

Outline: *In Defense of the Compound: (Cy)Borg Capitalism in Dystopian Science Fiction*,
presented by Stephanie Peebles Tavera at the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts:
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I. Introduction:

- a. **Context:** In the Anthropocene, a period marked by the human’s role as an agent of global geological destruction, corporations appear responsible for environmental degradation on a global scale.¹
- b. **Conflict:** Kim Stanley Robinson argues that the only solution for preventing further anthropogenic behavior among humanity requires the “de-strand[ing]” of science and capitalism. Robinson’s solution isn’t viable given that corporations function significantly within our global ecology; in fact, Kareiva and Marvier claim that “corporations are the ‘keystone species’ of global ecosystems,” providing the human closer access to resources for survival (967).
- c. **Thesis:** I suggest a rereading of the 1886 U.S. Supreme Court decision legally designating corporations as a “living person” and argue that corporations are not on a person and species, but a form of Haraway’s cyborg. Instead of a human model, the corporation requires a cyborg model, specifically Haraway’s cyborg, who exists in a “post-modernist, non-naturalist” world and accepts responsibility for the boundaries it creates and transgresses.²
- d. **Method:** In explicating my theory of (cy)borg capitalism, I extrapolate the potential for ethical relations between the corporation and the human, the corporation and the nonhuman animal, and the corporation and the machine from dystopian science fiction’s representation of transnational corporations, specifically, Bacigalupi’s agribusinesses in *The Windup Girl*, Robinson’s defense industries in *The Gold Coast*, and Winterson’s MORE in *The Stone Gods*.

II. Cyborgian Constructions

- a. Julia Sze favors constructing boundaries for the prevention of disease, toxins, and carcinogens since a “cyborg politics necessarily ‘advocates pollution’” in its “illegitimate fusions” of the human and nonhuman animal and the human and the machine.³
- b. Stacy Alaimo claims that “all that scary stuff, supposedly out there, is already within” doing “unwanted things as well, such as caus[ing] cancer or litter[ing] the planet.”⁴
- c. **Cyborg Capitalism Premise (1):** such a politics not only acknowledges these trans-corporeal movements between and among material bodies, but requires that the corporate body question its motive in constructing or transgressing boundaries.
- d. MORE’s “Natural Nutrition” (Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*): the corporation’s avoidance of pollution creates further hybridity and atmospheric pollution, yet the corporate body fails in accepting responsibility for constructing boundaries, resulting in the threat of global ecological destruction, at least on Orbus

III. Cyborgian Transgressions

- a. Sze overlooks the critical implication of Haraway's cyborg myth: In the same breath that Haraway argues for "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries," she also argues for "*responsibility* in their construction" (2270).
- b. **Cyborg Capitalism Premise (2):** Corporations remain always already a hybrid site of human, nonhuman, and technological intra-action, thus it too, revels in the "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries," but must also take "responsibility in their construction" for an economic ethics in the Anthropocene (2270).
- c. Springlife's Kinkspring Production (Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*): Megadonts, genehacked elephant-derived animals, are the "living heart" of the factory's power; they crank the spindles in the factory, providing energy for conveyor lines, venting fans, and manufacturing machinery (8).
- d. Calorie Companies' Ngaw (Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*): Companies' de-extinction of produce through gene-hacking controls all food production and prevention of diseases including the deadly blister rust and cibiscosis.

IV. Implications of Constructions/Transgressions

- a. **Cyborg Capitalism Premise (3):** The stakes are high for all human and nonhuman material bodies in that, because of the "interconnectedness of all beings," unmediated cyborgian transgressions and constructions might result in "disease and death," even apocalypse (Hageman 293).
- b. Winterson's Spike: "Humans have given away all their power to a 'they'" because humans "rely on technicians and robots to think for them" instead of alongside them.⁵
- c. Defense Industry's Carbrain (Robinson's *The Gold Coast*): The superhighway system (autopia) leaves "[n]o room for human error" (47), and with each accident, matter transgresses boundaries in unwanted ways, yet the corporations responsible for these transgressions remain distanced from consumers' lives, cleaning up the mess, but not preventing it.

V. Conclusion

- a. All three dystopias end in the threat of apocalypse: Winterson's MORE plans leaving Orbus for Planet Blue, Bacigalupi's agribusinesses disappear with the flood, and Robinson's defense industries are attacked by Jim.
- b. "Anthropocene" threatens apocalypse, but Haraway claims that "cyborgs can subvert the apocalypse of returning to nuclear dust" (2271).
- c. In rebooting the cyborg for the twenty-first century, s/he must adopt a new politics, a cyborg capitalist politics, that might subvert the inevitable end of the Anthropocene through "utopia as struggle," or at least for now, utopia as survival.

Notes

1. Arun Saldanha argues only a corporate body – specifically a European corporate body – can enact such change on a global scale: “Through the spread of capitalism and the nation-state form, one society – the European – has taken humanity hostage to a degree even the most racist ideologue could not have deemed possible. No society, indeed no species, ever created the conditions for its own demise on a planetary scale (and in a few centuries too)” (460).
2. See Haraway 2270. Although Haraway has since moved on from cyborgs, and has adopted a companion species model for posthumanist trappings of the nature/culture divide, I believe that in this digital age in which science fiction eerily becomes scientific fact, the cyborg might offer corporations a model for ethical relations with the material bodies it appropriates – the human, the nonhuman animal, and the machine.
3. See Sze 800; See also Haraway, *Simians* 177. Sze’s reference to a “cyborg politics” that “necessarily ‘advocates pollution’” and supports “illegitimate fusions” is taken from Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. However, Sze misreads the phrases “advocates pollution” and “illegitimate fusions” which do not support unmediated transgressions of material bodies, but “advocates pollution” of the nature/culture dualism upholding transnational capitalism.
4. See Alaimo 18. Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporality appears in *Bodily Natures* and describes the ways in which material bodies move “across different sites” in “often unpredictable and unwanted” ways (2).
5. See Winterson 65. One of my critiques of corporations in the longer version of this paper addresses the corporation’s attitudes toward technology. In all three dystopian novels, the characters and the corporations hold technological constructivist ideals. Constructivists claim that technology is capable of contributing both good and bad, positive and negative effects on the environment, yet the outcome remains determined by the agent of technology, namely the human (34). However, Haraway – and her cyborg – appear more pragmatic in their approach toward technology; I read Haraway alongside Michael Hynes and argue that cyborg capitalism requires a technological (critical) realist approach in understanding how technology co-constitutes and co-evolves alongside the human.

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