities. If there was no free will, then no one would be morally accountable for any action. Thus, although the interactors might control Stefan, the creators of the film panoptically monitor and survey them by being the ultimate controller of the storyline (Elnahla 4). The interactors are not really allowed to rupture the pace of the storytelling, and the imposition of temporality forces them to take certain decisions which are violent for the characters. In one of the five endings of the film, Stefan demands an answer to his question about who has been controlling him. In this meta-moment, one of the answers is that his fate is actually controlled by Netflix, "It's like TV, but online. I control it." This hyper-narrative format, thus, gives a kind of false creative 'freedom' to the interactor since the interactor only has the option to choose between pre-programmed and pre-scripted options. As Russell McLean, a producer of *Bandersnatch,* noted, "you think you're choosing your ending, but are you? *Black Mirror* is choosing your ending" (Streitfeld).

[24] Causal determinism refers to the idea that every event is a result of prior events and conditions necessitated by the laws of nature. The occurrence of every event is determined by our making choices and acting in a specific way. Compatibilists are philosophers like Thomas Aquinas who believe that free will and determinism are connected to each other. They believe that the truth of causal determinism would not undermine the free will. As a result, no threat would be posed to our status as morally responsible agents.

It seems that in *Bandersnatch*, there is an *unemancipated spectator*. The spectators must choose between the options given to them, even as all choices lead to the same ending. This is a posthuman illusion of choice in a capitalist society. Even after an interactor has successfully reached a desirable ending, the film provides the option to replay a previously selected option so that one is able to watch the other branching tree structures. Thus, the film paves the way for the interactors to select the appropriate options so that Stefan can create his game. The interactors can only reverse the film by ten seconds, but they cannot skip ahead. It is necessary to re-watch the already played scenes in order to continue playing and choose a different branching. Replaying the entire film to reach different endings might be a hindrance for the interactors, and a lot of patience and careful consideration of choices is required. If someone is replaying a scenario after a dead-end has been reached, then the previously not chosen option is automatised. The autonomy to choose acts of violence within the narrative, like choosing the option of killing Stefan's father or killing the therapist, may promise the interactors pleasure. It is worth asking whether the interactors themselves become cold cyborg-like subjectivity. With this, *Bandersnatch* becomes a film presented for not only the gaze but also a site of free flow and negotiation on the part of the interactors. They complete the events of the film through their God-like power and get incorporated within the cyborg film, becoming a part of the subjectivity.

Interpreting such a hyper-narrative film produces a *cyborg-interactor* not only because they share a prosthetic connection with the narrative (Mitchell and Snyder 53) in terms of involving their gestures through touch and click, but also because the hyper-narrative interactive film as a cyborg, forces the interactors to adopt a gaze that is equally modular and fragmentary. When we consider hyper-narrative use as a cyborg activity, it "may help to productively complicate what is a common vision of computer-text-as-hero in an emancipation/domination epic" (Johnson-Eilola

384). When the interactors of the film shape up the scattered chunks of the narrative into a lucid form, they also bring to life the hidden hyperlinks that modify or interrupt the narrative structure. As a result, there is a loss of the thought process when the cyborgian structure of the hyper-narrative continuously interrupts the interactor's attention. The interactor is caught in a cycle-like process instantiated in the form of a complex feedback loop. This feedback loop invites the realities of Baudrillard's simulation theory. After the dissolution of the real, all that exists is hyperreal, and there is no way out of the cyborgian structure but only "the chance to hasten catastrophic implosion with a fatal embrace" (Schroeder 149). This problematises the idea of a stable conclusion, and the interactors accept it in a kind of resignation. In the hyperreal immersive playspace, practical solutions become an illusion, and the interactors are webbed in the never-ending cycle. This cycle-like process within the cyborgian structure is never completed, each cycle opening up to a new continuous loop, resulting in the ultimate dissemination of the previously constructed narrative. We should attempt to consider the cyborg in Haraway's terms as something that operates amid rupture and commotion, a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and control, and neat endings. *Bandersnatch* resembles these fluctuations, and the non-linear nature of the narrative, along with the resistance on the part of the interactors, contribute to the cyborgian nature of such a hyper-narrative interactive film.

In the words of Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston: "The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image" (3). The contemporary moment is visually interactive and linkable; *Bandersnatch* represents the augmented power of the representation of posthuman aesthetics. The kind of interactivity that *Bandersnatch* represents in terms of fluidity, decentring and possibilities of multiple perspectives hails the new posthumanist aesthetics. These aesthetics of the immersive experience create an understanding of the relationship between technology, the

characters, the narrative and the interactors. The *unemancipated spectator* of *Bandersnatch* attempts to disfigure the binary and, in the process, constructs a cyborg with automatised choices through the medium of the film itself. The significance of their choices and the affects they have on the narrative make them believe that their presence is crucial, and they are also entwined with the same technology. The technology with which the film is created and which contributes to the aesthetics of immersive viewing makes *Bandersnatch* a posthuman product and the interactors a part of the cyborg subjectivity. Films like this make a new form of narrative based on interactivity where the boundaries between what is real and what is unreal are contested.

Section-III

Interrogating Interactivity in Interactive Literature

> "Here process is all; there is no fixed product or text, just the reader's activity as producer as well as receiver."
>
> (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 77)

In this section, the focus of the analysis is the genre of interactive fiction, with an emphasis on three interactive storytelling applications: *Chapters: Interactive Stories, Choices: Stories You Play*, and *Journeys: Interactive Series. Chapters: Interactive Stories,* designed by Crazy Maple Studio, was released in 2017. It brings fictional stories to life by blending textual prose, animation and sound effects. The collection of stories ranges from romance, fantasy, suspense, sci-fi and young adult literature to comedy. *Choices: Stories You Play* was released in 2020 and was designed by Pixelberry Studios. The designers promise the participants that *Choices* include genre narrative in the vein of popular Young Adult books like *Game of Thrones, Twilight* and *The Princess Diaries.* Similar to the maple leaves in *Chapters*, unlocking new chapters in a story in *Choices*

requires a key, and the interactors could only get two free keys every two hours. *Journeys: Interactive Series* designed by The Other Guys was released in 2019. It is a visual novel in which one can choose from various options available and could also "become the star of the story" by making the characters look like themselves. All of these applications are mobile narrative portals. One cannot engage with these stories for a long time without spending money and is required to buy diamonds, keys and maple leaves in order to keep on playing and to purchase additional story options like dresses. There is also the availability of advertisements in these three applications, watching which could give the interactors certain bonuses. Content-wise, they cover the same genres, and the number of chapters in each story is also similar. By analysing these interactive storytelling applications, this section examines the relationship between interactivity and narrativity.

Interactive fiction is the process of narration delivered via software simulating environments in which the interactors make choices to influence the storyline. These choices are usually textual prompts which appear at different points of narration. The rich graphics and the visual components make these interactive stories attractive and user-friendly. Each narration is accompanied by the visual of the setting and the characters and every other tiny detail of the context. This makes it engaging for the interactors since not only are they able to read the story but also see it simultaneously. However, there is a strong emphasis on prose as well since the entire visual narration is delivered to the interactors via the text. These fictions have multiple storylines and more than one ending, but to reach the most desirable ending, the interactors are required to spend some money. The following section demonstrates how spectatorship is closely associated with capitalism using Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" and how the desire to obtain pleasure from these interactive applications makes the interactors spend money.

After focusing on hypertext and hypermedia in the previous sections, the focus is shifted to interactive literature in this section, primarily because the aim is to trace the evolution of hypertexts in literature and to examine the extent of the intervention of the interactors that could be possible in narration. Unlike hypertexts, where the users have to choose from already designed paths to construct a text and reach an ending, in interactive fiction, the involvement of the interactors is to a greater extent. At every juncture in the narration, the interactors are required to make choices which correspond to how the narrative will go forward. With this genre, the interactors could relate more to the technology because, before the beginning of every story, they are required to design, dress and name the characters as per their choices. In this way, the degree of identification of the interactors with the characters is higher. With hypertexts, there are no visual components involved, but in interactive fiction, each textual prompt is accompanied by anime-style or live-action stills, beautiful backgrounds and the visual representation of the setting with minute details. With *Bandersnatch*, it has been established that the new process of spectating makes the interactors a part of cyborg subjectivity. In this section, there is a shift from the exclusive text-based environment of hypertexts and the cinematic experience of *Bandersnatch* to the amalgamation of text and visual elements of interactive storytelling applications. The three genres are similar with respect to their non-linear nature, fluidity and involvement of the users/interactors. But as one gradually moves from one genre to another, it is witnessed that enhanced functionalities make each of them unique aesthetic fields. The more the user/interactor participation, the more enriched the posthumanist aesthetic qualities of these fields. With increased technological innovations and the extent of control vested in the participants, the case of the *cyborg-reader* and the *cyborg interactor* is more defined.

4.3.1 Towards a Theory of Emancipated Narrative

"What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking?"

(Foucault 14)

When Foucault cites this statement from Beckett, he refers to the "indifference" characterised by the demise of the author figure and a tendency of open-endedness in postmodernist writings. The author's identity no longer matters and is suppressed by the process of writing itself. For Foucault, an author is only "a function of discourse" (19) and does not have any other authority. The author is referred to as the role that is created by the ways discourse is treated in culture. Foucault argued that texts which are not assigned an author's name are simply "consumed and forgotten" since the status of the authors has been created through power relations in the culture. He predicted that the eventual disappearance of the author would bring a better future: "We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity" (Foucault 33). This simple existence of texts without the author-function is what is argued in the case of interactive storytelling. In the interactive stories, the author continuously disappears in the midst of layouts, pop-up windows and simulation technologies. There is no longer a prerequisite for a fixed place for the author since the interactors are so immersed in the technology that they themselves start building up the story. There is an existence of "someone" somewhere, but there is no necessity to find out who. Foucault characterised the author as "something like a subject," which accounts for free circulation, composition (decomposition and recomposition) and manipulation. The feature of recomposition of the conventional concept of space and reality is evident in interactive storytelling. The author-figure becomes a construct of the interactor, and the interactive stories are the perfect interpretative spaces where the author can

be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed as the interactor sees fit. More important is distinguishing the 'creator' of the text from the corresponding author-figure. In the case of interactive literature, the interactors are the creators of the text, but somewhere, there is the author-figure who has written the stories at some point. But the creator or Barthes's "modern scriptor" is associated only with the text and does not exist beyond it. The interactors fill the gaps in the texts using their own experiences and thought processes.

In his book, *The Implied Reader*, Wolfgang Iser stresses that the "implied reader" as a concept is firmly rooted in the structure of the text. Iser's reader is not a common reader, although a less exceptional one. The reader's consciousness generates the meaning of the text through "the process of anticipation and retrospection, the consequent unfolding of the text as a living event, and the resultant impression of life-likeness" (Iser 290). Similar to Barthes's argument, Iser mentions that the readers should relate to the text with their own life experiences. This reader, which Iser refers to as an "implied reader," is an intermediary between the author's and the reader's consciousness. The concept of the implied reader is a textual structure which anticipates the presence of a recipient. The implied reader is called into existence by the text depending on the manner in which the text is being read and interpreted. This co-creative activity of the reader could also pursue a path that is not provided in the text. This dissertation argues that the interactors of interactive literature are implied readers in the sense that a) they are significantly different from their predecessors in terms of their contributions to constructing the narrative, and b) they are able to generate new readings with the help of their cognitive activity. The implied reader ideally does not contribute to criticism and is more concerned with interpretation.

4.3.2 Aesthetic Pleasure in Interactivity

> "Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind."
>
> (Foucault 15)

Interactive storytelling dramatises the events in a narrative by using animations, depending on the intervention of the interactors. Every action taken by the interactors corresponds to some change in the narrative. In addition to curiosity and suspense, interactive literature also includes an important feature: aesthetic pleasure—which is necessary to make it attractive to the interactors. The blending of the visual with the textual prose enables aesthetic pleasure. It is a physical pleasure accompanied by a dissolution—losing oneself. The constant efforts in uncovering the narrative of the stories "engrosses the physicalness" of the interactors: "It grants her/him a temporal sphere detached from everyday life and the powers of social control" (Lauteren 224). This detachment results in bodily pleasure for the interactors. The characters in these narratives are designed in such a way that there is a high degree of identification with the interactors, and they can empathise with their virtual self. This makes it necessary for the writers of interactive stories to also write complicated computer programs which include aesthetic interactions. The aesthetic experience of the interactors is similar to what Monroe Beardsley means when he claims that the aesthetic quality of an artwork lies in its elements, qualities, meanings, unity, and complexity. He mentions that the aesthetic qualities of art contribute to its value, and it has no existence beyond the art itself. The internal characteristics of art, such as its coherence and completeness, are solely responsible for its aesthetic quality. He argues that the cognitive activity involved in aesthetic response should be focused only on the art object:

> I propose to say that a person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated. (Beardsley 5)

Similar to Beardsley, Kant argues that cognitive activity produces pleasure during an aesthetic experience. This experience of the beautiful is an example of the manifestation of the capacity of the sensible. He mentions that the aesthetic qualities of a single object of art are limited only to that object due to its harmony and proportionality. The aesthetic comprehension of the beautiful is produced by the object as well as the thinking and the cognising of the interactors.

In *Choices: Stories You Play*, there is the availability of stories of genres such as–horror, suspenseful mysteries and vampire stories, but according to Beardsley, the aesthetics could still be made enjoyable even if the images are of dark and terrible things. Adding to the aesthetics is also the experience of discovery: the choices that the interactors make to proceed further in the story add to a feeling of wholeness and personal integration. Regarding the pleasure of the aesthetic experience, Kant states that the achievement of aesthetic pleasure is not dependent on reason. Even if the interactive stories represent dark and terrible images, the interactors could still experience beauty. Such a representation could never be boring since it is a "representation of the imagination which gives much to think about, without any determinate thought, i.e., concept, being adequate to it, which therefore no language can fully reach and make comprehensible" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 313). All aesthetic objects strive for experiences beyond the boundaries of reason and ultimately contributes to some form of pleasure since the author "dares to render sensible ideas of reason of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, hell, eternity, the creation, etc." (Kant, *Critique*

of Judgement 313–14). With their imagination, the authors reach out to the sensible, and this process is always accompanied by a cognitive understanding on the part of the interactors. This is where Kant's concept of the sublime emerges. The sublime is the process of the comprehension of aesthetics, which occurs when the synergy between cognitive understanding and the senses is overturned. He argues that the feeling of the sublime "makes intuitable the superiority of the vocation of reason over the greatest capacity of sensibility" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 257). The experience of the sublime represents the dominance of cognitive power over other senses. The fearful and threatening images invoke a feeling of the sublime since they "elevate the strength of the soul above its usual mean and discover within us a faculty of resistance of quite another kind" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 258). This feeling of the sublime raises the imagination of the interactors and seeks an aesthetic ideal.

In *Chapters: Interactive Stories*, the stories are usually divided between 20–25 chapters, and the reading time of each of the chapters is about 20 minutes. A significant part of interacting on this platform is by collecting diamonds. When a user logs in every day, there are some rewards in the forms of diamonds, tickets and maple leaves. Diamonds can also be earned by watching advertisements ranging from about 30 seconds to 1 minute. With the absence of the traditional author-figure, there is also the absence of the concept of royalty, which is earned by means of selling books in print. So, the interactive platforms have come up with a few ways to collect royalty in the form of VIP membership subscriptions, diamonds and daily ticket purchasing. Maple coins are earned for things like finishing chapters, watching advertisements, and interacting with the app on a daily basis. These maple coins can be, in turn, exchanged for purchasing diamonds.

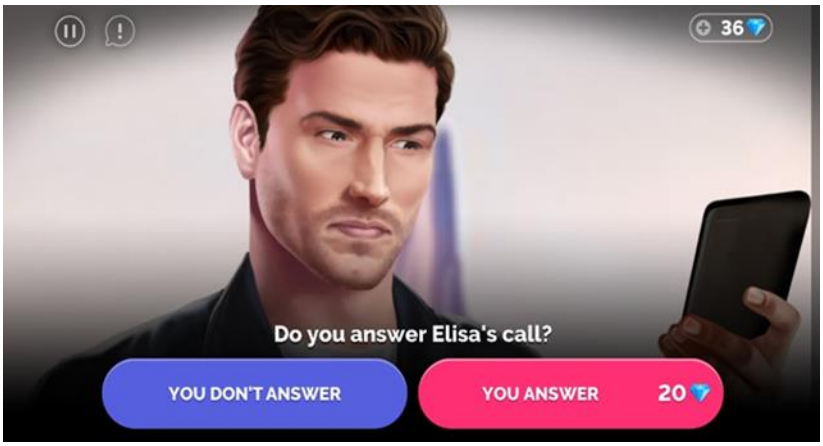

Figure 8. "Princess By Accident", Episode 3, Journeys: Interactive Series, *The Other Guys, 2019.*

Additionally, there is the option of sharing a referral code and inviting others to this application, and if they do so, the interactors would be able to gain diamonds on their behalf. The application automatically generates two tickets every two hours, and with the VIP packages, one has the option to get more tickets. One cannot engage with this platform indefinitely without spending money (see Fig.8). Spending money is an integral part of this platform. Whether one chooses to spend money or not also controls the narrative of the story. Only a few diamonds can be collected for free from time to time by watching advertisements, but to spend about 30–40 diamonds for each option, the interactors have to purchase diamonds, and there are various bundles available for buying these. So, to get the most favourable outcomes, one must spend money to buy diamonds. Through the numerous advertisements at every point of the reading experience, the developers also earn a lot of money. The traditional way of earning money through profits from selling books, royalties, and other such components is now replaced with digital equivalence. The buying of diamonds, advertisements, and VIP subscriptions are the alternatives now. All of these options require significant capital investment on the part of the interactors. The willingness to derive aesthetic pleasure from this platform makes the interactors spend money.

The relation of capitalism with spectating could be demonstrated using Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," which refers to the free movement of capital and money. Central

to Bauman's discourse is the question of impermanence, which is the key aspect of interactive fiction:

> Transience has replaced durability at the top of the value table. What is valued today (by choice as much as by unchosen necessity) is the ability to be on the move, to travel light and at short notice. Power is measured by the speed with which responsibilities can be escaped. Who accelerates, wins; who stays put, loses. (Bauman and Tester 95)

Interactive fiction provides a transient environment by continuously generating new objects to be admired and possessed. In order to consume these objects, the interactors are driven to invest. The illusion of individuality is provided to the interactors for designing virtual characters modelled on themselves. Investment of money is necessary to achieve this sense of impermanence, which Bauman refers to as "slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power" (14). In liquid modernity, consumption is connected to desire, which is fluid because of its relation to "plastic dreams of the authenticity of an 'inner self' waiting to be expressed" (Bauman 75). The freedom to consume from a wide range of objects also comes with an environment with necessary credit facilities vital to the movement of capital. All three interactive storytelling applications provide the availability of the liquidity of spending with proper avenues for transactions. The interactors are made to believe that pleasure could be derived from the aesthetic environment of interactive storytelling. The mode of consumption in liquid modernity, thus, markets the temporary expression of an individual in a virtual sphere by choosing the desired options from an "unfettered selection of goods and services under the sign of evolving technology" (Bauman 165).

The private act of creation becomes explicitly public and gives rise to the consumer society. This society is driven not only by the needs of the consumers but by the productive capacity of the market. The writers of interactive fiction emphasise not only production but also the consumption

of their work. In *The Consumer Society: Myths & Structures*, Baudrillard explains that contemporary capitalism includes not only profit maximisation but also the disposal of the product. It becomes necessary to control both the apparatus of production and the consumer demand—"to control not just prices, but what will be demanded at those prices" (Baudrillard 71). Once the consumers are attracted towards the platform of interactive fiction, and their desire of reaching to the end of the story is instigated, it becomes easier to provide them with the options to purchase goods. The accommodation of the desires of the individual by the market enables the producers to dictate the act of production and the subsequent consumerisation. Baudrillard argues: ''In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign" (25), and hence, there is a requirement to make the product "personalized." Interactive fiction serves this purpose by enabling the interactors to model characters on themselves so as to provide them with the illusion of playing their own story. This makes the products more powerful and persuasive in consumer society. Instead of associating the products with their material qualities and function, they are now integrated with the lifestyles and social lives of the people. The dominance of the commodities addresses the experience of lack in the consumers: "It is ultimately because consumption is founded on a lack that it is irrepressible" (Baudrillard 28). This feeling of lack results in a deep longing, which accelerates endlessly and the consumers are consumed by it.

While examining the influence of capitalism on spectatorship, it is necessary to examine the influence of capitalism in the creation of the cyborg identity. Since a major part of the dissertation's argument is based on cyborg subjectivity, it is necessary to analyse the role of capitalism in the creation of the cyborg identity. After Norbert Weiner invented the term "cybernetic" to refer to the self-correcting weapons systems he had been developing during and after World War II, there has been a prominent shift in the ontology of the cyborg—from the

mechanical to the biological—from a fabricated entity to a synthetic organic creature. The cyborg emerged as the answer to questions of global politics. The cybernetic being was modified to endure the hostilities of space travel and to improve the chances for the USA in the Cold War. The cyborg was conceived to revolutionise the capitalist society and to embody the reproductive as well as the destructive powers of science. A noticeable shift was from the individual cyborg to the all-encompassing "hive-mind," a concept recurrent in posthumanism. The cyborg was then considered akin to a "robot," derived from the Czech word "robota", meaning 'serf labour.' Thus, the cyborgs came to be referred to as mass-produced slaves. The entire ontology of the cyborg shifted under the influence of capitalism, and its functionalities became associated with power and wealth. The amount of investment determined the functionalities of the cyborg, and it stopped having its individual characteristics. Hayles posits that emancipation has been associated with humans only; the posthuman was never recognised to possess autonomy and agency. The concept of the individual cyborg was lost long ago, and in the contemporary situation, it is only a subject to authority. Even in the cyberspace of hypertext, hypermedia, and interactive fiction, the cyborg subjectivity is entwined with the technological innovations of these genres and the demands of capital investment.

4.3.3 Methods of Engagement in Interactive Literature

Close reading has been the traditional method of reading for a very long time until the concept of distant reading was introduced by Franco Moretti at the beginning of the 21st century. Close reading has always been the essential method of literary criticism, to read a text by interpreting its central themes and the analysis of their developments. Nancy Boyles defines it as: "Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension" (37).

In “What is Stylistics and Why are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?” Stanley Fish argues that during close reading, our understanding of syntax also keeps changing. With the level of analysing involved in close reading, there is a constant determination and redetermination of the senses. To carry out close reading, the readers occasionally use different colours of ink to underline or make notes on the pages of the books. With the availability of digitised texts, this has been replaced by highlighting lines and writing comments against them. In all of these methods, the structure of the source text remains intact. Distant reading dissolves this very structure. It generates “an abstract view by shifting from observing textual content to visualizing global features of a single or of multiple texts” (Jänicke 228). In this sense, distant reading never denies close reading entirely but rather advances it. The structural order of close reading is ignored in distant reading in favour of concentrating on one characteristic of the text at a time. Close reading is often accused of its uneconomical, time-consuming quality and narrow focus, but in distant reading, there are no such problems of time-consuming or the anxiety of an unattainable ideal knowledge. Distant reading is accompanied by statistical, quantitative methods to read a large volume of texts using “graphs, maps and trees” only to engage with very specific parts for reading.

In the context of close and distant reading, there is often the inclusion of contemporary debates of scale. With reference to scale, distant reading is considered to be a macroscopic view of thousands of texts, while close reading is considered to be the “microscopic view of a single text, a few passages, or even a couple of lines” (Jin 105). As a result, the scale becomes both included and eliminated from close reading. In the cases of interactive fiction, where both distant and close reading are combined, it becomes difficult to reconceptualise the role played by scale in the interpretation of the work. Interactive fiction does not operate on any particular scale of analysis but employs flexibility in scaling. This is referred to as “scalable reading” by Martin

Mueller, which captures the change of perspective from a "bird's eye-view to close-up analysis" (Jin 115). This allows for both zooming in and out and consequently strengthens the macroanalysis. It works well in the case of visual perspectives, and the effortless zooming in and out results in a homogeneous and continuous set of pictures. Mueller's "scalable reading" is, thus, synonymous with macroanalysis and is a substitution for distant reading. In addition to this, there is Cordell's "zoomable reading", which describes the analytical movement between close and distant reading.

With the emergence of interactive storytelling platforms, the time required to intensively move between different scales of analysis is reduced. As opposed to what Mueller refers to as "scalable reading," there is a "zoomable reading." Instead of "close" or "distant" reading, Ryan Cordell prefers the concept of "zoomable reading." During "zoomable reading," the interactor "moves between levels of perspective to build a robust argument" (Cordell 3). Zoomable reading involves reading from multiple sources in a manner that comprises moving attention back and forth among the texts. This includes both "close" reading in the case of the nodes of individual texts and also "distant" reading in the case of the edges of intertextual conversations. Clicking on an object on the screen zooms the view so that the selected text or image fills the entire screen of the window, and the touch allows zooming to arbitrary zoom levels. The animations included in the zooming interface help the interactors perceive the relative positions of the text and images in the initial and final views. The zooming also stops automatically once the appropriate viewing area is reached. This prevents the interactors from undershooting or overshooting "a desired target or get lost in the visualization" (Bier et al. 91). The font size, however, remains constant since the interface employs a uniform readable text size all over. What close reading could not provide to interactive literature, zooming out does—by allowing the users to look at all the individual occurrences

throughout the corpus at once. This level of engagement with the technology of interactive fiction is a result of the cognitive ability of the interactors. The perceiving of the relative positions of text and images, zooming to arbitrary levels and trying to build a robust argument while moving between different levels of perspectives are possible because of the simultaneous cognitive activity involved during "zoomable reading." As a result, cognitive activity is required not only to derive aesthetic pleasure from the interactive stories but also in the reading process.

Figure 9. "Princess By Accident", Episode 6, Journeys: Interactive Series, *The Other Guys, 2019.*

Another significant feature of "zoomable reading" is enabling the interactors to decide which nodes to read and in what order, tracking which have been read and which are still to be read, expanding the list of the chapters on the menu list, and iterating, until the interactor has reached to the desired level of understanding (see Fig.9). Due to the issue of long-term engagement, zoomable reading solve the difficulties of dealing with a large number of pages. The interactors can access the entire contents in a "zoomable browser that displays information at different levels of granularity, from the entire corpus, through sub-collections of documents, to pages of individual documents" (Bier et al. 88). The zoomable interface enables the interactors to access this information along with navigation, re-finding and planning what and when to read:

> A user who has assembled a collection of documents will then wish to view the collection and learn more about it. In particular, the user may want to identify the important authors,

> years, publications, and sub-topics of the collection. The user will also want to decide which documents to read and in what order. (Bier et al. 90)

The search button and the hyperlinks to individual chapters help the interactors navigate smoothly from one part of the story to the other. Even if it takes weeks for the interactors to complete reading, they can track their reading process in detail. Different colour coding of different tracks appropriates each level of zoom. Further, the colour layout shows how much of the chapter has been covered by the interactors. Other than reading the chapters and their descriptions by following the links, the interactors are also able to find out other information such as the author bio, the publication details, and when and how the story was released.

4.3.4 Visualisation in Interactive Literature

Espen Aarseth observes that in interactive narrative, the text that the interactors encounter includes both written descriptions and iconic symbols. He clarifies his argument by distinguishing between "scriptions" and "textons"—"strings as they appear to readers" and "strings as they exist in the text." This difference adds further complexity to the textual materiality in the case of interactive literature. When William K. Wimsatt talks about the requirement of a ceaseless movement between levels of materiality, he is only considering texts in print. In addition to aesthetic materiality, textual materiality is highly complicated in interactive literature since there is the involvement of a considerable number of codes and programming. Hence, the movement is not as ceaseless as Wimsatt predicts, with the shuffling of several elements within the structure and the narrative. In interactive literature, the interactors make choices after exploring the given set of textons, and the scriptions are produced as a result of the narrative and the interactor's choices. Unlike computer games, interactive literature employs a relatively large number of textons, and as a result, a greater

number of scriptions are generated from the choices. The interactive stories typically ask the interactors to make choices about attire, decorating rooms, managing resources, relationship choices, and what objects to find and how. By not spending money to buy diamonds or maple leaves, the interactors only have limited choices. To think in terms of capitalism, the illusion of choices works towards the advantages of the creators of these applications. The illusion of actually having a choice becomes redundant by the limited number of scriptions and textons. Whether an interactor decides to spend money or not, they still have to make a choice from the already existing set of options.

Figure 10. "Sunkissed", Ch- 3, Choices: Stories You Play, Pixelberry Studios, 2020.

Without the involvement of diamonds, sometimes the interactors could fail to make a successful choice. For instance, in the story "Sunkissed" by *Choices*, the character Aria searches for a recipe book. Three choices are given to the interactors to decide which place has the recipe book hidden (see Fig.10). If someone selects the bookshelves or the desk, they would be asked to make a choice again since none of those two places contains the book. Each time an unsuccessful attempt is made, a new set of scriptions pop up, changing the course of the narrative. Further, the same texton can be accessed at different points of the story. If a choice does not contribute much to the narrative, the interactors may be required to reconsider the choice again at some later point. Similarly, in *Bandersnatch*, the choices in the narrative allow multiple paths of experience. If a choice does not contribute to the progress of the narrative, the interactors are

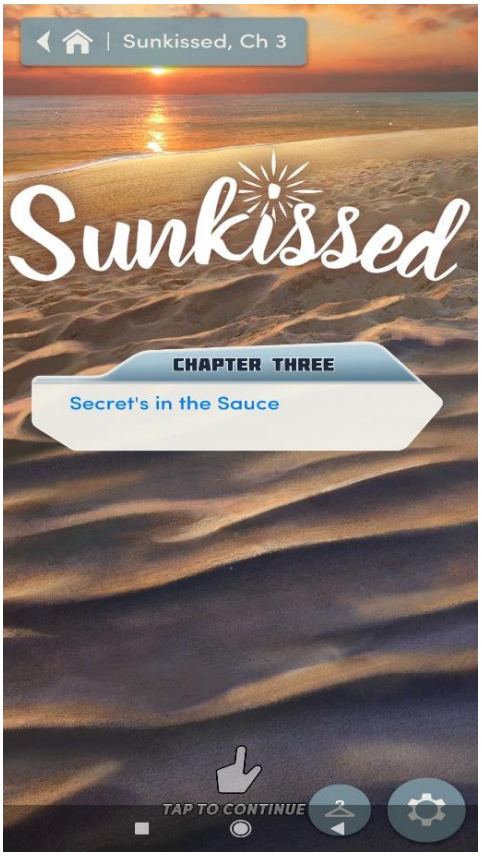

Figure 11. "Sunkissed", Ch- 3, Choices: Stories You Play, Pixelberry Studios, 2020.

brought back to a previous path and are required to choose the alternative option. Unlike interactive literature, *Bandersnatch* gives the interactors a choice to play for another ending as the credits begin to roll by going back to a crucial moment in the film and changing their choice. Another feature of interactive literature is the ticking clock; the reading and the choices are to be made in a given time span. While reading a book, we get to wait and linger on a page for a while, but in the case of the interactive application *Choices,* within 30 seconds of no activity on the part of the interactors, a prompt comes up saying, "Tap to continue" (see Fig.11). Consequently, the traditional approach of reading and then staying on the same page re-reading the same lines repeatedly has also undergone a huge transition. This new method of just glancing through and quickly scrolling to the next part within a time constraint is introduced in the interactive platform of reading stories. Instead of the 10-second time span of *Bandersnatch,* interactive literature allows 30 seconds of inactivity. However, in *Bandersnatch*, if no option is selected within ten seconds, Netflix automatically continues the narrative with the first option. This doesn't happen in interactive literature—the prompt appears on the screen, but the interactors are solely invested in the role of making choices.

In *Choices*, the "My Favorites" category enables the interactors to keep all of their favourite stories in the same place. This kind of sub-collections, called "bundles", refines the interactive approach of this interface. The automatic organisation of the collections into a spatial layout is

also colour-coordinated and includes a layout of icons to add to the visual properties so that the interactors "can build up spatial memories of the collection over long time periods" (Bier et al. 89). The way the rankings of the stories are used is also worth mentioning. The interactors are willing to engage in a long reading process by choosing the stories, so the highly ranked ones are highlighted in a visualisation that is attractive enough for the interactors to return to it again and again. This sub-collection also tends to change at regular intervals. This uniform indexing facility with graphical and contextual cues also helps the interactors in their decisions on what to read next. Most of the stories demand a long-time engagement, so the interactors are selective, and the selection process is further enhanced by other sub-collections, such as "Recommended for You," based on the reading history. The other sub-collections, such as "Completed Books," "My Bag," and "Trending", help the interactors track which stories have been read, decide what to read next, now and in the near future, and also find relevant information about the stories already read. While reading a book, the interactors cannot spend much time or thought navigating from one book to another to find references or to cross-check something. The transition is quick and easy in this interface with the help of different groups and sub-groups. The smaller thumbnail image of each page before entering into the screen-resolution image gives the interactors a moment to decide if they want to enter the desired page or not.

In *Patchwork Girl*, the Storyspace software provides a facility for the users to save their individual paths of links that have constituted their individual readings and also to add margin notes in each lexia. Although the collections of the saved paths of links are not colour-coordinated and lack visual properties as in interactive story applications, the organisation helps the users find their paths for further reading. The zoomable user interface is also responsible for differentiating hypertexts from traditional texts in print. The navigation of the text, re-finding of paths for

subsequent readings, planning what paths to follow, and enabling the user to add margin notes are the ways in which *Patchwork Girl* provides an in-depth reading experience to the users. This is where *Bandersnatch* is lacking: the zoomable user interface and the in-depth reading experience are both missing. There is no way in which an interactor could save the paths they have followed in an earlier viewing so as to arrive at a new ending in the next viewing. With each viewing and with the choice of one option, alternative paths are permanently closed off. The interactive complexity is much greater in *Bandersnatch,* and there is no way in which the navigation and the planning could be made easier for the interactors. Similar to hypertexts and interactive fiction, *Bandersnatch* also requires a long engagement process. The difference in visualisation and the lack of a zoomable user interface are responsible for the interactor's inability to recognise the paths previously followed. With each viewing, the interactors begin anew and are also prone to make the exact same choices which could result in a similar ending as during their previous viewing. The advantages of saving the selection process and the easier navigation with added visualisation make *Patchwork Girl* and the interactive fiction much more user-friendly than *Bandersnatch*.

As it has been argued in the previous section, the interactors share a posthuman connection with the narrative through their active gestures and seamless involvement with the interactive applications. This "technogenesis" is influenced by the "aesthetic pleasantness" of the interactive literature, which makes the interactors a kind of "joint presence" with the technology of the narrative itself. The kind of participation which is required in the material, infrastructural, and performative ways contributes to the posthuman aspect of this interactivity. The three sections of this chapter demonstrate the fact that in order to interact with the hypertexts and all forms of hypermedia, the input devices become the posthuman extensions of the human body. Further, by imbuing the desires and actions with the technology, the user/interactor becomes a cyborg

subjectivity. The interactive medium not only acts as a posthumanist but, by employing the "transformative power" to the interactors, enables them to be a part of the process of creating and completing the narrative, hence enhancing the user/interactor into a posthuman subject. The analysis establishes that the aesthetics of this posthuman interactivity adds to the experience of the discovery of the narrative with the choices that the interactors make to proceed further and make them feel a sense of wholeness and personal integration. Similar to the technological complexities of interactive literature, which contributes to its "aesthetic pleasantness," it can be anticipated that other genres of hypermedia, such as interactive films and video games, will also be successful in further aestheticising interactivity in the near future.

CHAPTER 5

Reading *I've Got a Time Bomb* as Crip Lit

After exploring the posthuman presence in *Patchwork Girl*, *Bandersnatch* and interactive fiction, this chapter examines and situates 'crip' in the posthuman context. This chapter critically examines Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* to demonstrate how this illustrated text is a part of Crip Lit. This chapter argues that the crip aesthetics of the novel contribute to the constitution of a posthuman fictive world in terms of the form and content of the novel. The chapter demonstrates how crip constitutes posthuman aesthetics and how it radically interprets community practices. Within Lamb's novel, a cripped coalition politics is formed when a group cohesion emerges among the characters who stand in stark contrast to the normative, standardised world. In this chapter, I read the crip as a verb to refer to the posthuman figure by emphasising how the text promotes disintegration and imperfection by incorporating all kinds of bodies and discourses. By using the term "crip" as a verb, this chapter demonstrates how the novel and its characters resist categorisation, normativity and traditional assumptions of disability. Crip theory has gained popularity within literary studies in order to understand how literature conceives of and contributes to the understanding and representation of crip. Crip theory is a departure from disability theory because it is interested in rejecting the boundaries between disability and able-bodiedness. Crip theory is significant in studying Lamb's novel because it brings to light the novel's rejection of normativity and its fascination with mental and bodily imperfections.

5.1 Fluid and Ever-changing Crip

Victoria Ann Lewis states that during the 1970s, the term "crip", which is the shortened form of the word "cripple", gained popularity as "an informal, affectionately ironic, and provocative identification among people with disabilities" (140). The term is readopted from the word "cripple" in the same way the word "queer" is appropriated by the LGBTQ+ community. Disability studies writers such as Nancy Mairs favours the usage of the word "crip" because of its Old English roots and its ability to disturb. In the mid-1980, the term "crip" started to refer to the in-group status and solidarity in the disability community. Instead of using deflating mainstream labels that are not only patronising but also misleading, educated disabled people started favouring the term "crip" because of the way it reclaims a stigmatised term. Lewis argues:

> The shape and sound of the word, with its quick burst of Anglo-Saxon roughness, forms compound words easily and, most important, matches the pride and panache of a growing, self-defining disability community. (145)

Through the cultural model of disability, the term "crip" crossed the thresholds of the realm of activism and entered into everyday discussions. [25] However, it still stands in opposition to the medical model of disability, which reduces "disability to the univocality of pathology, diagnosis, or treatment/elimination" (McRuer, *Crip Times* 19). This chapter examines and explores "crip" in the way it has been appropriated in the cultural model of disability because crip demands a culturally generative way for its appropriation.

[25] Cultural model of disability recognises disability as "a site of phenomenological value" which resists the processes of social disablement (Snyder and Mitchell 5). It understands disability as a cultural trope that acts as a site of resistance and a source of cultural agency that was previously suppressed.

Disability performance artist and scholar Carrie Sandahl argues that the concept of crip is "fluid and ever-changing", and it includes all kinds of impairments: physical, mental and sensory (27). She mentions that both crips and queers oppose the traditional elements of identity and adamantly oppose concepts of normality. In their shared history of a lack of acknowledgement in dominant representation, crip and queer possess intersecting identities. Sandahl argues that the power of claiming crip originates from the sedimented history of the prior usage of the term, along with its capacity to injure. She opines that she would want to replace the term "disability studies" with "crip studies" since she believes "crip" could also be used as a verb to emphasise a specific form of disidentification by destabilising mainstream representations of able-bodiedness. Further, Alison Kafer argues that the term "crip" is meant to destabilise categories of identity. She asserts that crip cannot be defined and is supposed to recognise intersections of social and political identities. Kafer also develops the notion of "crip time" to "theorize an 'elsewhere,' to provide a political framework for a more just world that does not rely on a normalizing impulse" (23). In Great Metropolitopolis, the eponymous protagonist, Sybil, identifies with other "more-than-human" characters like Sissy, Floss, Syetta and Pinny, and their alleged non-normativity ironically fosters cohesion and reciprocal care. By creating a protopic community, these individuals provide themselves with the opportunity to flourish within a space that is not always safe but rather signifies an attempt towards creating a safe space for themselves. The phrase "crip times" signifies austerity as well as describes a set of individual experiences and creative responses. Similarly, Robert McRuer offers his own concept of the notion of "crip time" as an analytic that could be used to critique the concept of space and time in relation to austerity.

5.2 Arriving at Crip Lit

McRuer conceptualises crip as an idea that explores how bodies "might be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization" (*Crip Theory* 33). He states that the aim of crip theory is to "resist delimiting the kinds of bodies and abilities that are acceptable" (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 31). Further, he argues that by cripping something, one also critiques and subverts dominant cultural expectations about able-bodiedness in innovative ways. McRuer speaks of "a coalition of "left-behinds" who may or may not identify as disabled but who can be comprehended as connected somehow through a crip analytic commitment to theorizing vulnerability, precarity and resistance expansively" (*Crip Times* 216). In Lamb's novel, we see a community of the "left-behinds" at the Home for Children of Elegance in Great Metropolitopolis. The Cult of Elegance was comprised of a group of "eccentric, flamboyant" people who owned and operated "plenty of bars, strip joints, tattoo shops and gay chaps-boots-and-poppers stores" (Lamb 226). There Sybil becomes a part of a protopic community with Sissy and her friends–Syetta, Floss, Pepsi and Pinny. She finds a place for belonging, and even after Sissy leaves her, she finds company in these people. In his earlier work, McRuer states that his notion of crip theory is something that is fluid and delimited and is a collection of perspectives and practices that critiques compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality. McRuer's notion of crip theory comes from aligning queerness and disability to refer to a shifting lexicon that repositions signs and bodies. He suggests that the notion of the "crip" provides the "raw material against which the imagined future world is formed" (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 72). In his book, he intends to create a new vocabulary that subverts and repurposes the two categories. By arguing for more "flexible bodies," McRuer's theory provides an entry-point to posthumanism, which necessarily argues for a free-flowing, hybrid entity that rejects all forms of fixed categories.

The preceding discussions underscore the significance of the verb form of the word "crip," where "cripping" something refers to "a sensibility, identity, or activity in opposition to mainstream assumptions about disability" (Lewis 142). In this chapter, the aim is to examine *I've Got a Time Bomb* in order to demonstrate how the novel crips common understandings of community, literature and narrative. I use "crip" as a verb to demonstrate the way the novel disrupts binaries, normativity and understanding of community practices. When I use the phrase Crip Lit, the term "crip" is used as an adjective/modifier. However, McRuer argues that "crip" as a noun or an adjective is not simply additive and does an injustice to the term by reducing it to being a descriptor. Instead, "the term's power when used as a verb" is much more and that "gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted." (McRuer, *Crip Times* 23). Further, McRuer argues that "to crip" means to expose how able-bodiedness and normativity get naturalised. So, I intend to privilege the verb over the noun or adjective because 'crip' as a verb enacts, ushers and reimagines identification and emancipation. It signifies a collective action and a protopic impulse of building a community together. Even Sybil Lamb, the author, is also the protagonist and is also a mirror of the reader. Hence, using the term as a verb implies duplication of intent and action.

The term "crip" used as an adjective/modifier originates from "Crip the Lit," where the term has been used as a verb. The intention behind this genre of literature is to provide a platform for individuals who identify as crip to have their unique voices, perspectives and stories included and valued in mainstream literature. Crip Lit as a genre also critiques stereotyped and inaccurate portrayals of impairment in writing. Instead, it ushers in new writings that creatively explore the issues of disability in writing. Further, Crip Lit includes the lived experiences of disability in writing by claiming 'crip' and by sharing the experiences of the in-group with that of the outside

world. Crip knowledge is now produced artistically in stories, poetry, zines,[26] performances, photographs and in cinema. As an emerging genre, Crip Lit centralises crip lives by creatively intersecting experiences of disability, gender, economic oppression and violence. Crip Lit differs from the conventional forms of literature, specifically in the manner it uses these literary techniques to cause discomfort in the readers. Recently published Brian Koukol's *Handicapsules: Short Stories of Speculative Crip Lit* (2021) is an important example of this genre. Koukol's book uses humour and fantasy to subvert traditional disability tropes and creates an unnerving effect on the readers. In the Preface, Koukol differentiates between disability literature and Crip Lit by stating that:

> Whereas Dis Lit and its larger tent encompass all of Disability literature, Crip Lit seeks to antagonize, to level the playing field, to illustrate that human nature and all of its inherent foibles don't appear when faced with a wheelchair, or an amputation, or ever-shortening telomeres. (Koukol 3)

5.3 Fictitious Composite Recreations

Tobin Siebers tries to correct the fact that most non-disabled people have a difficult time believing the fact that only artists with disabilities could make significant contributions to art, either as symbols of aesthetic beauty or by making art themselves. Siebers argues that modern art is constantly developing a powerful connection to disability with its innovative techniques and the way it embraces non-normative bodies. For instance, the Venus de Milo is an important example

[26] Zine is the abbreviation of the word "fanzine," which refers to a type of a self-published magazine that is usually circulated in a small circle. It emerged in different subcultures, where original or appropriated texts and images are produced and circulated by the authors themselves.

to which disability studies theorists keep coming back. This female figure has no arms; the stump of her upper right arm extends to her breast. Her face is severely scarred, and her left foot and the big toe on her right foot have also been cut off. But still, the Venus figure is considered the most beautiful female figure. The aesthetic quality of the artwork is there primarily because of the absence of both of the arms, Siebers believes. He sees the statue as a whole and imagines phantom limbs to defend the "grotesque body." In a way, the figure eschews the notion of perfect bodies by embracing the disability of the female figure. Bodies are not only represented through art, but they are also part of the representation process. Siebers predicts that the emergence of disability aesthetics might establish disability as "a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic production and appreciation" (Ware 197). Michael Davidson demonstrates the aesthetic innovations that disability can make possible. He cites examples of disability aesthetics within the tradition of modernist and avant-garde experimentation. He argues that by "framing disability in the arts exclusively in terms of social stigma, on the one hand, and advocacy, on the other, we may limit disability aesthetics largely to thematic matters, leaving formal questions untheorized" (Davidson, *Concerto* 2). To theorise these formal questions, this chapter argues for the usage of crip aesthetics. By using crip aesthetics, it becomes possible to set aside pity and advocacy, and instead, the focus is on the "strength and weakness, perseverance, and defeat, pleasure and pain" (Koukol 4) in the characterisation of individuals with disabilities. Although Davidson refers to McRuer's *Crip Theory* to demonstrate how disabled figures are often used to reinforce the normative expectations about how a body should appear and function, this dissertation extends the research on disability aesthetics. My reading of Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* is not only limited to the thematic matters but the formal questions are also explored relating to the crip aesthetics of the novel. Instead of using the term "disability aesthetics," I use the term

"crip aesthetics" in this dissertation so that I could examine how Lamb's novel demonstrates different bodies, their reactions, impacts and how they affect the other characters and the readers.

The characterisation, illustrations, tone and narrative shifts compose *I've Got a Time Bomb* as a collaborative, posthumanist, Crip Lit. The experimental modernist strain used in the novel deals with how modernist aesthetic practices such as fragmented perspective, disjointed temporality and alienated embodiment were founded on crip/queer experiences of bodily and mental differences (Franks 62). In his article "Crip/Queer Aesthetics in the Great War," Matt Franks argues that modernist aesthetics were founded on crip ways of perceiving and expressing the world. While the author Sybil Lamb's self-portrait is a visual expression of crip modernist form, *I've Got a Time Bomb* also exemplifies this intersection in a narrative mode. Instead of separating the queerness from the crip, the author spins a crip-queer aesthetics out of this raw experience. The novel embraces crip-queer modernist aesthetics in its formal innovation, bodily fragmentation and disoriented sexuality. The following section demonstrates how the novel's narrative style, constituted by flashbacks, puns, incomplete sentences and expositions, punctuates Sybil's personal experiences.

5.4 Navigating Through a Discordant Narrative

Before getting published in the form of an illustrated novel, Sybil Lamb published this story as a series of semi-autobiographical zines. Lamb self-published the series and circulated them in a small circle. She also illustrated the series by herself with a combination of self-portraits and scrawled stories on notebook paper. Zines are visibly different from mainstream publications because of their unprofessional appearance. They are quirky and consist of chaotic designs that "instigate intimate, affectionate connections between their creators and readers, not just

communities but embodied communities that are made possible by the materiality of the zine medium" (Piepmeier 214). Even when published as a novel, *I've Got a Time Bomb* retains its zine-like technique, which enables the author to play with seriality, temporality and corporeal fragmentation. The form of zines reconstructs the visual and spatial properties of a linear text in print by having the freedom to publish the parts of the story in any chronological way. By doing so, it transcends materiality and humanises the narrative by getting rid of any structure and linearity. Zines mobilise human qualities such as vulnerability and affection, which contribute to the connection of the body and the narrative through their constitution. With zines, the readers feel that they are privy to the author's confidential information and a sense of intimacy is immediately instilled in them. An imagined embodied community is established where the readers become an ally with the creator.

In 2014, Lamb published this novel with a series of her own illustrations that precede every chapter. The illustrations provide the readers with a glimpse of the content of the following chapter. The novel describes the events that happened in a fictional setting between "February 282 and January 288 in the Republic of Empires of North Amerika" (Lamb 4). The novel opens with a scene of a disaster in Morteville that Sybil, with her friend Maybe (Mary-Belle), has travelled to from the state of Filthydelphia in search of sites of disasters. Sybil accompanies Maybe and her friends Dr. No and Bo in their explorations to possible sites of destruction so that they can find shelter in abandoned houses and loot nearby shops for food and water. In the "Medical and Legal Disclaimer", which precedes the introduction to the novel, the author Sybil Lamb immediately establishes that her novel will be subverting dominant cultural expectations by mentioning that the protagonist "reports of a disconnect from the groundings of the self within an organic body, and of a disconnect from linear time and cause and effect" (1). A disclaimer is generally used to specify

or delimit any claims or rights that may be exercised by the concerned parties. It is a statement that is written with the intention of denying any responsibility. Sybil Lamb uses a Disclaimer to establish and specify the things that the readers should keep in mind before they decide to participate in the process of creating the text. The Disclaimer is, however, certified by Dr. C.W. Jamora of "SanFagsisco, 289" and is written in the same style and tone as the rest of the novel. This immediately brings to the reader's attention that whatever medical information they have just gathered about the protagonist Sybil (and probably the author herself) might just be imaginary. Although the medical terms have been deftly incorporated in the disclaimer, the certification makes it all questionable. The author claims in the Disclaimer that "this text is a minimum of 88% completely true" (Lamb 2), but the disclaimer itself questions the truth behind this claim. Further, Lamb states in the Disclaimer that "The 13 humanoids that appear in this story are FICTITIOUS composite recreations" (3). The names of these characters, such as Maybe, Sissy, Floss, and Pinny, and the various puns and ironies associated with them, all contribute to the cripping of the narrative.

Figure 12. Sybil's self-portrait. I've Got a Time Bomb. 2014. Topside Press, p. i.

The image of the cover page, illustrated by the author, depicts Sybil falling into a void with her belongings scattered all around her. The words "a novel by Sybil Lamb" are also illustrated with the "S" in "Sybil", drawn artistically with a hair-clip on it. Throughout the novel, all of the images of Sybil consist of this hair-clip, which differentiates her from the other characters. Even the "Medical and Legal Disclaimer" is preceded by the very first image in the novel (Fig. 12). It

is a self-portrait which depicts Sybil holding a time bomb in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other. She is surrounded by various things like scissors, pills, and other objects she uses to repair things and to make time bombs. She wears a hair clip and a few watches. The stitches on Sybil's stomach show a recent surgery, and her heart is protruding out with the veins connected to a time bomb. This is in relation to the entire text being a countdown from Tick 10 to Tick 0 when the bomb explodes, making Sybil's heart stop. With this figure, the notion of "internal self-reflecting" is also evoked because of the mirror that Sybil holds between her legs. The readers are not able to see what the mirror reflects, and only Sybil can see that. This is in tandem with Lamb's tone in the novel, where she resists assigning a gender identity to Sybil. This enables Sybil to defetishise her body and to be able to surpass the boundaries of heteronormativity.

"Tick 10" introduces Sybil's partner, Mary-Belle, who ran away from her home after her sweet sixteen. She travels in a group to find places of disaster where they can participate in protests, evade the laws and squat in abandoned houses. This travelling to different sites of protest contributes to the making of the fictive posthuman world in the novel. By resisting what is considered to be naturalised, the characters become posthumans by initiating a shift in perspectives. They destabilise the limits and reject any type of hierarchy. Maybe and Sybil squat in abandoned houses in defiance of normativity. In Filthydelphia, when a huge protest was organised, the nearby punks got tasered and were temporarily blinded with tear gas dispersal. Maybe and her friends reach there, organise first aid for them, and establish intake procedures for the medical tents. The large multi-group protests enabled Maybe and her friends to undertake some sort of action in an attempt to enact desired changes. Maybe is a trans woman who sees her sexual identity as a flaw and describes herself as being "broken and wrong" (Lamb 62). Maybe chose her own gender, as Lamb mentions: "She was the oldest, so it was only fair that she was the girl. No

one put that in her head; she just declared it when her seventh brother was born" (Lamb 10). Unlike Sybil, Maybe cares about what others think of her. This is why she feels dejected when she is constantly reminded that she is not "normal" because of her trans identity. Maybe tries to take care of others at different points in the novel, and the sites of protest where she can provide medical aid allow her to do that. She finds Sybil and takes her home with her. She travels to places which have been affected by floods or fire to provide first-aid to the "punks." She even tries to train as a nurse, but she soon drops out of nursing college. In "Tick 8," Maybe decides to burn down the house of her new girlfriend, Yeka. With Sybil's help, she succeeds in the job but immediately regrets doing so. She reconciles with Yeka and goes back with her to scrub the soot off the walls.

Moving towards "Tick 0," the narrative meanders through Sybil's fragmented experiences like that of the different branches of a hypertext. Similar to hypertext, the reader is required to construct and navigate through the text. In order to do so, "deep exploration" is required on the part of the readers with the availability of endless contexts. For instance, when Sybil leaves Franny and decides "to find whatever city Cake was in and destroy it so they could be together" (Lamb 143), the readers are required to go back to the second chapter, whose title is "Tick 9" in order to get the context. During their stay at the 5 Gallon House in Morteville, Sybil and Maybe meet Crudcakes. Sybil immediately takes a liking for Cake and finds her "weird, beautiful, and 6 feet tall" (Lamb 34). They both develop a sexual relationship as Sybil gets attracted to her charming, eccentric personality. Maybe had always wanted to belong to a protopic community which is not exclusive to trans people, but she could never achieve it. A protopic community refers to an exuberant experience of commonality and shared affect when a large and diverse community works toward an emancipated future. With Cake's help, Sybil finds that community at the 5 Gallon House, and she finds out that "the apokalypse got cozy" (Lamb 43). Cake, however, leaves Sybil

and rides off on her bike to find new friends. In "Tick 4", Sybil finds Cake once again and hopes to renew their relationship. However, this time, Cake finds it difficult to be with Sybil and renders her "unlikeable" because of her brain injury.

The countdown of the chapters starting from "Tick 10" doesn't make it easy for the readers either, and they become increasingly overwhelmed. Similarly, Sybil's conversation with Cake in "Tick 4" about her incoherent thought process and how she can't figure out "what is going on to [her] right at the moment" (Lamb 157) echoes her conversation with Maybe in "Tick 8" when they were discussing their hormone treatments in order to appear "normal." Belonging in a heteronormative society makes Sybil, Maybe and Cake see themselves as flawed. Further, Lamb states:

> We are all trapped in a self-aware, recursive-mediated multimedia performance piece. The cues for drama and character are written in simple code that is every part of the set we live on. We're only given the illusion of being real to help us method act our way through an automatically generated story about the cute trials and terrors of an endearingly unlucky family or ragtag crew of misfits and their mismatched partnerships and strings of coincidences. (Lamb 116)

Sybil's narrative becomes a "multimedia performance piece" written in codes that are misfits and mismatched. This not only makes it a crip text but also evokes the very definition of hypertext, and meanings are required to be assembled from the different parts of the text.

5.5 Rejecting Criptopia for Protopia

The term "criptopia" has largely emerged following the appropriation of the term "cripple." Combining the word "crip" with the concept of utopia, an imagined place characterised by

perfection, suggests an imagined world where persons with crip identities are supposed to thrive. According to Josie Byzek, criptopia refers to a space which is "perfectly accessible, affordable and accommodating." Criptopia is imagined as a utopic space "in which persons with disabilities are not only permitted to exist but also treated as equally viable to the normate or part of a broadly-defined understanding of the normate" (Sandino 28). Unlike the naïve optimism of criptopia, this chapter and the dissertation as a whole argue for the state of a protopia that aspires for gradual, incremental progress experienced and forged through the pronoun "we." Protopia aims to create a collaborative cultural framework of inclusivity. It casts aside monolithic narratives of the origin of the species that produce cultural hierarchies of the 'human,' the 'non-human' and the 'post-human.' Similar to the protopian posthumanism demonstrated in *Patchwork Girl* in the earlier chapters, *I've Got a Time Bomb* is also anchored in the principle of the celebration of physical presence, regenerative action and creativity. Further, Lamb's novel destabilises the dualistic understandings to nurture cultures of equity, contribution and mutuality.

In Morteville, Sybil, Maybe, and Cake build a protopic community together since none of them "fit in anywhere, comes from nowhere, is on her way to no idea where" (Lamb 38). Sybil flourishes in this community of a "ragtag crew of misfits," which is inclusive and stands in stark opposition to the trans community, where the heteronormative society was trying to limit her. Since this community enables Sybil and Maybe to overcome the coercive materiality of gender binaries and operate in networks of affinity that are more adaptable, nurturing and flexible, it may be deemed protopic. The "vine-choked, termite-eaten plantation house" (Lamb 25) provides Sybil, Cake and Maybe the opportunity to build a protopic community of lesbian/trans individuals. They co-exist with the flood water in the 5-gallon house at Morteville and believe that once the water is pumped out, the house will be "ultra-high class." Limited mobility around the neighbourhood due

to the clogged water makes the 5-gallon house with "a comfortable occupancy of about 6" a precious shelter for Sybil and her friends. The water progresses from being a nuisance to a part of the community that binds together these "boundary creatures" to construct an "elsewhere" where they flourish within an ethics of protopic empathy and care. This "elsewhere" echoes Alison Kafer's notion of an "elsewhere" that recognises intersections of multiple identities. Sybil finds this "elsewhere" twice–once at the 5-gallon house with Maybe, Cake and the punks, and again in Great Metropolitopolis with Sissy, Pinnie, Floss and others. Sybil realises that all these people have different identities and she can easily be anyone she wishes to be. Even though they appear to be misfits, together they all find their own place of belonging and are hopeful for their futures. This possibility of multiple futures recognises the affective and material responses of these characters and highlights their multiplicity. Within this "elsewhere," there is no singular future trajectory but instead a vast terrain of alternative futures.

Figure 13. Sybil destroying Monday's truck. I've Got a Time Bomb. 2014. Topside Press, p. 163.

The highlights of the chapters are represented in the illustrations; for instance, the one preceding "Tick 2" shows Sybil standing on the top of Monday's "Perfectly Normal Legal Ice Cream" truck with a gasoline can (see Fig. 13). After Cake breaks up with Sybil and leaves her stranded in the desert, Sybil travels to Salt Plain City. There, she meets Monday Mourning, who introduces herself as an "LA-based performance artist. South Califurnyeh's new hot rising star of the multimedia performance publicized

underworld" (Lamb 168). Monday owns an ice cream truck, but she needs money for diesel to be able to go anywhere. After her house had collapsed, her parents died, leaving her with an ice cream truck. Sybil offers to provide her "a few hundred gallons of diesel" (Lamb 168), and they decide to travel aimlessly in the ice cream truck. The name of the ice cream truck is "Perfectly Normal Legal," which ironically sheds light on the fact that all the characters overcome the normative binaries of perfect/imperfect, normal/abnormal, and legal/illegal. Within their protopic community, these binaries become dysfunctional and redundant. The two of them pick up Sawzall, who wanted a lift to the state of Tension, where his old army buddies lived in a wood shingle house named Castle Bitchin'. Although Sybil tries to be a part of Sawzall's community, she rejects it later on. She has been searching for a community of cohesion and a hopeful future, but Sawzall and his friends failed to provide Sybil with that. When Sybil decides to run away from Monday, Sawzall and his friends at Castle Bitchin', she resorts to a violent display of her resentment. She gets up on Monday's truck, the one in which she had been "for 4 months and 4800 miles" (Lamb 217), and destroys everything she comes across. The spikes of lightning during the storm become Sybil's co-conspirator in carrying out the destruction. The storm and the lightning become Sybil's comrades within the protopic community, which does not necessarily always succeed in providing a safe space to individuals, but it nevertheless signifies an attempt towards it. When read through the lens of "transcorporeality," nature progresses from being just a manipulable resource for humans to a comrade within the protopic community, where there is a complex entanglement between the human and the more-than-human. The resistance to the rigid gender/sexual binary results in empowering the concept of "transcorporeality," which refers to the entanglement of humans and more-than-humans. The characters in Lamb's novel are "intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 2) and flourish in a protopic community. Lamb's

novel embraces a protopian posthumanist notion of a community practice that highlights inclusivity and fosters group cohesion among crip communities. Such a community critiques the idea of the 'perfect' existence and instead emphasises the possibility of a vast perimeter of many alternative futures.

5.6 Destabilising Pre-conceived Notions of Conventional Modes

Different words are consciously parodied by the author throughout the novel. In her book *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity" (xii). It is used as a strategy to signify a critique of a particular dramatic work or a cultural production. In *I've Got a Time Bomb,* the cripping of the language takes place when Lamb uses made-up words, which serve as a parody of dominantly heteronormative words like "love." Throughout the novel, Lamb uses a slashed "o" (ø) to spell the word "love" as "løve." This symbol used in Norwegian and Danish resignifies 'love' in the novel. While reading the novel, the readers are forced to pause and contemplate the spelling and its meaning. Lamb invents a new lexicon to subvert the normative love culture. This slashed "o" could also be interpreted as "zero," implying that love means nothing (Affleck 143). Lamb uses this spelling perhaps to signify a space where a trans woman might put herself and reinvent a new value for herself while rejecting the kind of love glorified by society. By using parody, Lamb crips disidentification by destabilising mainstream representations of heteronormative love. Similarly, for the word "intimate," the author uses the made-up word "intimatapated" to signify a sexual act between Sybil and her partner, Cake (Lamb 42). It also points to the fact that their love is a combination of 'intimacy' and is 'emancipated' from the conventional notions and binaries. To

talk about the sexual intimacy between two trans women, Lamb uses this word consciously so as to parody normative notions of love and sex.

Figure 14. Sybil gifting the time bomb to Carriage. I've Got a Time Bomb. 2014. Topside Press, p. 90.

The image preceding "Tick 6" shows Sybil gifting a time bomb to Miss Carriage Fyre, who has been her object of love and affection for quite some time (see Fig. 14). This is the first time Sybil parts with the time bomb and gives it to somebody else. Starting from the illustration which precedes the "Medical and Legal Disclaimer," Sybil is seen diffusing a time bomb herself while the wires of that bomb are connected to her heart. The narrative begins by setting the bomb in motion, and thus, the countdown starts from "Tick 10" in the first chapter and goes on till "Tick 0." After that, in the first chapter, the readers learn that Sybil has rigged the building where she was squatting with Maybe. So far, she had been rigging different places and blowing them off whenever she wanted, but his time, she takes it a step further and attempts to "blow up Miss Carriage Fyre 7 months after her skull was rebuilt" (Lamb 91). Sybil was attracted to Carriage, and the "obsession ate everything else and made her useless. Over weeks, she waited for understanding to make its way around all the scar tissue in her brain, but it should have happened already, and it didn't" (Lamb 100). This is when Sybil decides that the only way she can stop herself from excessive obsession is by blowing Carriage up. The bomb in itself serves as a metaphor that Lamb had been using so far in the narrative. Sybil puts a

card on the bomb, giving a reason why she is blowing Carriage up and attaches the card to "a gasoline can, taped to a lamp battery, a digital counter, and a detonator" (Lamb 102). It was built in such a way so that when Carriage takes off the card, the ticking will start, but it would only keep counting in circles. This echoes the ticking all through the narrative. With the first chapter titled "Tick 10," the readers might expect that the bomb will explode soon, but the narrative keeps on going around in circles, and the ticks get slower and more confusing. Sybil knows that the bomb that she is giving to Carriage will only explode when somebody tries to stop the ticking. But Carriage never tries to stop the bomb from ticking, and it never explodes. Instead, she squeaked with delight when she found the bomb, and later on, she continued keeping the bomb on her nightstand and made stories about how she used the bomb as an alarm clock.

In the Preface to *Handicapsules*, Koukol opines that "Crip Lit denotes a Disabled perspective liberated from the ableist gaze and its associated demands" (3). By resisting the constraints of linearity, space and time, Crip Lit destabilises pre-conceived notions of conventional modes of disability literature that build up a narrative to evoke pity and sympathy from the readers. To reject normative temporality, Lamb states in the very beginning that the novel is written "in scaled relative time" (5). In order to play with any concept of time, not only does the story begin with the year 282, but words like "minute" are spelt as "minnit" throughout the text. Here, Lamb uses phonetic spelling, where each letter represents one spoken sound. The word is written according to how the letters and syllables are spoken. Similar to the word "minnit," Lamb also uses "Amerika" to provide a guide to the readers for correct pronunciation. Further, the second page of the book, which provides the copyright information, also mentions "COPYRIGHT © 289 BY SYBIL LAMB." The readers can no way receive any information about the real-time and have to adapt to the "relative time" that the author has set up for them. This parodies the traditional time

constructs and starts off with the ticking of the time bomb, which is supposed to explode by the time the readers reach the last chapter titled "Tick 0." Lamb, thus, resets the time in the beginning by intentionally misspelling it and playing around with it and then leaving the time bomb to take its own trajectory through the narrative. Along with temporality, space is also critiqued when places like San Francisco are spelt as "SanFagcisco" or Philadelphia as "Filthydelphia." These spellings suggest the possibility of degeneration and degradation in these places and also critique the homophobic and transphobic attitudes of these cities (Affleck 153).

Almost with every new chapter, Sybil re-invents herself by taking new names and by travelling to a new place. These names are not just random thoughts but are significant to Sybil's life and her narrative. Sybil confesses that she destroyed her paper identity trail "several name changes ago" (Lamb 8). Changing names is an important aspect for trans people. A name change becomes an important structural invention for trans people that not only provides them with increased socioeconomic stability but also enables them to resist specific gender identities. So, Sybil's name changes are not random, but they are deliberate and thoughtful. She changes her name to obtain a business card for herself in order to make her job and her life as Black Mountain Sally official. This is in tandem with the practice of legal name changes of trans people in workplaces and employment searches. It becomes instrumental for transgender individuals because "having legal documents befitting one's gender identity may increase [their] success on the job market" (Hill et al. 33). With each new location and each new job, it becomes a necessity for Sybil to find a name that appropriates her identity. In the Disclaimer, the protagonist is referred to as Sybil X. D'Lye, and this continues for the first two chapters. The middle initial "X" in her name "neutralizes not only identity in general but also gender: historically, an "X" was used by nonliterate people (or people who did not speak or write English) in lieu of a signature" (Affleck

118). The "X", referring to an unknown entity, indicates infinite possibility and once again evokes her non-conformity to gender. Further, the "Lye" in her surname might refer to the word "lie", echoing Lamb's remark in the Disclaimer that "any resemblance between this clever, playful storytelling format and any kind of LIBEL or SLANDER is a lie! Cuz IT IS NOT!" (3). When Sybil reaches Amerika, she calls herself Black Mountain Sally and re-invents a new personality for herself:

> She walked along the creek beds and ridges in her fancy Applebaby flared jeans and animal print cami tops from Family-Save-It. She lived in a stick treehouse with a hammock decorated with Polaroids of things fixed to everything else with either nails or clothes pins. Black Mountain Sally was called Black Mountain Sally cuz that's what it said on the new bizznizz cards she'd made at City Discount. (Lamb 127)

With the business card, Sybil validates her new name and identity. By the time she reaches Salt Plain City and meets Monday, Sybil changes her name to Sterile Amerika, which parodies the heteronormative concept of sterility.

In the core of Crip Lit lies the intention to reject any form of "ignorant inspiration porn of the status quo" that refers to the disabled as "marginalized, fetishized, and infantilized" (Koukol 3). In *I've Got a Time Bomb*, the characters do not evoke empathy from the readers; instead, they use sarcastic humour to break down the binaries of good/evil, able-bodied/disabled, and human/posthuman. They do not represent the cheerful sage notion of disabled characters and instead are portrayed as unlikeable, lazy and selfish, just like every other human being. Through the ambiguous representation of sex/gender, the novel "denaturalizes gender and thereby offers an opportunity for readers to consider the binary in new ways that may help trans people (trans women in particular) to be 'bodies that matter'" (Affleck 78). By reclaiming and re-performing their

gender, Sybil, Maybe, Sawzall and Cake possess the potential to break down the sex/gender binaries, which not only contributes to the making of the crip but also the posthuman. *I've Got a Time Bomb* describes how crip worlds are created through acts of naming and puns that contest 'ordinary' worlds. Similar to Sybil, Mary-Belle Kurtz, who is referred to as Maybe for the rest of the novel, also struggles with her trans identity. The wordplay with her name "Maybe" connotes all the things she 'May' be. Not only her name but when Maybe talks about hurt, there is also a complicated word-play involved in it, which parodies the conventional sex and gender constructs. In the third chapter, which is titled "Tick 8," Maybe confides in Sybil:

> The hurt don't make it special, it makes it hurt. I wish you could show normal the hurt. Know what HRT is? HRT, when it's the quack medical treatment that you subject yourself to make you U, with the U it spells HuRT. (Lamb 57)

Maybe is a trans woman who, like Sybil, injects herself with hormones such as HRT or Hormone Replacement Therapy, and she refers to it as "HuRT." The wordplay between the word "hurt" and the hormone HRT makes this an interesting anecdote. Maybe in the earlier quote describes her daily struggles being a trans woman and her effort to be "normal" and "boring." Instead, she feels "broken and wrong" (Lamb 62). But heteronormative people do not let her do so by constantly reminding her that she is not "normal" and should be only part of a trans-community. Here, Lamb's novel satirises the idea of a community. For Sybil and Maybe, a community is a place where they can be themselves without having to conform to a dualistic way of life. So, they reject the trans-community to form their own protopic community, which is inclusive and does not conform to any categoristaion. When Sybil reaches New Paris, she meets Miss Sissy Steaks and immediately falls in love with her. Sissy helps Sybil in finding the protopic community, which she has been looking for a long time, and with Sissy's friends, Sybil finally finds herself a 'home.' However,

the narrative ends for Sybil when Sissy leaves her, thus, signifying that the name Miss Steaks might also allude to "Mistakes," a satirical parody in itself. Whether meeting Sissy was a mistake for Sybil is debatable because, along with finding a community, Sybil also gets drawn more to the dystopic AmeriKan suburbs that are replete with gender violence and dysphoria.

5.7 Humour as Means of Disruption

Miriam Corker refers to crip humour as "an emancipatory praxis," yet she emphasises that the key to understanding crip humour lies in "solidarity and context." The humour only makes sense to those who have a sense of understanding about the speaker's context and the place they are coming from. This is why when Sybil jokes about her attention span, Sissy understands it because she also struggles with her own attention span, but when she does it in front of Sawzall, he does not understand the context. Reid, Stoughton and Smith argue that individuals "use self-deprecatory humour positively to dissolve and recreate disability… They emerge as capable people who find life's predicaments amusing" (635). In their analysis of humour, they also consider the fact that "in a mainstream setting, such humour could build tension and discomfort" (Reid et al. 641). When Sybil uses satiric humour in front of people who have no idea about what she has gone through, they feel uncomfortable and miss the context. Therefore, interpreting humour relies on important contexts: "who is telling the joke, who is laughing, why they are laughing, and what those individuals know about the disability in question" (Milbrodt).

In *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, Eli Clare states that "we in the disability rights movement create crip culture, tell crip jokes, identify a sensibility we call crip humor" (82). Clare opines that crip humour possesses the power to turn "*cripple* into a word of pride" (83). She argues that in mainstream culture, it is crucial to 'crip' bodies and sexuality to

create more diverse representations. Similarly, a certain kind of humour is required to elevate crip pride. While it may elicit momentary laughter, it also reveals the hidden significance and unspoken meanings. This chapter refers to this kind of humour as "crip humour," which reappropriates the term "crip" to frame the narrative in a positive light (Milbrodt). This kind of humour has the potential to surprise and shock the listeners, prompting them to consider alternative perspectives and understandings. It creates discomfort within the audience that inherently interrogates their perspectives of able-bodiedness. Further, it articulates the explicit awareness of multiple embodiments and challenges the standardisation of what are referred to as 'normal' bodies. It suddenly brings the audience's attention to something that previously had not caught their attention and, in the process, leads to their ontological disorientation.[27] This is primarily because the audience remains "in-relation with body and world rather than temporarily feeling cut off" (Parrey 14). Ontological disorientation through humour explicitly puts the individuals in touch with relations to other people and their bodies.

For a long time, disabled bodies and different bodies have been the object of comedies and stand-up humour. Individuals with disabilities began to use humour for emancipatory purposes, and at the same time, they were also able to present an insider perspective, blurring the boundaries of the normative/non-normative binary through varied modes of embodiment that challenge overstated theories of crip and impairment. They poke fun at the normative culture, and their humour serves as a vehicle for slipping constructive images of non-normativity into mainstream culture. By shifting from the object of the joke to that of the creator of the joke, they undermine

[27] Ryan Parrey refers to ontological disorientation as "a turn in our orientation to the world as well as the body" (3). Ontological disorientation constitutes of experiences and encounters that permanently disrupts existing meanings of disability and generate new meanings. It occurs as a result of being influenced by the relatedness of people and their bodies and experiences.

the power of people who laugh at them. Through alternative images and counter-narratives, they ontologically disorient multiple perspectives that instruct understandings of non-normative bodies. Through this ontological disorientation, Lamb's novel claims the 'crip' by critiquing stereotyped portrayals of laughing at the impaired. Humour undermines and reveals the precarious absurdities on which able-bodied rationality depends. While questioning notions of normativity, sexuality and embodiment, it also plays a substantial role in the deconstruction of the ableism/disablism binary.

Humour is one of the ways crip aesthetics is constituted in *I've Got a Time Bomb*. The characters often use ambiguous and contradictory responses to reveal something as incongruous. While sitting at a saloon in Salt Plain City, a woman approaches Sybil and asks her if she could tell the woman "the top 3 times of the day that pop" into her head without looking at the clock above the bar. To this, Sybil responds by pretending that she is very upset with the woman. She remarks: "This whole saloon is made outta cardboard. Cardboard, craft paper, contact cement and paint. Even that clock. The only reason I don't set it on fire is cuz I'm not real neither" (Lamb 167). Here, Sybil's response with an ambiguous anecdote originates from her perception of the fact that there is an incongruity in the question itself and also that the whole exchange is supposed to be harmless. The ambivalent and incongruous response of Sybil emphasises that her assessment of the woman's question about time is responsible for her particular anecdote. This is in tandem with Lamb's critique of temporality, similar to the way she plays with the word "minnit" or when she mentions "relative time." Further, humour is incorporated in the novel through responses emerging from tension reduction, unexpected honesty and deviation from the familiar. When Maybe decides to burn down her girlfriend's house, Sybil helps her to do it. She asks Maybe if she wants to save something, and Maybe picks up a few things around the room and puts them in a large suitcase. After the house is consumed by black smoke, they come out of the house and Maybe

use irony to justify her decision to burn the house down. She mentions that although she has burned down her girlfriend's house, she is still someone who "travels with a suitcase, and buys train tickets instead of catching on the fly, and live[s] in a house, and have a job, and a significant-other-LTR-life-partner now" (Lamb 60). Another instance of responses arising from witnessing something which deviates from the familiar is when during her stay at Great Metropolitopolis, Sybil meets Sissy Steaks and remarks that Sissy got so skinny because Sissy refuses to be a slave to food. To explain how Sissy survives without any food, Sybil banters: "Her body was the packaging material a humanoid had been shipped in" (Lamb 235).

Crip Lit uses humour to subvert traditional disability tropes and creates an unnerving effect within the readers. In Lamb's novel, while talking with Sawzall, Sybil mentions: "Getting beaten in the head in till you're certifiably brain damaged is no big deal. I figure it was gonna happen to me eventually and I'm glad I finally got it over with" (Lamb 183). The comment might not seem satiric on the surface, but it has everything to do with power relations. This particular exchange reveals how any other forms of embodiment which do not fit the socially constructed idea of able-bodiedness could also be represented as something which is "no big deal." Once Sybil does this, Sawzall follows her cue and uses a similar kind of satiric humour to describe how he was shot and lost a part of his digestive system: "Now I move fast and agile. I don't want to be carrying a bunch of useless junk around" (Lamb 184). Sybil has been successful in communicating the humour to Sawzall, and then he continues talking in the same humorous vein that Sybil has initiated. Tom Shakespeare has remarked that in-group humour could be misread because this sort of humour both challenges and reinforces a stereotype: "There is no simple answer as to which jokes are offensive, and which jokes are liberatory because it depends on nuance and intention" (52). *I've Got a Time Bomb* uses humour to create a space of understanding for the characters and to portray

their independence and agency. It enables them to position themselves on their own terms by subverting the dominant ideologies of being helpless. Sybil uses satire, banter and comic dispositions to successfully communicate with her friends, who make her feel heard "by developing an alternative comic language around the body" (Shakespeare 51). Her mode of storytelling using these forms of humour validate a potential crip embodiment. It debunks commonly held stereotypes and simultaneously "opens a space for dialogue about relationships with one another, and about the relationships [they] share" (Reid et al. 639). Throughout the novel, different characters use humour to narrate their lived experiences, and, in the process, they hope to connect with people who have similar experiences. They use humour to "resist the oppressive force of a master discourse by taking control of [their] narrative and constructing it as [they] choose" (Mossman 653). However, the reception of such humour depends on both the teller and the audience. While some readers may laugh with the crip, others laugh at the crip.

Lamb destabilises ideas about normativity and able-bodiedness by producing discomfort among the readers. Being positioned and positioning oneself are two metaphoric constructs of how humour operates in the novel. In both cases, the "subjects engage in narratives-in-interaction and make sense of self and others in their stories" (Bamberg 224). In telling her stories and employing sarcastic undertones along with it, Sybil positions herself on her own terms and potentially subverts dominant ableist ideologies. While returning from her friend's wedding, Sybil crashed her bike because she was drunk and had no control of her movements. Two men cornered her and asked her "if the reason she was all fucked up was cuz she was a faggot, and Syb pointed out that they were obviously the faggoty ones" (Lamb 83). This tongue-in-cheek remark serves different purposes. On the surface, it is a comment about Sybil's movements and physical appearance. For Sybil, it is a critical nod towards male heterosexual privilege in a confrontational way. It functions

as a figurative object that becomes a vehicle which enables the two men to remark on Sybil's embodiment. Since challenging someone in a position of authority would be dangerous for Sybil, she chooses to reply using antagonistic humour to navigate the hierarchal and gendered systems. In this incident, Sybil expresses her disapproval of the sexist remarks verbally through her tongue-in-cheek comment.

Another way Sybil uses her stories to mediate interactions with other individuals is by finding humour in her own actions that potentially take out the seriousness of those situations and allow other people to connect to her stories. This has been emancipatory for Sybil because by being the subject of the joke, she invites others to laugh at her. Similarly, the author jokes about Odie's speech impediment by mentioning that her voice always seems rude and angry. Due to the impediment, her mood was indecipherable: she always sounded the same, regardless of being "happy, sad, delighted, or enraged" (Lamb 328). These teasing remarks often take out the seriousness of these situations and instead make them relatable to the readers and incite laughter. When Sissy and her friends laugh with Sybil about their short attention span, they forge a community of their own and connect on the basis of their solidarity with each other. Sybil identifies with other characters, such as Maybe, Sissy and Pinny, who often engage in humorous conversations about their lived experiences. While talking about Pinny, a member of the House of Elegance who has an attention span of 0.5 seconds, the author uses sarcastic humour to remark that Pinny had been assigned "48-hour psychiatric detention a dozen times" to refer to her "massive frontal lobe damage like Sybil" (Lamb 300). This can also be interpreted as an extension of compulsory able-bodied ideologies that systematically justify the omission of other bodies. However, this satiric comment, which was meant as a joke, signals the difficult situation that Pinny is operating under. The comment is also a biting critique of the psychiatric system, which fails to

respond to the needs of individuals dealing with psychological problems. By comparing her with Sybil, the author brings to our attention that there is an existence of a community surrounding these individuals.

Ato Quayson defines the term "aesthetic nervousness" as "when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (15). It is represented through symbols, metaphors, reversals of plot structure, the relation between the text and reader and so on, all working together towards the "construction of a universe of apparent corporeal normativity" (Quayson 33). Quayson's analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1955) demonstrates how Beckett resisted the 'extreme anxiety' that able-bodied individuals feel while encountering non-normative bodies. Quayson shows how Beckett's work invariably included tragedy, comedy and impairments. While discussing Molloy's character, Quayson argues that his "physical disabilities are not determinant factors of his identity and can be thus be set aside quickly once they are mentioned" (109). Similarly, in Lamb's novel, the determinant factors of Sybil's identity are not limited to her bodily attributes. When the readers realise the underlying satire of such humour, they reflect on their own understandings of established notions of embodiment. Lamb uses witty anecdotes throughout the novel, which, on the surface level, appear as funny and provoke laughter but often have a satiric undertone. Lamb writes that after Sybil's accident, when she was discharged after a botched-up skull repairment, she had blurry double-vision in her right eye, and her left eye was impaired. She wasn't able to "walk 1000 feet without passing out" and had her face "rebuilt, and then sewn back kind of crooked" (Lamb 89). This particular anecdote communicates the details of Sybil's treatment to the audience in a way that does not invoke pity for her. When Sybil finds shelter among a few friends at the Wallows, she describes them as those who did not alienate her:

> The kind of people who would still let you hang out if you had brain damage and a 3-second attention span and sometimes forgot how doors worked and had 1 or 2 tiny yet epically absurd delusions a day, accumulating like an abscess of crazy right behind your dead left eye. (Lamb 108)

She narrates her lived experience using ambiguous anecdotes so as to position herself as in control of the narrative by giving others permission to laugh at her. By using ambiguity, Sybil intentionally becomes the laughter-maker and, in the process, turns a potentially serious instance into an incongruous joke. It is the opposite reaction that her listeners or even the readers of the novel might expect. Humour articulates a process that enables these characters to strengthen their positions in the social context by coming together and forging a protopic community of their own and taking part in the construction of their own discourse. Using humour, these characters also articulate their identities and lived experiences by forging a connection with their listeners. Further, the readers also undergo ontological disorientation while they encounter different forms of humour throughout the novel.

5.8 Presence of a Cripped Cyborg

Besides the narrative, the protagonist of *I've Got a Time Bomb* could also be understood as a posthuman-hybrid figure who necessarily belongs to a "postgender world." Lamb's novel endorses a significant aspect of posthumanism, which is the rejection of representation where all the characters are constantly in flux. The eponymous character Sybil shares similar characteristics with Haraway's notion of the cyborg and also with the patchwork girl in terms of being queer, dis-proportioned and scarred. Sybil is a female cyborg who encapsulates a posthumanist future of hope and pluralistic possibilities. She embodies the posthumanist vision of regeneration and radical

inclusivity and represents what Haraway terms a "boundary creature." Both the patchwork girl and Sybil's facial differences, in terms of their scars and crooked head, constitute the cripping of the characters. This enables Sybil and the patchwork girl to exist as boundary creatures because of the way they disrupt the technological/organic binary of the corporeality of the body. In New Paris, Sybil becomes acquainted with Sissy Steaks, who scooped ice cream in a queer bar named Call Your Mother. Sissy lived in a four-storied abandoned house with seven bedrooms. The house was completely empty because Sissy demanded OCD cleanliness. She had no furniture, food or even clothes. She throws away her clothes after some time and steals new clothes from shops. When she meets Sybil at Call Your Mother, she brings her home, but at the same time, gets wary that someone is getting involved in her life. Lamb writes: "Sissy was supposed to be the ultra-embodiment, the very archetype of this northern bratty grown-ass runaway street bitch faggy punk girl, who was as part of the Metropolitopolis as the microorganisms living on your eyelashes are part of you" (254). Sissy walks in and out of places, never becoming too attached to anyone. She never lets anyone into her house, which she calls Sissy's Solitude, which is suggestive of her constant need to be in solitude. Once it becomes almost impossible for her to stay away from Sybil, she leaves her. The only way she knows to take care of her excessive obsession is by rejecting the object of obsession altogether similar to what Sybil did with Miss Carriage.

When Sissy goes missing, Sybil starts living alone in the abandoned house at Greater Metropolitopolis, where Sissy used to squat. One day, the landlord arrives with the police, who interrogate and threaten Sybil. To save herself, Sybil flees by jumping out of the window and falls "25 feet onto a pile of broken furniture at 5 in the morning on the 30th of December, 287" (Lamb 342). Sybil's narrative ends at "the bottom of the dumpster," where she finds "a cool ocean" to nourish her back to health. Even when she knows she can't get out of the dumpster with her

fractured leg, she is still hopeful and finds peace "at the bottom of the ocean, beneath a mountain of trash" (Lamb 343). As Sybil enters into a dream-like stage where she imagines herself gliding through the blackness of outer space, the narrative ends. The readers are offered no resolution, and just like in hyperspace, the readers are left wondering what happens next. Just like the five endings of *Bandersnatch*, there is also a possibility of different endings to Sybil's narrative–whether she will die in the dumpster or will she get out, will she be rescued by one of her friends? The readers are again left to join different branches of the narrative and pick an ending suitable for them. Unlike the usual coherent, happy endings of a literary text in print, hypertexts often provide abrupt and unresolved endings to the users. There is no closure in the real sense of the term as the narrative keeps on shifting and new pathways appear. Similar to the narrative, which resists linearity, Sybil also resists the idea of stability. She constantly rejects different binaries, and it is only apt for the narrative to end with another rejection of the life/death duality. The posthuman possibility of a post-dualistic world makes *I've Got a Time Bomb* a novel that manifests post-centralising and accepting multiplicities in the sense that they acknowledge alterity and recognise themselves in alterity.

Alison Kafer re-evaluates the future of cyborg theory and eco-feminism. She argues for a "cripped cyborg politics," inviting feminists to reconsider their common use of disability as a depoliticised metaphor for hybridity and entreating disability activists to include the critiques of class and Western privilege offered by socialist and transnational feminists (Kafer 12). Kafer suggests that as discussions of the cyborg are one of the rare places where disability appears within feminist texts, disability studies scholars need to attend to cyborg theory. Along with Alison Kafer, Rosi Braidotti has also argued for a posthumanist disability approach that embraces "non-normative and anti-establishment ways of living life" (Goodley et al., "Posthuman Disability

Studies" 348). When viewed through these theoretical forms, *I've Got a Time Bomb* stands out as a crip posthumanist text that is replete with fundamentally fluid, flexible and changeable identities. With the very introduction, Sybil is described as a hybrid cyborg-like figure:

> Her part-time-construction-job-trained physique was a vestige of Parisian-Bulgarian DNA hexed by a half-Romani gypsy. Her DNA was ideal for wrestling goats on a mountain or doing the can-can while smoking and her body was always doing inappropriate, counterproductive things, but she clenched her teeth and carried on. (Lamb 8)

Her "inappropriate" body cannot be defined in normative terms, and the fact that her DNA enables her to do different things contributes to the negation of any gender binary. When Cake re-enters Sybil's life, Cake is unable to deal with Sybil's crip embodiment as a result of her brain injury. While describing Sybil's attention span, Cake compares Sybil's brain with that of her old pocket computer "which had been held together by googly eye stickers and plaid duct tape. The one that would take 6 seconds to respond if you tried to start a song when another was already playing" (Lamb 152). Further, the comparison of Sybil with a googly-eyed old pocket computer signifies the metaphor of the cyborg. In terms of her embodiment and non-normativity, Sybil bears a resemblance to a cybernetic being. With her stitched-up brain, she destabilises the conceptions of what it means to be a normative being. Her enhancement by the corporeal merging with technology makes her "a multi-faceted and relational subject" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 188). She is further described as someone who "at best was only partially male, anyways, kind of sumtimes" (Lamb 88). This description is similar to that of the female cyborg in *Patchwork Girl* when she is described as "part male, part female." Throughout the novel, Sybil appropriates her disassemblage by constantly changing her name and identity and by fashioning out new personalities. Similar to the patchwork girl, Sybil is also a patchwork of her deconstructed and reconstructed body parts,

her stitches highlighting the sewing that she has undergone to recraft her body and her narrative. Sybil is also stitched up "like a quilt," which makes her a hybrid, multi-layered cyborg metaphor for both body and text. The cyborgian embrace of fluid and flexible identities without being constrained by corporeal realities enables Sybil to debunk and reclaim her identity as a crip posthuman being.

5.9 Gradual Disassimilation of the Narrative

I've Got a Time Bomb shares the posthuman aesthetics with *Patchwork Girl* in not only terms of its form, which resembles a hypertext, but also the patchwork-like narrative of the text. In Lamb's novel, chronology is constantly broken, and the reading of such a novel is similar to that of the interpretation required in the case of hypermedia and interactive fiction. The readers of *I've Got a Time Bomb* are required to participate in the process of creating and completing the narrative, but in a different way than they do in a virtual hypertext like *Patchwork Girl*. Lamb's novel is a hypertext in print, and the readers are only allowed to read the chapters in a specific order. In a virtual hypertext, the mode of reading is more emancipated compared to a hypertext in print, like *I've Got a Time Bomb*. The narrative in Lamb's novel osmoses with the ontology of cybernetic beings. This refers to the idea that Lamb initiates a process of gradual assimilation of information and knowledge to establish her protagonist as a more-than-human character. To achieve such an osmosis, it is essential to deconstruct the fixed category of the 'human.' Innovative narrative techniques, such as the collage experiments of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, are found in Lamb's novel. This novel also follows Michael Davidson's assertion of avoiding those characters whose disabilities are the focal points of novels. He argues that the experimentalism of modernism is found in the "invisible" presence of the disabled body—the "missing body of the aesthetic"

(Davidson, *Invalid Modernism* 10). He focuses on the figure of the "invalid aesthete" as providing a form of consciousness which interprets aestheticism as "a barrier against modernist progress and bourgeois rationality" (Davidson, *Invalid Modernism* 38).

Lamb's novel experiments with the form to successfully avoid making the different disabilities the focal point of the novel. Further, the experiment with temporality represents a fragmented presence of a variable body and a variable mind. The readers are not only required to keep up with the narrative shifts but should also interpret the 'continuous presence' of the author since the author Sybil Lamb insists that most of the incidents described in the novel actually took place "despite conflicting accounts of events and of dates of stuff and the order they happened in" (2). The author experiments with the form to establish crip not as a lack but as an aesthetic value. *I've Got a Time Bomb* abandons the 'centre' and linear storytelling by embracing characteristics such as open-endedness and non-sequentiality. The narrative reverses linear time and chronological storytelling. The novel resets Western time to nearly 300 years ago, and the year is 282. Before the novel begins, there is "A Note from the Author" segment, which provides some standard guidelines for the readers on "How to Decipher Discordant Narratives in Relative Entropic Time." This could be viewed in parallel to the guidelines provided by Shelley Jackson in *Patchwork Girl* about how to use the Storyspace software in order to be able to read the hypertext. In that note, the author offers instructions on how to ""unpack" a narrative reconstructed from conflicting accounts from every time zone in Amerika and Canadia" (Lamb 4). Starting with the first chapter titled "Tick 10," the countdown continues till the end of the novel, where the reader is left with a range of open plots. In tandem with the form of a hypertext, the characters in this novel also keep moving in and out of the narrative. For instance, Sybil meets Cake in "Tick 9," and she again enters the narrative in the seventh chapter titled "Tick 4."

Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* allows the readers to imagine such radical, fluid and inclusive futures that deconstruct existing binaries and pave the way for shared affinities. As a Crip Lit, Lamb's novel subverts domination within the culture by complicating the narrative as well as the form and structure. By being a paradoxical subject/object resistant to perfect communication and control and having neat endings, *I've Got a Time Bomb* emerges as a crip posthumanist text. In this hypertext, there exists a recreation of the crip posthuman embodiment using cyberspatial representations of hybridity. Lamb's text uses literal and metaphorical hypertextual elements to provoke an affective response from the readers. Further, the consideration of the cyborg figure as a bodily category which disrupts order and enforces chaos could be seen parallelly with the figuration of the body of hypertexts. As a crip posthumanist text, *I've Got a Time Bomb* embraces a protopian posthumanist future of regeneration, radical inclusivity and pluralistic possibilities.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

> "The posthuman has thus reached the final deconstruction, revealing an approach on existence which, although situated in recognition of its own autopoietic modes, does not comply with any ontological dualism, assimilation, centralization, or presumption, relationally expanding its own material and semiotic network of alliances and significations, and ultimately, recognizing itself as a monistic pluralist (or a pluralistic monist) form of becoming."
>
> (Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* 182)

When I began working on this thesis, it was a pre-COVID era, which made me think and perceive things quite differently. Two years into the pandemic, and since most of this thesis was written in lockdown, it made me reevaluate certain concepts. Like waiting for Godot, have we been waiting for the posthuman for so long that we have missed its arrival? Is this already a posthumanist era? With the pandemic, will there be a necessity for another 'post' to the posthumans? To cope with the insistence on an integral redefinition of everything around me, I have turned to posthumanism time and again. The term 'posthuman' was thrown at anything and everything during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the central argument being that those who survive the pandemic will naturally be considered posthumans. It is still considered an ambiguous, hypothetical being whose basic capacities certainly exceed the present humans. The focus is still only on cybernetics, and other things such as race, gender, culture and biopolitical implications are not considered majorly. But this dissertation has navigated its way around these assumptions to reach an understanding of the posthuman as an entity that destabilises any symbolic limits and dualisms. It challenges the exclusivist approaches and invites us to think and consider everything in relational and multi-

layered ways. Having gained an understanding of how to analyse and interpret the posthuman subject, this dissertation expands the existing discussion on posthumanism as "as a praxis, can be perceived as an existential awareness which exceeds the notion of a one-dimensional becoming" (Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* 181). Posthumanism refers to a network of alliances, matters and perspectives relating to technology and all forms of existence. It requires us to reflect on our position in a dynamic, material, and responsive process which emphasises pluralistic notions of the human and hails a future with multiple possibilities.

This dissertation has demonstrated how the crip enacts, ushers and reimagines identification and emancipation by signifying a protopic impulse of building a community together. During an interaction with Margrit Shildrick on November 21, 2020, I posed a few questions on the crip approach, to which she replied that "the crip approach, which builds on the provocative idea of 'crip' as a non-compliant stance that positions disability and other forms of currently devalued embodiment as a positive part of the world. It understands grim realities, but also celebrates playfulness" (Shildrick, *Interview*). She mentioned that crip imagines a different mode of futurity. Within crip critique, any failure "can be seen not as a consequence of individual debility, but as the condition of possibility for thinking alternative forms of sociality, communality, and flourishing" (Shildrick, *Interview*). The lockdown period brought the crip existence to everyone with restrictions on movement, touching, and interacting. Even when people turned to online platforms to be social and professional in order to connect with each other, they learned to embrace and inhabit accessibility technology almost unreflectively.

During the lockdown, when the citizens restricted themselves to their homes all around the world, there were numerous artistic expressions over social media. New Instagram pages, TikTok, and YouTube channels have been a regular thing. The lockdown had direct and indirect impacts

on reading, writing and viewing experiences. Risk perceptions about physically spectating any form of visual culture resulted in authors and creators turning to the virtual mode to capture additional revenue and embrace new consumer demand. To keep themselves distracted from the rising number of COVID cases and the lack of masks and sanitisers, people invested their attention in online content. Writers were publishing their works more frequently, and films and series started getting released on online platforms. The private act of creation became explicitly public and gave rise to a new kind of consumer society within the four walls of one's home. This society is driven not only by the needs of the consumers but by the productive capacity of the market. Even as part of the academia, we embodied cyborg-crip digital subjectivities during the pandemic. The individual students, teachers and researchers turned into coloured boxes in the Google Meet classrooms that could be muted, unmuted and were audible and visible according to their own conveniences.

The writers of interactive fiction emphasised not only production but also the consumption of their work in a safe environment free from the fear of coming in close contact with others and getting infected. This contributed to the flourishing of a new and urgent "participatory culture" where the creators made provisions for people at home to be a part of the spectacle. Interactive media took a new turn and started offering an illusory image of happiness and unity in the form of increased creations of interactive games and story applications to provide the interactors with an illusion of actively participating in society and culture. This spectacle of the active life became a 'seduction,' and people spent money to be a part of collective action, an imagined community and communication that recreated their social reality. In the alienated society of late capitalism, this interactive posthumanist media fostered group interactions and participatory accomplishments. Looking at these artistic expressions in the visual culture, I pondered over the technological

complexities of hypertexts and hypermedia. Realising that there has been a considerable increase in people's choice of engaging with posthumanist literature during the lockdown, I reflect on how much of it is born of extreme isolation and the need for meaningful action and connection. Posthumanist literature helps people imagine stories that humanist traditions cannot and enables them to confront the rupturing of anthropocentrism. To comprehend the meanings of hypertext or a film like *Bandersnatch*, individuals have to actively and tacitly deploy their understanding and cognitive ability. The necessity of finding some meaning in life under lockdown has resulted in the audience employing complex skills in interpretation and filling gaps with assumed meanings and contexts. The pandemic has also necessitated the creation of posthuman subjects who are, at the same time, entrepreneurial, self-driven, optimistic and self-disciplined. This applies to the creation of posthumanist literature where "soft skills" of self-presentation, the creative process, writing complex codes, graphic designing and social media validation, even under stressful conditions, have become desirable.

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which literature and visual culture imagine interactivity, readership and spectatorship differently, illustrating the significance of the posthuman figure to literature and visual culture's interrogation of anthropocentrism and the widespread decentring of the human subject. Through the textual and discourse analyses offered here, the thesis has also traced the posthumanist critique jointly performed by theory and fiction. Sybil Lamb's illustrated novel, Shelley Jackson's hypertext, and the two forms of hypermedia examined in this thesis reshape the contours of readership and spectatorship. These literary and visual expressions of posthumanist literature are thought experiments of human ontology and also enable speculative engagement with timely questions of human futurity, such as those raised by the anthropocene and humankind's extinct future. As I anticipate in this conclusion, the next stage

of this work on reading the posthuman may lie with emerging scholarship on ideas of posthumanist literature as a genre in its own, which build upon the advances of posthumanism and facilitate further insights into the neo-humanist tendencies of posthumanist literature. Each chapter has drawn attention to the destabilising influence of posthumanism on the reader and the spectator, outlining the fruitful intersections of technology and being. Posthumanist literature and visual media continue to embrace the human subject, critiquing but also preserving the idea of literature as a repository of our humanity and our best selves. The thesis takes into consideration only the cultural aspects of readership and spectatorship. This research has not considered the social aspects of the evolution of readership and spectatorship. The way the transformation of the readers and spectators to a cyborg figure contributes to the change in the kind of audience engagement with hypermedia has not been elaborated on in this thesis. With only a brief exception of how hypertext alludes to more feminine reading practice, this thesis has not dealt with the feminist aspect of readership and spectatorship either. How does a female reader read a hypertext differently from a male reader? Will a female interactor choose the same option in *Bandersnatch* as their male counterparts? The way a female interactor plays an interactive game and spends money to reach a desirable ending: is it the same way a male interactor does that? These are some of the questions that the thesis has not answered and remain open for further deliberation.

Posthumanism is a flourishing field of study, and there is always room for new interpretations of posthumanist literature. As with any highly focused study, there are avenues of research and interrogations that I have not attempted. I believe that the critical analysis of posthumanist literature should continue. For instance, future studies can be focused on interactive animes and other areas of visual pop culture. Further study on posthumanist literature would benefit greatly from exploring different mediums by honing this study's argument regarding the

cyborg-reader and *cyborg-interactor* to find newer interpretations of visual cultural works. I have chosen the six works in this study for reasons of close thematic and structural linkages. I have also limited the work to the genre of hyper-narrative interactive cinema and have kept it confined only to *Bandersnatch*. By examining the evolution of interactive cinema and the *cyborg-interactor*, it would be possible to see changes in spectatorship expression and representation, along with the changing dynamics of the author-reader relationship within posthumanist literature. It would, for example, be useful to examine how interactive cinema evolved from theatre to online streaming platforms like Netflix in order to provide the interactors with a hyper-real experience. Further, how the bodily experience of the spectators is affected by posthumanist aesthetics is something that needs to be contemplated. When technology becomes part of the spectator's body and their actions of touching or clicking cause real-time consequences, it would be interesting to find out how the technologised bodies of the spectators embrace a collaborative and multiplicitous praxis. The theories behind certain disclosures are fluid and dynamic, like the concept of posthumanism itself, and as such new methodologies are also important to understand the ways in which Crip Lit and posthumanism interact and collide. It would also be interesting to find out how body image is closely associated with spectatorship and how protopic communities resist the standardised notions of beauty and ideal bodies. Many fascinating findings could be deciphered from the intersection of posthumanism and Crip Lit. To further understand the ways in which different forms of Crip Lit could constitute posthumanist aesthetics, it's important to conduct further research on such works. Such diverse, radical new disclosures could help bring nuance to our common understandings of posthumanism and posthumanist literature.

The discussed scholarship on the idea of a *cyborg-reader* or a *cyborg-interactor* affords us a way to consider the problem regarding posthumanist literature's requirement of a reader or a

spectator who has some prior knowledge and information about how to interact with it. When Tobin Siebers argues that all bodies are not equal when it comes to aesthetic response, one could connect it to the limitation of visual perception for visually impaired spectators of *Bandersnatch,* who require audio descriptions to be enabled. However, *Bandersnatch* does not provide such a feature; either Netflix or other streaming platforms have to incorporate this feature with an interactive film. Like the guidelines in the Storyspace software in *Patchwork Girl* or the "Medical and Legal Disclaimer" in *I've Got a Time Bomb*, a way has to be implemented that provides instructions to the interactors with no prior knowledge on how to engage with posthumanist literature. Technological designs which are accessible to all and their implementation are necessary for hyper-narrative interactive films and story applications so that they do not contribute to the existing marginalisation in society. Similar to *Bandersnatch*, interactive literature also employs privileged viewing access, which considers all interactors to be super-users, disabled and non-disabled alike. Interactors with cognitive and intellectual impairments will not be able to engage with interactive literature without spending money on their own. To gain accessibility, spending money is required, other than what is already involved in the process of engaging with the platform. The creators have rarely considered interactors with a disability, and hence, spectatorship for those interactors could only be achieved, even if it is, to a small extent, by capital investment. The illusion of individuality that interactive fiction offers attracts interactors with disabilities all the more, and to achieve that illusion, transaction is necessary. Software for multimedia navigation will require a considerable amount of capital investment on the part of the interactors. Since the creators themselves haven't made these applications accessible, interactors with disabilities have to resort to whatever technological modifications that could be available. In such cases, even spending money won't guarantee accessibility for the interactors. Aimi Hamraie, the author of

Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability, raises important questions relating to the idea of accessibility to make us re-evaluate our understanding of who we imagine as disabled and who we think are supposed to benefit from accessibility features. In her lecture titled "Critical Access Studies," Hamraie argues that the focus should not be on the functional aspects of accessibility; instead, it should be about interdependence and community. When an inclusive community is formed, the baseline of accessibility will naturally exist in it. The importance of building a radically inclusive community lies in the crux of a crip posthumanist approach that the thesis has taken.

On Global Accessibility Awareness Day on May 19, 2022, Netflix introduced a few features to enable smoother functioning of their audio descriptions and subtitling accessibility features for deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) individuals. These features are now available in multiple languages. Additionally, a new collection has been launched titled *Celebrating Disability with Dimension* that functions "much like the platform's other special collections that pull from Netflix's catalogue of existing content with the goal of promoting their visibility as users browse the service" (Pulliam-Moore). Heather Dowdy, Netflix's director of accessibility, states that the platform has been closely working with the disability community to develop more features so that the accessibility provided by Netflix becomes more inclusive. These inclusive ways pave the way for disability futurity, which creates a political and personal horizon that appreciates the significance and value of disability identity. Disabled futurity centres on the needs of disabled people and advocates for a kind of collective action that includes all individuals without any sense of discrimination in respect of access.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to make a specific argument about posthumanist literature. By examining the six primary sources, the thesis has identified a thematic and a

structural trend in posthumanist fiction and visual media. It has been argued that within the posthuman fictive world, there exists a protopia that resists power hierarchies. The hybrid, posthuman beings are no longer considered non-normative, and they redefine traditional notions of subjectivity and personhood. The posthuman literary and visual expressions that have been discussed in this thesis clearly exemplify this blurring of binaries and redefining subjectivity. Although I have done extensive research on Netflix's *Love, Death & Robots* along the lines of the posthuman subject critiquing the 'human' condition, I have not included it in this thesis because of a lack of a posthuman element in its form. Thematically, it did not fit the other three forms of literature, and *Love, Death & Robots* cannot be termed as a hypermedia like *Bandersnatch* or the interactive story applications. It is an American adult animated anthology television series whose fourth season is currently in production and is slated to release in 2025. My point of interest in the series lies in the fact that it offers a representation of how consciousness might evolve outside of the body and how it transcends the limits of a human biological body. By transcending the embodiment constraints, the cyborgs and robots in the series develop a sense of individuality and free will. They critique the existing notions of corporeality and the status of humans as the dominant species. Similar to *Patchwork Girl*, the series represents the blurring of the human/animal, human/machine and male/female boundaries and demonstrates how the posthumans retain their selfhood and individual agency even when they constantly transcend their subjectivities. The series has emerged as a space wherein the impact of emerging technologies on the body in order to achieve political agency has been exposed, examined and critiqued. Further, I am interested in how the intra-active entanglement of matter, substance, multidimensional entanglements, and storytelling makes *Love, Death & Robots* expand the semiotic space of "worlding." Although the series does not challenge spectatorship in any way, it remains an

important visual expression of how the posthumans deconstruct the ideologies of the capitalist society, patriarchy and gender-class discrimination.

As in all academic endeavours, there lies the underlying question, "Why does it matter?" To answer this, I have to reiterate the fact that although posthumanist literature has been introduced as an emerging genre, there hasn't been a significant discussion of its response-based evolution in the contemporary moment. Similarly, Crip Lit, as a growing genre, critiques stereotyped and inaccurate portrayals of impairment in writing. It ushers in new writings that creatively explore the issues of disability in writing. By bringing these two together, I have argued that Crip Lit also constitutes posthuman aesthetics in the way it looks forward to an "elsewhere"—a protopia that subverts normative culture. It signifies a collective action and a protopic impulse of building a community together. Further, posthumanist literature constantly challenges how readership and spectatorship work by paving the way for a "participatory culture." The readers, users and interactors are required to participate in the process of creation along with the author and the creator. Moreover, my emphasis is on how posthumanist literature stands away from the dystopic science fiction that imagines technology being the end of existence. Rather, through the six literary and visual expressions, the thesis demonstrates that the posthuman future is not necessarily a dystopic vision but rather a vision of hope and improvement than the present condition. It emphasises that technology is neither the Other to be feared nor it is the supreme entity; instead, it is "a way of revealing." By expanding the enmeshment of technology in creating literature and other media, this thesis reflects on how technology mediates thinking, interpretation, affect, aesthetic pleasure and catharsis. It stresses a kind of future sustainability which includes all forms of human and non-human lives, artificial intelligence, aliens and even hypothetical entities related to the notion of the multiverse. Posthumanist literature, on the whole, challenges traditional

humanist ideas of species hierarchy, author-reader hierarchy and human-technology hierarchies. It decentres human exceptionalism in every way and represents a turn toward a "participatory culture."

This thesis has been an attempt to study the ways in which people have attempted to derive aesthetic pleasure by trying to make sense of a narrative. By attempting to navigate a path through a dynamic medium, the readers/users/interactors negotiate their own identities, values and worldviews. This pleasure is also experienced in relation to power and a hegemonic ideology. It comes from the pleasure of finding oneself with the devices of control, which produces a definite change in the lives of the characters. Whereas interactors of *Bandersnatch* have found out that the best possible ending could be achieved by choosing to kill Stefan's father, one of the students during my lecture in an "Introduction to Mass Communication" class, declared that no matter what the ending would be, she would never choose a violent option. Thus, engaging with posthumanist literature is revelatory in nature; it reveals people's hidden desires and moral dilemmas. Motivations behind making a choice are perhaps a reflection of people's desire to be in control and feel emancipated. The aesthetics of posthumanist literature engage the senses in such a way that the interactors focus their attention on the experience at hand and make choices subconsciously. Being able to create a happy ending for the characters in an interactive story, the interactors derive a sense of accomplishment, adding to their sense of self-esteem. Behind all these lies the fact that these contents are highly influenced by sponsors and advertising support. The interactors are made to believe that pleasure is guaranteed from the aesthetic environment of interactive storytelling. As a result, the interactors are provided with new objects to admire and possess. In order to consume these objects, the interactors are driven to invest. The illusion of individuality is provided to the interactors for designing virtual characters modelled on themselves,

which makes capital investment on their parts necessary. Such literature is a combination of a lot of elements and aims to fulfil many purposes–commercial, instructional, entertainment-oriented, or a combination thereof. Further, interactive story applications, in particular, capture the interest of the general interactors who attempt to see parallels between the happy ending of a narrative and their own lived realities. By being able to make the characters resemble their own selves, the interactors try to make the story their own. Additionally, a posthumanist crip text such as Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* allows the readers to re-evaluate their own notions of crip, able-bodiedness and normativity. By deconstructing all these notions, Crip Lit strives to "level the playing field" and, in the process, makes the readers reflect on their existing thoughts and understandings. Such literature subverts traditional tropes of disability and creates discomfort and an unnerving feeling in the readers, which makes them interrogate concepts of identification and emancipation. When Sybil and her friends try to create a protopic community in Lamb's novel, it also paves the way to reconsider community practices within the marginalised. Choosing a protopia over utopia, dystopia or criptopia, the posthuman subjects aspire for gradual, incremental progress experienced and forged through the pronoun "we."

As society changes, an appearance that is deemed 'normal' keeps on evolving, which causes issues of appearance to affect more people over time. But protopic communities provide a place of expression and recognition to crip individuals so that they can come together in active resistance to broad discriminatory discourses. The protopic communities can be essential platforms where individuals suffering from appearance discrimination and body image concerns can engage with each other to encourage healthy behaviours and acknowledge different bodies as 'normative' bodies. This collaborative cultural framework is an essential component of posthumanist literature, where regenerative action and creativity are celebrated alongside nurturing cultures of equity,

contribution and mutuality. Posthumanist literature iterates the fact that within its "elsewhere," there is no singular future trajectory but instead a vast terrain of alternative endings and futures.

Future Scope of Work

Within a technologically mediated society, we see the death of grand narratives, and posthumanist literature serves as a replacement, helping the stories reach people in a way that is aesthetically pleasing. With hybrid identities, people are able to relate to technology and the world while sitting in their own homes. As during the lockdown, writers and creators have constantly resorted to the virtual space, time and again, potshumanist literature can be considered as a way of retelling forgotten stories in a way that will make people engage with it and also participate in the creative process. There can be further studies along these lines to gain a broader understanding of how posthumanist literature retells and redefines grand narratives by making them inclusive and rejecting any kind of existing hierarchies within them. The concept of the use of language can also be further explored in the context of interactive story applications, where the focus is more on visuals. To what extent posthumanist literature depends on language and signs will be interesting to study for future researchers. The work begun in this dissertation can lead to further research on different areas of interdisciplinarity, such as–feminist posthumanism, posthuman disability studies, and postcolonial posthumanism. This is primarily because these areas of interdisciplines decenter human exceptionalism by representing an "elsewhere," where there is no singular future trajectory but instead a vast terrain of alternative endings and futures.

References

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1983.

Affleck, Sara Jane. *Making Mockeries, Making Connections: The Revolutionary Potential of Parody in Twenty-first Century Art and Literature*. 2019. Trent University, PhD dissertation.

Alaimo, Stacy. "Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1994, pp. 133–52. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178438.

---. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Duke University Press, 1996.

Bamberg, Michael. "Narrative Discourse and Identities." *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality Disciplinarity*, edited by Jan Christoph Meister, Tom Kindt, and Wilhelm Schernus, Walter de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 213–37. doi: 10.1515/9783110201840.213

Barrett, Edward. *Text, ConText, and HyperText: Writing with and for the Computer.* MIT Press, 1988.

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, 1975.

---. "The Death of the Author." *Image-Music-Text*, edited by Stephen Heath, Fontana Press, 1977, pp.142–49.

---. *Writing Degree Zero*. Macmillan, 1977.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Sage, 2016.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press, 2000.

Bauman, Zygmunt, and Keith Tester. *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*. Polity Press, 2001.

Beardsley, Monroe C. "Aesthetic Experience Regained." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 28, no.1, 1969, pp. 3–11.

Beckett, Samuel. "Texts for Nothing." *The Transatlantic Review*, vol. 24, 1967, pp. 115–16.

Bendle, Mervyn F. "Teleportation, Cyborgs and the Posthuman Ideology." *Social Semiotics*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2002, pp. 45–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330220130368

Bielskyte, Monika. "Protopia Futures [Framework]." *Protopian Futures*, 2021. https://medium.com/protopia-futures/protopia-futures-framework-f3c2a5d09a1e

Bier, Eric, et al. "A Document Corpus Browser for In-Depth Reading." *Proceedings of the 4th ACM/IEEE-CS Joint Conference on Digital Libraries*. 2004.

Blaagaard, Bolette. "The Aesthetics of Posthuman Experience: The Presence of Journalistic, Citizen-generated and Drone Imagery." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2015, pp. 51–65.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch, Directed by David Slade. Performance by Fionn Whitehead. House of Tomorrow Netflix, 2018.

Blackman, Lisa, and Couze Venn, editors. "Special Issue on Affect: Editorial." *Body & Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 7–28.

Bostrom, Nick. *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Boyles, Nancy. "Closing in on Close Reading." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 70, no.4, 2013, pp. 36–41.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. Columbia University Press, 1994.

---. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Polity Press, 2002.

---. “Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity.” *Rhizomes*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2005.

---. “Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment.” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2008, pp. 7–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2008.11666049

---. “Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others.” *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 2, 2009, pp. 526–32. doi:10.1632/pmla.2009.124.2.526

---. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.

---. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity Press, 2019.

Bride of Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale, performances by Boris Karloff and Colin Clive, Universal Pictures, 2008.

Brooke, Robert. “Control in Writing: Flower, Derrida, and Images of the Writer.” *College English*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 405–17. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/377529

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. Routledge, 2002.

Byzek, Josie. “Criptopia.” *New Mobility: The magazine for active wheelchair users*, 2013, http://www.newmobility.com/2013/08/criptopia/

Calvino, Italo. *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Translated by William Weaver, Harvest Books, 1981.

Carlson, Patricia Ann. “Hypertext: A Way of Incorporating User Feedback into Online.” *Text, ConText, and HyperText*, edited by Edward Barrett, 1991, pp. 93–110.

Chapters: Interactive Stories, Crazy Maple Studio, 2017.

Choices: Stories You Play, Pixelberry Studios, 2020.

Cisney, Vernon W. “Differential Ontology.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013. https://iep.utm.edu/diff-ont/#H2

Clare, Eli. *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Duke University Press, 2015.

Clarke, Bruce. *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems*. Fordham University Press, 2008.

Clarke, Julie. "The human/not human in the work of Orlan and Stelarc." *The Cyborg Experiments: The Extensions of the Body in the Media Age,* edited by Joanna Zylinska, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002, pp. 33–55.

Cordell, Ryan. "Taken Possession of: The Reprinting and Reauthorship of Hawthorne's "Celestial Railroad" in the Antebellum Religious Press." *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly,* vol.7, no.1, 2013, pp. 1–20.

Corker, Marian. ""Disability" The Unwelcome Ghost at the Banquet…and the Conspiracy of "Normality"." *Body & Society*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1999, pp. 75–83. doi: 10.1177/1357034X99005004008

Cornell, Saul. "Splitting The Difference: Textualism, Contextualism, and Post-Modern History." *American Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1995, pp. 57–80. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40643731.

Cotkin, George. ""Hyping the Text": Hypertext, Postmodernism, and the Historian." *American Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1996, pp. 103–16. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40642823

Cumming, Naomi. *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification*. Indiana University Press, 2000.

Davidson, Michael. *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*. University of Michigan Press, 2008.

---. *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. Verso, 1995.

---. “Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies.” *American Literary History*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1999, pp. 500–12. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/490130

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1987. Translated and Foreword by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Giles, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Columbia University Press, 2007.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978.

---. *Cinders*. University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

---. *Voice and Phenomenon*. Translated by Leonard Lawlor. Northwestern University Press, 2011.

---. *Of Grammatology*. John Hopkins University Press, 2016.

Devlin, Keith. “Good-bye Descartes?” *Mathematics Magazine*, vol. 69, no. 5, 1996, pp. 344–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/2691278

Downs, Roger M., and David Stea, editors. *Image and Environment: Cognitive Mapping and Spatial Behavior*. Transaction Publishers, 2017.

Elnahla, Nada. “*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* and how Netflix manipulates us, the new gods.” *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 2019, pp. 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2019.1653288

Ferrando, Francesca. “Towards a Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement.” *Frame Journal for Literary Studies*, vol. 25, no.1, 2012, pp. 9–18.

---. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Fish, Stanley. "*Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*." Harvard University Press, 1980.

---. "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" *Approaches to Poetics*, edited by Seymour Chatman, Columbia University Press, 1973, pp. 109–52.

Foucault, Michel. "Authorship: What is an author?" *Screen*, vol. 20, no.1, 1979, pp. 13–34.

Franks, Matt. "Crip/Queer Aesthetics in the Great War". *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2019, pp. 60–88. https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2019.0003

Freeman, Lauren. "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy: A Feminist Approach to Selfhood and the Other in the Thinking of Martin Heidegger." *Inquiry*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2011, pp. 361–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2011.592342

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists." *American Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2000, pp. 334–38. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041845

Gherardi, Silvia. "Sociomateriality in Posthuman Practice Theory." *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, and Practitioners*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 50–63.

Goodley, Dan, et al. "Posthuman Disability Studies." *Subjectivity*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2014, pp. 342–61. https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2014.15

---. "Feeling Disability: Theories of Affect and Critical Disability Studies." *Disability & Society*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2018, pp. 197–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1402752

Griffin, David. "Netflix's *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* Review." *IGN*, December 28, 2018. https://www.ign.com/articles/2018/12/28/netflixs-black-mirror-bandersnatch-review

Halberstam, Judith. “Automating gender: Postmodern feminism in the age of the intelligent machine.” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1991, pp. 439–60. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178281

Halberstam, Judith M., and Ira Livingston, editors. *Posthuman Bodies*. Indiana University Press, 1995.

Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Hodder Arnold, 1978.

Hamraie, Aimi. *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

---. “Critical Access Studies” Harvard, Massachusetts, November 12, 2020. Lecture.

Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” 1985. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

---. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.

Hauskeller, Michael. *Mythologies of Transhumanism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Hawley, Erin. “The Bride and Her Afterlife: Female Frankenstein Monsters on Page and Screen.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2015, pp. 218–31. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43799028.

Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman?: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* Chicago University Press, 1999.

---. “Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl:* The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis.” *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/pmc.2000.0011.

---. *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

---. *How We Think?: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, HarperCollins Publishers, 1977, pp. 283–317.

---. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford University Press, 1978.

Herbrechter, Stefan. "Posthumanist Literature?" *Conference on Approaching Posthumanism*, June 4-6, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

Hill, Brandon J., et al. "Exploring transgender legal name change as a potential structural intervention for mitigating social determinants of health among transgender women of color." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, pp. 25–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-017-0289-6

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

---. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*. 1985. University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Irigaray, Luce. *In the Beginning, She Was*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl; or, a Modern Monster.* Eastgate Systems, 1995.

---. "Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl." *Media in Transition*, vol. 4, 1997, pp.1–9.

Jänicke, Stefan, et al. “Visual Text Analysis in Digital Humanities.” *Computer Graphics Forum*, vol. 36, no. 6. 2017, pp. 226–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/cgf.12873

Jin, Jay. “Problems of Scale in “Close” and “Distant” Reading.” *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2017, pp. 105-29.

Johnson, Barbara. “My Monster/My Self.” *Diacritics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1982, pp. 2–10. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/464674.

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan. “Control and the Cyborg: Writing and Being Written in Hypertext.” *Journal of Advanced Composition*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, pp. 381–99. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20865923.

Journeys: Interactive Series, The Other Guys, 2019.

Joyce, Michael. *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics*. University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Macmillan, 1931.

---. *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. Translated by James Creed Meredith, Clarendon Press, 1973.

Kelly, Kevin. “The Technium: Protopia.” 2011. https://kk.org/thetechnium/protopia/

Koukol, Brian. *Handicapsules: Short Stories of Speculative Crip Lit*. Independently Published, 2021.

Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. Duckworth, 2016.

Lamb, Sybil. *I’ve Got a Time Bomb*. Topside Press, 2014.

Landow, George P. *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

---. “Stitching Together Narrative, Sexuality, Self: Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl.*” *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*. John Hopkins UP, 2006.

Larsen, Ernest. “The Fetal Monster.” *Fetal Subjects, Feminist Positions*, edited by Lynn M. Morgan and Meredith W. Michaels, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, pp. 236–49.

Lauteren, Georg: “The Pleasure of the Playable Text: Towards an Aesthetic Theory of Computer Games.” *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference*, edited by Frans Mäyrä, Tampere University Press, 2002, pp. 217–25.

Lavender, Andy. “Viewing and acting (and points in between): The trouble with spectating after Rancière.” *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2012, pp. 307–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2012.690744

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Lewis, Victoria Ann. “Crip.” *Keywords for Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin, New York University Press, 2015, pp. 140–45.

Leys, Ruth. “The Turn to Affect: A Critique.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 434–72.

Love, Death & Robots. Produced by Tim Miller, Joshua Donen, David Fincher and Jennifer Miller. Netflix Streaming Services, 2019.

Lowry, Brian. “‘Black Mirror’ plays gimmicky game with ‘Bandersnatch’.” *CNN*, December 28, 2018. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/12/28/entertainment/black-mirror-bandersnatch-review/index.html

MacCormack, Patricia. *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012.

Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002.

McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York University Press, 2006.

---. *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*. New York University Press, 2018.

McSweeney, Terence, and Stuart Joy. "Change Your Past, Your Present, Your Future? Interactive Narratives and Trauma in *Bandersnatch* (2018)." *Through the Black Mirror*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 271–84.

Meyer, Marissa [marissameyerauthor]. "Cinder is Getting Married!" *Instagram*, February 14, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ9yOZbJ_J0/?hl=en

Milbrodt, Teresa. ""Today I Had an Eye Appointment, and I'm Still Blind": Crip Humor, Storytelling, and Narrative Positioning of the Disabled Self." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2018. https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v38i2.6163

Millett-Gallant, Ann. "Crip Aesthetics in the work of Persimmon Blackbridge". *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Arts, Culture, and Media*, edited by Bree Hadley and Donna McDonald, Routledge, 2019, pp. 218–26.

Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Mitchell, William J. *Me++: The Cyborg Self and the Networked City*. MIT Press, 2004.

"Monster, n., adv., and adj." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2021. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738

Moravec, Hans P. *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

More, Max, and Natasha Vita-More. *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

More, Max. "The Extropian Principles Version 3.0: A Transhumanist Declaration." November 27, 2014. http://mrob.com/pub/religion/extro_prin.html

Mossman, Mark. "Visible Disability in the College Classroom." *College English*, vol. 64, no. 6, 2002, pp. 645–59. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3250769.

Nelson, Theodor H. *Literary Machines: The Report On, and Of, Project Xanadu Concerning World Processing* ... Mindful Press, 1992.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by Adrian del Caro, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

O'Connor, Roisin. "*Bandersnatch*: What happened when we watched Netflix's *Black Mirror* film." *Independent*, December 28, 2018. independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/bandersnatch-live-updates-black-mirror-netflix-latest-decisions-endings-interactive-stefan-choices-a8701701.html

Paracelsus. "Concerning the nature of things." *Book The Ninth, Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great,* edited by Arthur Edward Waite, James Elliott & Co., 1894.

Parrey, Ryan C. "Being Disoriented: Uncertain Encounters with Disability." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2016, pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i2.4555

Piepmeier, Alison. "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community." *American Periodicals*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2008, pp. 213–38. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41219799

Pordzik, Ralph. “The Posthuman Future of Man: Anthropocentrism and the Other of Technology in Anglo-American Science Fiction.” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2012, pp. 142–61. https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.23.1.0142

Pulliam-Moore, Charles. “Netflix is beefing up its audio description and subtitling accessibility features.” *The Verge*, May 19, 2022, https://www.theverge.com/2022/5/19/23130179/-netflix-accessibility-audio-descriptions

Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation.* Columbia University Press, 2007.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso Books, 2009.

Readings, Bill. *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*. Routledge, 1991.

Regnauld, Arnaud. “Interrupting D: ‘Patchwork Girl’s’ Syncopated Body.” *Revue Française D'études Américaines*, no. 121, 2009, pp. 72–83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20875901

Reid, D. Kim, et al. “The Humourous Construction of Disability: Stand Up Comedians in the United States.” *Disability & Society*, vol. 21 no. 6, 2006, pp. 629–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590600918354

Reynolds, Matt. “The Inside Story of *Bandersnatch*, the Weirdest *Black Mirror* Tale yet.” *WIRED*, December 28, 2018. www.wired.co.uk/article/bandersnatch-black-mirror-episode-explained

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. MIT Press, 2004. https://gamifique.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/1-rules-of-play-game-design-fundamentals.pdf

Sandahl, Carrie. “Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performances.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2003, pp. 25–56.

Sandbothe, Mike. “Media temporalities in the Internet: Philosophy of time and media with Derrida and Rorty.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 35–45, 1998. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1998.tb00091.x

Sandino, Amanda Martin. *The Dis-Topic Future: Biofuturity, Disability, and Crip Communities in Anglophone Speculative Fiction*. 2018. University of California, San Diego, PhD dissertation.

Schroeder, Randy. “Playspace Invaders: Huizinga, Baudrillard and Video Game Violence.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 30, no.3, 1996, pp. 143–52.

Seaman, Myra J. “Becoming More (than) Human: Affective Posthumanisms, Past and Future.” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2007, pp. 246–75. https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2008.0002

Shakespeare, Tom. “Joking a Part.” *Body & Society*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1999, pp. 47–52. doi: 10.1177/1357034X99005004004

Shaul, Nitzan Ben. *Hyper-narrative Interactive Cinema: Problems and Solutions*. Brill, 2008.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. 1816. Arrow Books, 1973.

Shildrick, Margrit. *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality*. Springer, 2009.

---. Interview via Google Meet. Conducted by Jaya Sarkar, November 21, 2020.

Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Aesthetics*. University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Smith, Sidonie. “Reading the Posthuman Backward: Mary Rowlandson’s Doubled Witnessing.” *Biography*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2012, pp. 137–52. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23540937

Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Streitfeld, David. “*Black Mirror* Gives Power to the People.” *The New York Times*, December 28, 2018. www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/arts/television/black-mirror-netflix-interactive.html

Tolva, John. “Ut pictura hyperpoesis: Spatial form, visuality, and the digital word.” *Proceedings of the Seventh ACM Conference on Hypertext*. 1996, pp. 66–73. https://doi.org/10.1145/234828.234835

Vermeulen, Pieter. “Posthuman Affect.” *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2014, pp. 121–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2014.917001

Wallace, Jeff. “Literature and Posthumanism.” *Literature Compass*, vol. 7/8, 2010, pp. 692–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00723.x

Ware, Linda. “When Art Informs: Inviting Ways to See the Unexpected.” *Learning Disability Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2011, pp. 194–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948711417557

Willis, Emma. “Emancipated Spectatorship and Subjective Drift: Understanding the Work of the Spectator in Erik Ehn’s “Soulographie”.” *Theatre Journal*, 2014, pp. 385–403. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24580352

Wolfe, Cary. “Is the Anthropocene… A Doomsday Device?” Interview by Claire Colebrook, Berlin, January 23, 2013.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

SCOPUS Journal Articles

Patnaik, Anhiti and Jaya Sarkar. "Crip-Queer Ethics of Care in Amruta Patil's Kari and Sybil Lamb's I've Got a Time Bomb." *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 2024.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Reconsidering Cartesian dualism and selfhood in *Love, Death & Robots*." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2022, pp. 1407–20.

Karmakar, Goutam and Jaya Sarkar. "Virus and Visible Reality: Biopolitics, Crime, and Disability in Peter May's *Lockdown*." *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, vol. 9, no. 18, 2022, pp. 306–23.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Reading Hypertext as Cyborg: The Case of *Patchwork Girl*." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2020.

Peer-reviewed International Journal Articles

Sarkar, Jaya. "'Dance of Agency': Conceptualising Architecture as Posthuman Through an Assessment of La Sagrada Família." *Edinburgh Architecture Research*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2024, pp. 32–48.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Violent Delights and Bodies without Organs: Technologization of the Body in *Love, Death & Robots*." *Transpositiones: Journal for Transdisciplinary and Intermedial Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 6, 2022, pp. 153–64.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Bodies and Expressions: Exploring the Aesthetics of Disability Performance Art." *Tête-à-Tête*, vol. 1, no. 6, 2022.

Review Article

Sarkar, Jaya. "Rethinking Multiple Ontologies and Ecologies: A review." *EASST Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2022.

Book Chapters

Sarkar, Jaya. "Interrogating Non-Normativity: Transgender Embodiment in Samantaral and Nagarkirtan." *Gender, Sexuality, and Indian Cinema: Queer Visuals*, edited by Srija Sanyal, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023, pp. 101-109.

Sarkar, Jaya. "From *Devi* to *Bulbbul*: Cinematic Representations of the Embodied Goddess." *Thematizations of the Goddess in South Asian Cinema*, edited by Anway Mukhopadhyay and Shouvik Narayan Hore, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, pp. 166–75.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Digitalising Narrativity: Reimagining Art and Culture Through Interactive Storytelling." *Digitalization of Culture Through Technology*, edited by Deepanjali Mishra and Sasmita Rani Samanta, Routledge, 2022, pp. 123–28.

Sarkar, Jaya, and Goutam Karmakar. "Phantasmagoria of the Hegemonic Cultural Structure: Interrogating the Indian Urban Facade in Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend*." *Popular Literature: Texts, Contexts, Contestations*, edited by Rupayan Mukherjee and Jaydip Sarkar, ibidem-Verlag, 2022, pp. 223–37.

Conference Proceedings

Sarkar, Jaya. "(Re)claiming the Non-animal: Interrogating Anthropocentrism Through Samit Basu's Turbulence." *Proceedings of the "Posthumanism and the Ecological Crisis" Conference*, 22nd January, 2022.

Sarkar, Jaya. "Indian Supercrip Cyborg: Deconstructing Normativity through Feminist Posthumanism." *Proceedings of the "Posthumanism and India" Conference*, 13th June 2021.

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS

- Presented the paper titled “Crip Humour: Exploring Subversion of Stereotypical Portrayals of Laughter at the Impaired” at “Wit, Humour and the Carnivalesque in Literature and Performance” Conference organised by IACLALS and BITS Pilani-Goa from February 15–17, 2024.
- Presented the paper titled “Situating the Process of Othering Within a Postcolonial Posthumanist Framework” at the “Global Anthropo-Scene: Rethinking Sustainability and Cultural Preservation” Conference organised by Jadavpur University Kolkata from January 30–31, 2024.
- Presented the paper titled “Role of Technology in the Journey from Religious to Secular Pilgrimage: The Case of La Sagrada Familia” at the “Religion and Technology in an Era of Rapid Digital and Climate Change” Conference organised by IIT Madras and RWTH Aachen University from November 21–23, 2023.
- Presented the paper titled “Finishing the Unfinished Cathedral: Theorizing Posthuman Architecture” at “Future Human: Digital Frontiers in Posthumanist Discourse” Conference organised by All India Forum for English Students, Scholars, and Trainers from October 1–2, 2023.
- Presented the paper titled ““Caught in between Two Worlds”: Exploring Vulnerabilities in Young Adult Literature” at “International Young Researchers’ Conference: New Research in English Studies” organised by English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad, from April 26–28, 2023.

- Presented the paper titled "(Re)claiming the Non-human Animal: Interrogating Anthropocentrism Through Samit Basu's *Turbulence*" in "Non-Western Approaches in Environmental Humanities" Conference organised by University of Warsaw from July 11–13, 2022 at Warsaw.
- Presented the paper titled "(Re)claiming the Animal through a Postcolonial Posthumanist Framework" at "Politics of Technoscientific Futures Conference" organised by the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology from July 6–9, 2022 at Madrid.
- Presented the paper titled "The Child of the Pandemic: Interrogating Biopolitics, Crime and Disability" in "The Child of the Future Conference" organised by the University of Cambridge from June 30–July 1, 2022.
- Presented the paper titled "Visualizing Transnational Lesbianism using a Crip-Queer Framework" in the "Queer Homing Desires Conference" organised by Jadavpur University, Kolkata from March 7–8, 2022.
- Presented the paper titled "Digitalizing Narrativity: Reimagining Art and Culture through Interactive Storytelling" in "Ethics and Aesthetics: Debates in Indian Arts, Literature, Enactment and Philosophy" Winter School organised by Manipal Academy of Higher Education from January 31–February 4, 2022.
- Presented the paper titled "Conceptualising Resistance through Disability Performance Art" in the "Disability: Resistance, Disruption and Transgression" Conference organised by SGTB Khalsa College and Kirori Mal College, Delhi from November 29–December 3, 2021.

- Presented the paper titled “Cyborg Communication: Linking Technology and Subjectivity” in “Distant Communications: making contact across time and space from antiquity to the digital age” Conference organised by the University of Birmingham and University of Plymouth from July 21–22, 2021.
- Presented the paper titled “Indian Supercrip Cyborg: Deconstructing Normativity through Feminist Posthumanism” in “Posthumanism and India: Envisioning and Manifesting” Symposium organised by Indian Posthumanism Network from June 4–13, 2021.
- Presented the paper titled “Whisk, Share and Bite: Exploring the Gastronomic Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic” in “Food in/of Pandemic Conference” organised by Liverpool Hope University and Christ University, Bangalore from May 10–12, 2021.
- Presented the paper titled “Bodies and Expressions: Exploring the Aesthetics of Disability Performance Art” in “How Bodies Matter: The Politics of Resistance and Subversion in Global Literary & Cultural Traditions Conference” organised by Louisiana State University, US, from March 4–6, 2021.
- Presented the paper titled “Stitching and Splitting: Understanding the Pleasure of the Visual Text” in the “Pan-NIT Humanities and Social Sciences Research Conclave” organised by NIT Warangal from January 8–10, 2021.
- Presented the paper titled “Interrogating Nonnormativity: Transgender Embodiment in *Samantaral* and *Nagarkirtan*” at the “South Asia in Alternative Cinemas” Conference organised by EFLU, Hyderabad and Shivaji University, Maharashtra, from October 31-November 1, 2020.
- Presented the paper titled “Shattered Nerves: Representations of Mental Illness in Young Adult Fiction” at the “Literary Diseases: Representation of Disease in Literature and

Cinema" Conference organised by Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, on October 30, 2020.

- Presented the paper titled "Interrogating Interdisciplinarity: Difference, Relations and Inclusion" in the "Interdisciplinarity and Comparative Literature" Conference organised by Jadavpur University, Kolkata, from October 13–15, 2020.
- Presented the paper titled "Representing the Posthuman Embodiment: The Case of Netflix's *Love, Death & Robots*" in "The Possible and Impossible World of Science Fiction" Conference organised by St. Andrew's College, Mumbai, from September 11–13, 2020.
- Presented the paper titled "Aestheticizing the Cyborg Entity: Showing and Telling the Posthuman in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*" at Alliance Management Studies International Conference organised by Alliance University, Bengaluru, from April 11–13, 2019.

BIOGRAPHY OF JAYA SARKAR

Jaya Sarkar completed her Masters in English Language and Literature from the University of Calcutta in 2017. Her field of specialisation in her Masters was Gender & Literature and Modern European Classics in Translation. She qualified the UGC National Eligibility Test for Assistant Professor in English in June 2019. Her areas of research interest include Posthumanism, Disability Studies, Digital Humanities, Cultural Studies, Feminist Studies, and Postmodernism. She is a Fellow of the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology, the Posthuman Lab, and the Indian Posthumanism Network. She has edited the book *Industrial Melanism: An Evolutionary Reverse Swing* and has published seven articles in international journals. She has also written four book chapters, which were published by international publishing houses and has presented papers at various national and international conferences. She is currently working as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Sciences, MLR Institute of Technology, Hyderabad.

BIOGRAPHY OF DR. ANHITI PATNAIK

Dr. Anhiti Patnaik is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani. Her areas of interest include Victorian and World Literature, Cultural Criminology, Queer Studies, Postmodernism, and Global South Studies. Anhiti completed her PhD in Cultural Studies at Trent University, Canada and is a Fellow of The School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University and The Institute of World Literature, Harvard University. Her articles have been published in *Neo-Victorian Studies*, *Journal of World Literature*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, and book chapters *in Horror Fiction in the Global South* (Bloomsbury) and *Place Matters: Critical Topographies in Word and Image* (McGill-Queen's University Press).

BIOGRAPHY OF PROF. SHILPAA ANAND

Shilpaa Anand is an Associate Professor of Disability Studies and Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the BITS-Pilani Hyderabad Campus. She has a PhD in Disability Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an MA in English from the University of Hyderabad. Her research interests include literary and cultural disability studies, the historiography of disability and culturally different concepts of corporeality. In her doctoral work, she explored the conceptual history of disability in the Indian context. Anand's papers are published in edited volumes on disability studies in India and South Asia, as well as in scholarly journals. These include 'Historicizing Disability in India: Questions of Subject and Method' and 'The Models Approach in Disability Scholarship: An Assessment of its Failings'. Over the last decade, she has supervised over ten MPhil and PhD dissertations on a range of critical issues in English Studies, Disability Studies and Medical Humanities. She moderates a lively email list called Disability Studies India and has co-edited multiple issues on disability of the web magazine Cafe Dissensus. Additionally, Anand holds the honorary position of Distinguished Research Fellow at the Centre for Disability Studies at NALSAR University of Law in Hyderabad.