

**Unnaturally Natural: subjectivity and place in
contemporary young adult dystopian fiction**

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Date of Submission: 21/05/2020

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Abstract

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction challenges adolescent readers to think about current social and political issues, and engage in debates about the relationship between people, technology, and nature. Above all, these narratives provide an opportunity for young people to consider and challenge the hierarchies that exist between these, and their own role in reinforcing or dismantling them. This thesis explores the representation of place and subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. My analysis of such narratives draws from ecocritical and posthumanist theories. While both ecocriticism and posthumanism have been (and continue to be) addressed separately in children's literature, it is through considering both theoretical approaches that the greater cultural debate of people, nature, and technology can be addressed. An ecocritical approach to the posthuman subject provides a framework within which the relationship between place and subjectivity in young adult fiction can be explored and understood.

In addition to these theoretical approaches, I draw upon a topoanalytical approach to dystopian fiction for young adults from Jane Suzanne Carroll's study of British children's fantasy fiction. A topoanalytical approach to contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults highlights the relationship between place and subjectivity in these narratives. Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces is also influential in my textual analysis, which demonstrates how places tend to function to suppress or reward the development of subjectivity.

The relationship between place and subjectivity in young adult fiction addresses the greater cultural debate of people, technology, nature, and their place in the twenty-first century. This thesis closely analyses contemporary young adult dystopian fiction that allows the adolescent reader to interrogate subjectivity through the perspective of posthuman protagonists that focalise the experience of identity-formation resulting from their relationship to place. I contend that individual subjectivity is embedded in the environment, and the individual's engagement with and perception of place informs their development of subjectivity.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction narratives strategically use the environment to illustrate aspects of identity-formation. The protagonist's relationship to the spaces and places depicted in these narratives informs their development of subjectivity. The textual analysis in this thesis demonstrates how contemporary young adult dystopian fiction engages with ideas from posthumanism and ecocriticism, and represents place and place-connectedness as integral to the construction of a posthuman subjectivity.

Keywords: dystopia, ecocriticism, place, posthumanism, subjectivity, young adult fiction

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) _____ Date: 21/05/2020

Stephanie Thompson

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the Department of English and Macquarie University for the support throughout my candidature. My primary supervisor, Dr Ryan Twomey, provided valuable feedback and advice when it came to completing and submitting this thesis, and I am grateful for his patience and guidance. Dr Victoria Flanagan, formerly of the Department of English, was generous with her knowledge, feedback, and insight throughout my initial years of candidature. Thanks also to the librarians at Macquarie University Library for curating an extensive collection of online and offline resources.

During my candidature I received funding from Macquarie University's Faculty of Arts HDR Candidate Conference Travel Scheme (FACCTS) to present a paper at the 2018 Australasian Children's Literature Association of Research (ACLAR) conference in Wellington, New Zealand. I also received funding through the Macquarie University Postgraduate Research Fund (PGRF) that supported my attendance at the 2019 International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) Congress in Stockholm, Sweden.

Thank you to my friends for their ongoing support and curiosity. I am especially thankful to Ferne and Sophie-Anne for the entertaining comments throughout the writing process.

The encouragement from my family has been fundamental throughout my candidature: my grandparents, parents, and sister. My mother, Karynne, championed the completion of my thesis; without her, I may never have had the courage to begin.

Finally, I am grateful to my companions, Eliot and Merlot, for the amusing antics and motivating nudges when I needed them the most.

Introduction: Ecocriticism and the Posthuman Subject

“I’m a steam-powered wooden robot – just as nature intended.”

Bender, *Futurama*

The desire to become *natural* is a common motif in young adult dystopian fiction, particularly as the developing adolescent subject confronts existing notions of the human and renegotiates definitions of ‘human’ and ‘natural’ in order to eke out his or her place in the world. Bender, a character from the animated television series *Futurama*, could be mistaken for a human male in his early-mid 20s; his blasé attitude and poor work ethic, regular (and usually excessive) consumption of beer, and frequent presence on the couch watching television could be considered stereotypical attributes of many young Western men. Bender’s barrel-like metal body identifies that he is, despite his human-like traits, a robot. In one particular episode, Bender decides to get a software upgrade, but soon changes his mind, fearing the loss of his “robo-humanity” (“Obsoletely Fabulous” 00:05:12-00:05:16). He runs away to an island that resembles a hippy-commune where obsolete robots live a ‘natural’ life free from modern technology. Bender consequently decides to downgrade, transforming his metal body to one of wood, declaring himself “a steam-powered wooden robot – just as nature intended” (“Obsoletely Fabulous” 00:13:02-00:13:07).

The irony of a robot rejecting technology and embracing nature exemplifies the tension that exists between technology and nature in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Ideas of technology and nature are represented in such fictions as in opposition to one another, such as the fear of the outside world depicted in Heather Anastasiu’s *Glitch* (2012) and the dependency on technology to suppress the natural (that is, human emotions and impulses). If not in opposition to one another, technology or nature may be represented as more superior to the other when it comes to negotiating subjectivity – *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* by Mary E. Pearson (2008) centralises the role of nature and the natural in the narrative and the protagonist’s identity-formation, whereas the maturation of the protagonist in Ernest Cline’s

Ready Player One (2011) occurs almost entirely in or as a result of a virtual world, where nature and the natural can only be simulated. Of significance in all of these novels, however, is the emphasis on the unification of technology and nature – more often than not, the protagonist needs both in order to interrogate subjectivity and achieve agency. Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* would not exist if not for technology – it is Jenna's relationship with nature and the natural world that help Jenna come to terms with what she initially perceives to be her 'unnatural' body.

For the most part, the developing subject does not have to go to the extreme transformation that Bender endures in order to identify with the natural world; however, his statement does emphasise how traditional binarisms of nature/technology and human/nonhuman are challenged in contemporary texts. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the adolescent protagonist frequently acts to subvert and interrogate these boundaries, for example, Jenna perceives that acceptance from the birds (which initially reject eating from her hand) would validate her status as 'natural' despite her manufactured body. It is not until Jenna redefines her understanding of identity that she is able to accept herself – and feed the birds with the assistance of a 'loaned' identity. This results in Jenna and Allys challenging and changing society's definition of 'human' (previously reduced to a percentage). Jenna's engagement with nature and the natural environment directly influences her maturation and identity-formation; similarly, the developing subject in other contemporary young adult dystopian narratives engages with place to interrogate his or her subjectivity. Identity-formation is accordingly depicted in these young adult narratives as dependent on the developing subject's engagement with nature and, consequently, the collapsing of boundaries between nature/technology and human/nonhuman. Nature and natural landscapes are represented as playing a significant role in the adolescent protagonist's identity-formation; however, they are not exclusive places with which the adolescent protagonist engages. Spaces and places created for and by technology are also significant to the subject's development, representing changing ideas of how – and where – identity-formation and maturation take place. The virtual world of the OASIS in *Ready Player One* is central to Wade's agency; similarly,

the spaces and places created by technology in Dan Wells' *Bluescreen* (2016) are represented as integral to Marisa's autonomy. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction frequently depicts worlds where the boundaries between people, nature, and technology have been reimagined and, accordingly, redefined. Such a representation challenges notions of the human and suggests an increased openness to perceiving the nonhuman as human; the unnatural as natural.

An Ecocritical Approach to the Posthuman Subject

Ecocriticism and posthumanism are employed in this thesis as frameworks within which the relationship between place and subjectivity in young adult fiction can be explored and understood. The relationship between place and subjectivity in fiction for young adults addresses the greater cultural debate of people, nature, technology, and their place in the twenty-first century. The corpus consists of novels that centralise a 'nonhuman' protagonist; whether cyborg, genetically modified, or synthetically created, the 'nonhuman' protagonist embraces the liminal space they inhabit and, from this vantage point, engages in an exploration of subjectivity. In turn, this exploration allows the adolescent reader to embrace the technology around them as well as learn of the environmental challenges confronting the not-too-distant future. So, too, does the representation of the natural environment and technology in fiction for young adults.

Exploring place and subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction demands a critical approach that accommodates the developing subject's engagement with notions of 'nature' and 'human' in order to interrogate subjectivity within the dystopian setting. In order to achieve this, I propose an approach that is influenced by both the ecocritical and posthuman frameworks. Each has been addressed separately in the field of children's literature, but it is through a combination of both theoretical approaches that we can examine the greater cultural debate of people, nature, and technology. Ecocriticism and posthumanism offer distinct approaches when it comes to analysing and understanding the representations of place in

contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, and how these relate to the developing subject. Both theoretical approaches have overlapping ideas when it comes to understanding the interrelationships between people, nature, and technology. At their broadest, both theories seek to understand what is meant by the term 'human' and how this relates to the 'nonhuman'. Any of these variations of the nonhuman – mechanical or animal – could display human characteristics and therefore identify as human.

While I approach contemporary young adult dystopian fiction with a theoretical framework that uses both ecocriticism and posthumanism, my main focus is on what could be simplified as an ecocritical approach to the posthuman subject: that is, exploring how the posthuman's relationship with place and the environment informs their development of subjectivity. Similarly, Phoebe Chen posits that

when reading the text through ecological posthumanism as a theoretical filter, we reach into moments of nature in crisis and evaluate the transformative process through which the natural environment influences the protagonist's identity. (183)

While posthumanism offers the opportunity to explore the subject as a global citizen (Flanagan, *Technology and Identity* 97-98), ecocriticism encourages us to consider, too, the responsibilities we have for the world itself. While this thesis does not exclusively examine the role of the natural environment in identity-formation, it draws upon an overall idea of nature and the natural as significant influences regardless of the prevalence of technology in the lives of young adolescents. Current social and political debate around our environment's future urges us to consider not only the role technology has in redefining our world and ourselves as subjects, but also the growing concerns associated with climate change.

Both ecocriticism and posthumanism are concerned with the notions of human and nonhuman: ecocriticism centralises nature and the environment in reconsidering the role of humans while posthumanism emphasises the role of science and technology in

reconceptualising the human. An ecocritical approach to the posthuman subject suggests that the impact of technology on people is inevitable, as represented in young adult fiction, but what remains possible is the construction of an empowering relationship between people, nature, and technology. Pramod K. Nayar argues that critical posthumanism “sees the human as embedded within an environment, an instantiation of a series of information exchanges, transfers of data and feedback mechanisms that cause the system to close itself off operationally in order to regulate itself as a response to the complexity of the environment” (35). I contend that individual subjectivity is embedded in the environment. The individual’s engagement with and perception of place informs their development of subjectivity.

Clare Bradford et al. suggest both ecocriticism and posthumanism are significant to the exploration of contemporary children’s literature, addressing each in separate chapters of *New World Orders in Contemporary Children’s Literature: Utopian Transformations* (2011). They write:

Ideas of humanity – that is, ‘the human’ – naturalise and hierarchise difference within the human and make absolute distinctions between the human and nonhuman. Ideas of the posthuman question what we consider to be ‘natural’, and create possibilities for the emergence of new relationships between human and machine, biology and technology. (181)

Such relationships usurp dualisms traditional to dominant Western ideologies, particularly that of humanism.

Humanism and Romantic conceptualisations of the child and nature continue to be influential in Western discourses addressing the relationships between people, nature, and technology. Literature for children and young adults is, however, beginning to recognise the need to reconsider the representation of both nature and technology, and the impact that people, nature, and technology have on each other. Victoria Flanagan argues that the prevalence of anti-technology messages in children’s literature since the 1980s has undergone

an ideological shift (*Technology and Identity* 2). With this shift comes a reconceptualisation of the child not only in relation to technology, but also nature. The correlation between nature and technology has become more pronounced due to an emphasis on relationships with people, and it is this connection that is influential in even the most basic of dystopian settings in young adult fiction.

The connections between nature and technology have become entangled in the twenty-first century. Food sources are dependent on science providing accurate forecasts and genetically modifying seeds and produce according to the environment in which food is grown; amputees have prosthetic limbs that not only visually complete the physical form, but have increasing possibilities for functionality and, in some cases, this functionality exceeds the possibilities of the original. At what point does the human end and the nonhuman begin? What is 'natural' in this constantly changing world? Simplified, both ecocriticism and posthumanism theories seek to overturn the hierarchies that have been insinuated into children's literature since humanism and Romantic notions of the child within nature first dominated fiction for children. The world has changed since Rousseau first introduced "the essentialist image of the child in nature" (Thacker and Webb 19). Where nature was once viewed as inherent to the experience of childhood and development of selfhood, contemporary narratives represent changed perspectives of nature and technology, and the subsequent negotiation of subjectivity. The possibilities of technology are, in the twenty-first century, rapidly becoming probabilities. Consequently, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explores the possibilities of science and technology with emotion, judgement, and individual perspective.

Ecocriticism

The prefix 'eco' is recognisable as being related to ecology or environment. Ecocriticism, then, implies an examination of the environment. Cheryl Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xvii) is the most widely referenced, identifying that ecocriticism focuses on representations of the environment

in literature. The term 'ecocriticism' has come to encompass the study of the relationships between humans and the environment as represented in cultural products, from film and art to theme parks and shopping malls (Garrard 5). Definitions of ecocriticism remain varied, particularly when considering the influences of deep ecology and feminism, the latter of which I will explore further in chapter two.

Deep ecology philosophy, its key principles credited to Arne Naess (Garrard 23-24), adopts an ecocentric approach to the natural environment. One of the definitive points of deep ecology demands that the well-being of the environment take precedence over human life (Sessions 68). Greg Garrard explains the subversion of the hierarchy that represents humans as superior to the environment, writing that deep ecology "identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere" (24). The suggestion that the separation of humans from nature is the "origin of environmental crisis" is depicted in many contemporary young adult dystopian novels. The subversion of the hierarchy between human/nature and the "dualistic separation of humans from nature" is emphasised in the textual representation of people, nature, and technology in dystopian fiction for young adults. One does not need to search far to discover dystopian worlds built on the premise that the abuse of the environment by humans has led to the demise not only of the environment, but also of human life. The separation of humans from nature is depicted in children's films such as Pixar's *Wall-E* (2008), which presents a bleak portrait of Earth's possible future right from the opening frames. The camera zooms in to show Earth – which would once have been a blue and green planet suspended in the star-speckled black expanse of the galaxy – as a sphere shrouded in brown haze. Zooming through a thick belt of what appears to be a satellite scrapyard, the smog parts to reveal piles of rubbish towering over skyscrapers. With no human in sight aside from looping advertisements on billboards, the protagonist is a robot (albeit a robot with recognisably human characteristics); this is not an Earth fit for human life. Novels such as *Pure* (2012) by Julianna Baggott and *Glitch* depict a world in which humans are physically separated

from the devastated environment. People considered worthy of not being subjected to the pollution or anarchy of an environment unfit for human life inhabit domes or dome-like spaces. Within this space, humans are sometimes represented as living harmoniously with nature, encouraged to reflect on the imbalances that brought human existence to this precarious point and to avoid – at all costs – repeating the mistakes that brought such devastation to the environment.

In *Pure*, a dome space has been constructed prior to the Detonations – those who were safely inside the Dome when the Detonations occurred are now known as “Pures” because their physical forms have not experienced deformities like those outside the Dome, the “wretches”. The wretches, whose bodies are made up of the organic and artificial components of the objects around them when the Detonations occurred, are considered less than human because of their physical deformities. The Pures are, in contrast, genetically enhanced to be the best version of human, physically and cognitively. In the novel *Glitch*, the outside world is unsafe for human habitation and it is the Community, a subterranean construction, that is considered the only safe space for people to live and work. I explore these spaces in detail in chapter two, particularly how the novels represent the natural environment in relation to such controlled, constructed spaces designed to ‘protect’ their inhabitants. These novels share similarities with other contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults in their portrayal of domes and dome-like spaces.

Textual representations of attitudes towards the environment thematise social and political debate surrounding environmental issues in the twenty-first century. When it comes to examining the significance of place, an ecocritical perspective emphasises the significance of environments – natural or otherwise – to identity-formation and maturation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In his explorative text on ecocriticism, Garrard broadly defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). The critical analysis of the term ‘human’ is especially significant to understanding the relationship between

people and nature not only in a contemporary environmental context, but also in their representation in young adult dystopian fiction. Bradford et al. argue it is “a critical method and ethical discourse that considers the interconnections between nature and culture (and hence between actual environments and textual representations of them)” (104). The textual representation of environments, natural or constructed, is pertinent to exploring young adult dystopian fiction because these environments have a significant influence on the developing subject. The dystopian setting is often one that challenges the developing subject’s understanding of place and environment, and notions of ‘natural’.

There is ample opportunity for both ecocritical and posthumanist perspectives in children’s literary criticism. David Aitchison argues that “extended studies of children’s fiction and the environment are few and far between” (145), naming Alice Curry’s study, the publications from the International Board for Books for Young People (IBBY) sponsored 2009 conference Deep into Nature: Ecology, Environment, and Children’s Literature, and Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd’s *Wild Things* as the only recent extended works in twenty years. A significant addition to this list that has since been published is *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children’s Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues* (Goga et al.), which focuses on exploring the representation of nature and the child in Nordic literature for children and young adults. There are also chapters within this text that draw on posthumanism, which further informs the significance of a merging of the ecocritical and posthumanist theoretical approaches.

An ecocritical perspective foregrounds and, to an extent, validates the increasing presence of messages encouraging nature education and environmentalism. Dobrin and Kidd’s collection of essays *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism* explores the interplay of texts and environmental experience (1) and focuses on the environmental experiences of younger children. The primary belief underpinning the collection is that there is a need for children to be exposed to explicit nature education. Dobrin and Kidd argue

[m]any of the activities that occupy the time of young children take place in settings that isolate them from the natural world or present only simulations of that world. The impact of this may very well be that considerable numbers of children may never develop the positive attitudes toward the environment that are so crucial to its preservation. They may never achieve the familiarity with nature that is vital to environmental planning and activism. (7)

The observation that young children are isolated from the natural world encourages consideration as to what kind of adolescent and, ultimately, adult these young children may become. Children and adolescents in urban environments are especially distanced from experiencing the natural world – consider the absence of nature in high-rise apartment complexes, the limitations of cultivated gardens with exotic plants in lieu of the native in suburban backyards, and the urban sprawl encroaching on the habitats of native wildlife. How do children and adolescents experience and perceive the natural world in such contexts? The suggestion that there is a need to inculcate young children with nature education and a deeper awareness of nature is reminiscent of what Betty Greenway refers to as the “greening” of children’s literature (146-147). Many ecocritical perspectives of children’s literature focus on this “greening” of the young reader through texts. Carolyn Sigler argues, “Contemporary literature for children demonstrates even more clearly the return to the more biocentric pastoral anticipated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and currently being discussed by ecocriticism, for it has become increasingly clear in the latter half of the twentieth century that even isolated wonderlands and secret gardens are endangered” (150). Early twenty-first century literature for young adults, especially dystopian fiction, continues to depict the endangered natural environment; however, there has been a shift in the representation of and focus on technology and science as offering possible solutions, and not existing solely in contrast or competition to nature. Not only are current social and political debates focusing on

environmental issues, but also on issues of technology and science, typically in relation to the environment and people.

In addition to drawing on ecocritical and posthumanist ideas, I also utilise ecofeminism. Flanagan contends that feminism is significant to children's literature in that it "has been far-reaching in terms of the way an incredibly diverse range of literature produced for children in the last half-century has actively sought to redress patriarchal discursive practices" ("Gender Studies" 29-30). The redress of "patriarchal discursive practices" is reflective of second-wave feminism; however, more recent writing is engaging with third-wave feminism ("Gender Studies" 30). Flanagan provides examples of how both ecocriticism and posthumanism are positioned to support this agenda ("Gender Studies" 30), and draws parallels between feminism and posthumanism "as each endeavours to destabilize conventional concepts of subjectivity" ("Gender Studies" 30).

In their introduction, Dobrin and Kidd state that "it is critical to recognise that any ecocritical look at children's literature must include ecofeminist perspectives" (10), yet, as Bradford et al. note, Dobrin and Kidd's collection *Wild Things* only specifically addresses ecofeminism in one of the sixteen essays (85). Bradford et al. suggest

[a] wide integration of ecofeminism is yet to come, although we envisage that it will eventually play an oppositional, interrogative role in the field, with a potential to reshape the nature and direction of environmental advocacy in children's texts and to disclose the operation of the culture/nature duality in a text's orientation towards the material environment. (85)

One such integration is Curry's *Environmental Crisis in Young Adult Fiction* (2013). In her exploration of feminism and environment in children's literature, specifically post-apocalyptic environments in young adult fiction, Curry suggests that ecofeminism "is especially apt for engaging with the construction of young adult subjectivity in novels in which radically ruptured post-apocalyptic societies struggle to create new - more caring - world orders based on the

dismantling of social and biosocial inequalities” (1). Curry’s study is one of few texts that specifically explore young adult fiction through an ecofeminist framework, and it does so with analysis of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction such as Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008). The overall focus is on how young adult literature can engage with environmental issues recognisable in current debate. Curry proposes the hybrid body “as a symbol of resistance to human-earth dislocation” (17) as it is through the combination of human and nonhuman that the relationship between humans and the natural world can be re-envisioned (17). Curry argues that the posthuman figure is one of man and machine, dislocated from nature (72), whereas the ecological hybrid articulates “the distinctness of both self and other” (181) rather than assimilating both. Curry’s study concentrates on the female body and thus the lack of choice and ownership female characters frequently have over their bodies is a key principle of her argument. However, I also believe that an equally-significant opportunity arises in this literature to explore representations of the male body and male adolescent’s development of subjectivity, which in many cases is also fundamentally affected by technological interventions. Responses to the impact of technology on the body differ depending on the character’s gender, as do the representations of and relationships with nature.

While ecofeminism plays a part in the development of my theoretical framework, I have chosen to focus on the human/nonhuman dualism identified by Glotfelty as the dualism that ecocriticism negotiates (xviii-xix). Ecocriticism is an analytical discourse dominated by environmental issues; at its heart is the relationship between people and the environment and a desire to bring the two together, rather than structure them within a hierarchy of oppositional dualisms. Garrard offers one chapter in the second edition of his book (a chapter not present in the first edition) with the intention of arguing that “reconsideration of the idea of ‘the human’ is a key task for ecocriticism, tending to drag it away from pastoral and nature writing towards postmodern concerns such as globalisation and the numerous ‘naturecultures’ (Donna Haraway’s term) that render the conventional binary opposition of culture and nature redundant” (17). The reconsideration of ‘the human’ as the key task for ecocriticism leads to my

drawing from the posthumanist framework to work in conjunction with the ecocritical, as posthumanism is a lens through which such reconsideration is particularly articulated.

Posthumanism

As the prefix 'eco' implies ecology or environment, the prefix 'post' implies 'after', suggesting that the term 'posthuman' is an examination of what comes after the human. The terms 'posthuman' and 'posthumanism' are not to be confused, the former referring to a human changed by technology and the latter referring to a theory. While this thesis focuses on the posthuman subject, in order to comprehend the intricacies of understanding 'the posthuman', it is first necessary to understand posthumanism as a theoretical approach.

A clear definition of posthumanism is made complicated by the many different approaches to posthumanism and the various uses of the term. The term 'posthumanism' tends to be associated with terms such as antihumanism and transhumanism, and the presence of cyborg and android figures seems to further complicate what is meant, exactly, when the word 'posthumanism' is used. The suggestion of posthumanism as being 'after' humanism encourages an exploration of humanism itself. Humanism centralises the human: an intelligent, autonomous subject. As Nayar summarises, humanism "treats the human subject as the centre of the world, which is influenced by the human's thoughts and actions" (5). Integral to the idea of the human subject within humanism is the freedom to pursue personal choice and the possession of an awareness of self (5). In discussing humanism in relation to children's literature, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum identify the two significant characteristics of humanism:

[first] it focuses on human beings and starts from human experience – all beliefs, values, and knowledge are derived by human minds and human experience; and second . . . individual human beings have a value themselves, grounded in the power to communicate, and in the power to observe themselves, to speculate, imagine, and reason. These powers

enable freedom of choice and will, innovation, and the possibility of improving the self and the human lot. (19)

Both posthumanism and ecocriticism seek to challenge anthropocentrism, yet humanism is a dominant ideology in children's literature. Flanagan attributes the significance of humanism to children's literature as a result of narratives being driven by identity development, underpinned by "a construction of agency based on the principles of individualism, action and autonomy" (*Technology and Identity* 14). Suggesting that posthumanism is what comes after humanism is a somewhat accurate – albeit ultimately limiting – notion. Cary Wolfe argues

[posthumanism] comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world . . . after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore. (xv)

Humanism has been a dominant ideology in children's literature for the past century; however, there has recently been a change in approaches to the human subject, particularly in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Humans, in such texts, are no longer the centre of the world, but one of its many parts. Nayar identifies two frames for the term 'posthumanism', the first being "an *ontological condition* in which many humans now, and increasingly will, live with chemically, surgically, technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms" (3). Perhaps it is the possibilities of such an existence that is most easily identified as influencing contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Partridge in *Pure* witnesses the effects of surgical and genetic manipulation of the human body, initially perceiving his brother as more animal than human; Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* relies on a body built to accommodate her uploaded consciousness; *Ready Player*

One's Wade finds respite from the dystopian reality through a utopian virtual reality. Wolfe's approach to posthumanism insists

we attend to the specificity of the human – its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing – by (paradoxically, for humanism) acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is. (xxv)

Such an approach offers an opportunity to overturn the human/nonhuman binary by situating the human and nonhuman as one and the same. The fusion of the human/nonhuman emphasises what Nayar identifies as the second frame of posthumanism, "a new *conceptualisation* of the human" (3). Nayar argues that it is "critical posthumanism" which moves "beyond the traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous, self-willed individual agent in order to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology" (4). Approaching the human as an assemblage, with an emphasis on the human "enmeshed with the environment and technology", is integral to my theoretical framework, particularly in my approach to the posthuman subject.

The human subject is an individual, defined by her/his agency and ability to define one's identity as unique to her/his self; agency is a crucial part of humanism. In posthumanism, however, the individual is part of a whole, and more focus is placed on the collective than any one individual. Rejecting the human as "exceptional" (Nayar 3) and "dominant" (3), "critical posthumanism begins with the assumption that the human incorporates *difference* in the form of other DNA, species and forms of life, so that its uniqueness is a myth" (4). In explaining critical posthumanism, Nayar identifies "the human as a congeries, whose origins are multispecies and whose very survival is founded on symbiotic relations with numerous forms of life on earth" (9).

The idea of the human as a congeries challenges the humanism approach to the human as being superior as a species and destabilises such a hierarchy. The destabilisation of the hierarchical frame that positions humans as dominant is a shared idea of both ecofeminism and posthumanism. Further to this is Nayar's argument that the human identified within the humanism ideology is "traditionally treated as male and universal" (5), a gendered definition that is scrutinised through both ecofeminist and posthumanist perspectives.

The idea of the posthuman being part of a whole is represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through the adolescent protagonist's relationship with the home space, particularly as defining a place of sanctuary requires engagement with others. The inter-relationship between the place of sanctuary and posthuman agency implies that, in such narratives, agency is not individualistic or independent of others, but bound to others. Donna Haraway argues that we are not posthuman, but compost, the term implying that "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all" (*Staying with the Trouble* 4). Haraway further argues

[n]o species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too. (*Staying with the Trouble* 100)

Thus the individual is, in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, not truly 'individual'; even in achieving agency, the adolescent protagonist is bound to others, and their own experience of identity-formation is entwined with their experiences with and knowledge of others. As Haraway's argument suggests, the adolescent subject is not and does not develop alone.

Bradford et al.'s *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations* (2011) dedicates a chapter to ecocritical perspectives (which Aitchison also acknowledges); however, there is a distinct gap in studies providing ecocritical perspectives of young adult fiction. A similar gap is also apparent in posthumanist perspectives of children's

literature; just as *New World Orders* dedicates a chapter to ecocritical perspectives, there is also a chapter for exploring the human in the posthuman world. Flanagan identifies this chapter as the “seminal discussion of posthumanism and its relationship to children’s literature” (*Technology and Identity* 26). Such critique suggests there is a need for posthumanist perspectives and deeper exploration of the posthuman subject within the field of children’s literature, particularly as the popularity of dystopian fiction continues to maintain a presence on the shelves of young adult readers. *New World Orders* is particularly influential in the development of my theoretical framework; its focus on how children’s texts respond to the realities of social and political changes promotes ecocritical perspectives and the idea of the posthuman in children’s literary criticism.

An urge to see ecocritical perspectives and responses to the posthuman in criticism of children’s literature has led to my development of a theoretical framework that approaches the posthuman subject with an ecocritical and, at times, ecofeminist lens. Similarly, my theoretical framework is also influenced by a recent concept that Rosi Braidotti terms “posthuman feminist theory”, which brings together anti-humanism and anti-anthropocentrism (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 673-674) and foregrounds “the radical immanence of embodiment and embeddedness” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 687). The notion of embodiment and embeddedness is especially addressed in chapter five of this thesis, which responds to Braidotti’s urge for posthuman feminism to “criticize narrow-minded self-interests, intolerance, and xenophobic rejection of Otherness” (“Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism” 25).

Bradford et al. acknowledge an increase in responses to the posthuman in children’s literature (154), and the posthuman is increasingly addressed in children’s literary criticism. However, this response is problematised by the tendency to conflate ‘posthumanism’ and ‘the posthuman’. Elaine Ostry addresses the posthuman in children’s literature with her suggestion that the word ‘posthuman’ is a suitable replacement for ‘human’ in response to the “lines crossed between organic and inorganic, and the human and animal” (“Is He Still Human? Are you?” 222), but her analysis of young adult fiction focuses on validating the humanist subject

rather than responding to posthumanism's reconceptualisation of the human. Flanagan critiques that "[t]he prevailing humanist vision of subjectivity in Ostry's corpus is therefore greatly at odds with posthumanism, a discourse that is actively engaged in deconstructing humanist ideologies of subjectivity" (25). Flanagan's book *Technology and Identity in Young Adult Fiction: The Posthuman Subject* (2014) identifies the significance of posthumanism as a critical lens from which to approach contemporary children's literature, particularly young adult fiction, and draws on posthumanist theory to explore the impact of technology on the human subject. While Noga Applebaum argues, in her study *Representations of Technology in Science Fiction for Young People* (2010), that technology is represented as negative and ultimately limiting to the individual, Flanagan perceives that technology is increasingly being represented with more positive connotations. The more positive representation of technology in recent fiction informs my own discussion of contemporary young adult fiction, and I have identified a corpus that represents increasingly positive messages when it comes to representing the relationship between people and technology in such fiction.

Contemporary Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

In my approach to contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, it is my intention to examine the representations of technology and nature as they relate to the subject, particularly because such representations respond to the "troubled times" of the early twenty-first century. In the foreword to Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry's collection of essays *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Jack Zipes writes: "We are living in very troubled times. More than ever before, we need utopian and dystopian literature" (ix). He suggests that such literature is needed "to provide hope for a different and more humane world" (ix). Dystopian fiction depicts bleak imagined futures – futures in which the natural environment has been rendered uninhabitable and the individual is deprived of agency. Farah Mendlesohn argues that science fiction needs to be more optimistic and relevant to young people, suggesting that since 1970 "science fiction for teens became increasingly a place for adults to warn the young about the future" ("Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?" 157). Maria

Nikolajeva argues that dystopian fiction for young adults may ultimately be perceived as pessimistic because it reflects adults' fears and guilt (*Power, Voice and Subjectivity* 88); however, the texts selected for close examination in her analysis are late-twentieth century publications, and are not reflective of more recent fiction.

Dystopian fiction – which can be viewed as being a subset of science fiction – has responded to the demand for more optimistic narratives, particularly in evoking questions about the present through the representation of possible futures. John J. Han et al. compare young adult dystopian literature to classical dystopian literature, arguing that the latter “provides underlying questions about specific social and political concerns that elicit critical discourse on these issues in contemporary culture” (5) while the former “tends to appeal to popular adolescent issues such as self-identity, thrill-seeking, and romantic angst” (5) and perceive both classical and young adult dystopian literature to have “similar trajectories” (5).

While dystopian worlds tend to be built around the faults and transgressions of people abusing power, technology, and nature, the individual somehow manages not only to survive, but thrive within this setting. Hintz and Ostry argue that “[u]topian and dystopian fiction is a productive place to address cultural anxieties and threats as well as to contemplate the ideal . . . [it] talks about the fears, questions, and issues that interest children and young adults” (12). Recent dystopian fiction explores the ‘what ifs’ of a world devastated by war, environmental disaster, or an abuse of technology and science, reflecting current social and political anxieties. Environmental crisis and ideas of the posthuman are definitive aspects of the twenty-first century; however, the essays in *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* tend to focus on tropes and thematic conventions. In terms of addressing environment and nature, Hintz and Ostry acknowledge the class issues associated with concerns for the environment, and the function of dystopian fiction as “cautionary tales” (12); however, the absence of ecocritical perspectives in the collection is limiting. Most young adult dystopian fiction relies on either environmental crisis or technology to cause the disaster that leads to a dystopian world, yet the focus in the collection of essays more closely examines the role of

technology as having the potential for representing “darkest fears and brightest hopes” (11). When it comes to addressing technology and the posthuman, Hintz and Ostry acknowledge that utopian and dystopian literature is an “ideal forum” for exploring what they refer to as the posthuman age (11), yet specifically posthumanist perspectives are not offered in the collection.

Since the publication of *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, there has been an increase in dystopian fiction available to young adults. Perhaps this reflects the increasing demand from young readers who seek to escape into worlds more chaotic than their own, but it may also reflect the increasing instability of the environment and social order reported in the media. Publishing a decade after *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, Balaka Basu et al. also address the potentials for young adult dystopian fiction in *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. The essays address more recently published dystopian fiction such as *Unwind* (2007), *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008), and *Divergent* (2011), the latter of which was adapted into a film of the same name in 2014. Given the increase in dystopian fiction published for a young adult readership, there is a plethora of texts available for exploration. In their introduction, Basu et al. identify that “dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self” (1). Posthumanism is more than an exploration of what it means to be human, as notions of agency and explicit consideration of subjectivity are different for the posthuman and the humanist subjects. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explores ideas of the posthuman subject; however, there is an ideological tension between such explorations and the ultimate conclusions of the narratives.

The Adoration of Jenna Fox could be interpreted as having a distinctly humanist conclusion: Jenna’s perception of herself as a human is central to the narrative, and she comes to define this as being an individual with autonomy and control over herself. Jenna’s definition of herself is reflective of the “autonomous, self-willed individual agent” (Nayar 4) that Nayar considers to be the humanist perception of the human. Yet the reader understands that there

is more to Jenna – her cybernetic body as well as her subjectivity is “enmeshed with the environment and technology” (Nayar 4), which Nayar considers to be a posthumanist perception of the human.

In *Ready Player One*, Wade ultimately expresses a preference for the real world over the virtual world; however, the virtual world has played an integral part in Wade’s maturation and identity-formation. The preference for the real world at the novel’s resolution is reflective of the tensions that exist in current perceptions of technology, which I explore in more detail in chapters one and three. Similarly, Skye’s perception of her real-world body and experiences contrast with the virtual constructed in the App World of Donna Freitas’ *Unplugged* (2016); the very title of the novel suggests removal and disruption. Skye’s inexplicable preference for reality, of which she has little memory, is another example of the tension that exists in discourses of technology and people. The posthumanist idea of the human as “an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology” (Nayar 4) is a significant aspect to the characterisation of protagonists (and other characters) in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. The protagonist in *Bluescreen*, Marisa, is a famous gamer and has a robotic arm; Adam in Mark Alpert’s *The Six* (2015) makes an informed decision to undergo a procedure that uploads his brain into the body of a robot, creating a consciousness that can be transferred between machines. Yet despite discourses that interrogate notions of being human and explore the idea of the posthuman, the emphasis in these narratives is on the character’s continued individuality and autonomy – their *human* qualities, suggesting a distinctly humanist perspective of the subject in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. Integral to their interrogation and development of subjectivity are their relationships to the places represented in the narratives.

As N. Katherine Hayles argues, “what is lethal is not the posthuman as such but the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self” (*How We Became Posthuman* 286-7). The idea that the posthuman is distinct from humanist perspectives of selfhood highlights the importance of understanding and distinguishing the human and posthuman, and

the humanist and posthumanist conceptualisations of subjectivity. The separation of the human from the posthuman is important in understanding approaches to subjectivity. Such a distinction is explored in this thesis, particularly in focusing on representations of ways the posthuman engages with place in order to negotiate subjectivity. In 2015, the journal *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* released a special edition that focused on posthumanist perspectives of children's literature. The intention of the special addition is summarised in the introduction by Zoe Jaques' as "[to] address the multifarious modes in which the [posthuman] discourse pushes boundaries of humanity and, indeed, the boundaries of childhood" ("Introduction" 8). The focus on posthumanism in the publication reflects the increasing significance of posthumanist perspectives in children's literature. Jaques was also co-editor of the issue. Jaques is especially well positioned to co-edit the issue and write the introduction, as her study *Children's Literature and the Posthuman* (2015) was published in the same year. Specifically exploring posthumanist perspectives in children's literature, the book focuses on the relationship between humans, animals, and the natural world. Jaques argues that "children's fantasy animates and gives a voice to a host of imaginary, impossible and real beings so that drawing boundaries between truth and fiction becomes sufficiently challenging as to question a rigidly hegemonic, humanist ontology, in keeping with the aims of posthuman thinking" (*Children's Literature and the Posthuman* 6). Similarly, Amy Ratelle's *Animality and Children's Literature and Film* (2015) emphasises the possibilities for posthumanist approaches to children's literature. Ratelle suggests that "current posthumanist scholarship works to deprioritize the conception of an exclusively human subjectivity" (1); however, the study's focus on animal studies provides a somewhat limited posthumanist perspective of children's literature in regards to the interrelationships between technology and the human.

In the introduction to *Posthumanism in Young Adult Fiction: Finding Humanity in a Posthuman World* (2018), a collection of essays that specifically explores posthumanist issues in young adult fiction, Anita Tarr and Donna R. White suggest that "[d]uring adolescence, when young adults are beginning to consider consequences, meaning, and purpose, readers can

actually reflect on what is being presented to them and decide for themselves how they might change the way they think about the world and their place in it” (xvi). The collection is a significant body of work when it comes to understanding how literature for young adults engages with posthumanist theories. Tarr and White’s emphasis on the adolescent reader reflecting on the ideas presented to them in young adult fiction draws attention to the significance of young adult fiction in the lives of adolescents, and also leads us to question what, exactly, young people are reflecting *on*. What sort of ideas are being presented for their perusal? Tarr and White acknowledge that “applying posthumanist theory to children’s and young adult literature is a recent undertaking that still needs a lot of work” (xvii). The need for more work in applying posthumanist theory to young adult fiction is addressed with this thesis, as it is my intention that this thesis contributes to such an undertaking.

Within the dystopian novels that constitute my primary corpus, the typical thematic preoccupation with identity-formation (which characterises children’s literature generally) is ideologically linked with the external environment. This thesis will argue that these young adult fiction narratives strategically use the environment to illustrate aspects of identity-formation. While the natural environment tends to dominate some novels as the most significant environmental influence over subjectivity, constructed and artificial environments also contribute to the adolescent protagonist’s development and maturation. In addition, technology enables the creation of virtual spaces in which the developing subject can experience a sense of place and explore the limitations of both the virtual and real worlds. How the protagonist relates to the home space, urban environments, and virtual spaces also informs their development of subjectivity.

There is a key difference between the dystopian writing for adults and that for young adults in that dystopias for young adults have a more hopeful message than those for adults. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan identify dystopian writing as “[t]raditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, dystopias maintain utopian hope *outside* their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopias as a warning that we as readers

can hope to escape its pessimistic future" ("Introduction" 7). Such a description is especially true of dystopian fiction aimed at an adult audience; however, this is not an accurate definition of more recent incarnations of dystopias written for the young adult audience. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction offers warnings, certainly, but it also offers hope for the individual and for the world. Sara K. Day et al. argue that "the potential for hope has often been identified as a feature that distinguishes young adult dystopias from those written for adult audiences" (10). Novels for a young adult audience incorporate a "bleak, depressing" aspect into the representation of a dystopian world, yet hope is not abandoned within the narratives.

The individual often symbolises hope, as it is the individual who rises up against the oppressive society and, simply put, saves the world. Adolescent protagonists do not conform to what Naomi Jacobs describes as the "ideal citizen of dystopia" (92). Such a citizen is

fully integrated with the social formation and has no self to express. The regimes of power in these classic dystopias understand free agency as based in individuality, and they use every means available to destroy any kind of identity that is separable from and potentially at odds with the collective. The realm of subjectivity is such a regime's primary locus of social control; without a clear sense of self, a citizen of dystopia will feel no need to rebel, even if means of rebellion were available. (Jacobs 92)

Such citizens are identifiable in the dystopias represented in texts for young adults, and often the protagonist begins as a controlled part of the collective. The reader therefore explicitly interrogates subjectivity as the adolescent protagonist rebels against a society to develop agency and establish their individuality.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction addresses what it means to be human in the twenty-first century, a time when the boundary between the artificial and the natural is blurred, and the unnatural is assimilated into the natural. A dystopian setting plays a significant role in such narratives. Day et al. offer dystopia as "a powerful metaphor for adolescence" (9) and argue

that the representation of adolescents saving the world “reverses the hierarchy in which real children and young adults are at the bottom” (10). Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents characters and circumstances that challenge the power between child/adolescent/adult as well as encourage the reader to challenge and usurp other hierarchies such as human/nonhuman, nature/technology.

Read the back of a contemporary young adult novel and there are often a couple of helpful ‘keywords’ listed that may include ‘romance’ or ‘dystopian’. Day et al. identify dystopian literature as a mode, not as a genre, where texts classed in broader genres adopt dystopian features (8). Such imagined scenarios have been propelled into popularity since the publication of Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* in 2008 (film adaptation 2012). While dystopian settings were frequently utilised by the science fiction genre prior to this, it is with the burgeoning popularity of dystopian settings since *The Hunger Games* that dystopia has become more than a trope for science fiction. Many young adult novels are now categorised as ‘dystopian fiction’, which we may now consider a sub-genre of science fiction. Dystopian fiction is also referred to as post-apocalyptic fiction; the biblical connotations of apocalypse are no longer entertained. Notions of the apocalyptic are now “associated with a catastrophic end, or near-end, of either human society or human life, through the intervention of natural or divine beings or events” (Levene 59). Lyman Tower Sargent defines dystopia as: “A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9). The representation of a world that is “considerably worse” to the adolescent reader’s current twenty-first century context tends to take the shape of a world that denies the individual of agency. The denial of agency may be the result of oppression, economic upheaval, or a general sense of hopelessness in response to the state of the (fictional) world. Dystopian fiction tends to present a warning that inspires the reader to act and make changes to avoid the potentially terrible future (Evans 33), yet contemporary young adult dystopian fiction also includes an element of hope that suggests that if changes aren’t made and this fictional future becomes a

reality, there is still opportunity for the individual to affect change in the world. In such narratives, the term 'dystopian fiction' tends to identify an oppressive society that denies the individual of agency and discourages citizens to develop a clear sense of self. Individuality, if it exists at all, is heavily controlled and/or superficial. At times the oppression of the adolescent subject represented in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults is overt, for example in *Glitch*, while at other times it is subtle, for example in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction typically features a first person narrative and focalises the adolescent protagonist's experience. If not told from the first person point of view, such narratives are usually in the third person, but still told from the perspective of the adolescent characters. Marah Gubar examines the role of the child narrator in Victorian writing as being a technique that is "ubiquitous in literature for children and young adults" (39), but was a new perspective when initially employed in Victorian writing for children. Gubar contends that it is in this era that authors of children's literature challenged the Child of Nature paradigm (5) and began exploring the notion of child agency through the employment of the child narrator. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the employment of the child – or adolescent – narrator continues to operate with similar effect when it comes to exploring agency and identity. Perhaps it is now more than ever that the Child of Nature paradigm is challenged directly in a world where the very concept of nature itself is ambiguous and undergoing redefinition with every scientific and technological advancement that occurs.

Corpus

The corpus for this thesis mostly consists of texts from Western writers, representing dominant Western ideologies and discourses. With the current popularity of dystopian fiction comes an abundance of texts that may be selected. My corpus has been selected from texts published in the early twenty-first century (i.e., after the year 2000) based on their representation of technology and the natural environment, the use of characters who may be identified as posthuman, and a significant change in these characters as they negotiate their

subjectivity within the dystopian setting. The selected novels allow the adolescent reader to interrogate subjectivity through the perspective of posthuman protagonists that focalise the experience of identity-formation resulting from their relationship to place. Robyn McCallum argues that focalisation is “crucial for the representation of agency and intersubjectivity” (30), and further posits

[b]y situating narrative point of view within the perceptual and conceptual purview of a particular character, that character is constructed as a specific ideological and discursive position, that is, as a ‘language worldview.’ Characters are thus represented as occupying subject positions in relation to contextual discourses and voices. (31)

The use of posthuman protagonists as focalisers in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction positions the reader to consider and engage in discourses from a perspective that might challenge their own perception and understanding of the relationships between people, nature, and technology. In Flanagan’s analysis of the representation of posthuman subjectivity from a posthuman perspective, she argues that posthuman focalisers enable “posthuman subjectivity and experience to be centralised within the narrative and endowed with thematic significance, a process that results in the gradual destabilisation of humanist concepts of self and identity” (*Technology and Identity* 60). Focalisation is used in such narratives to align the reader to the posthuman perspective, creating opportunities to challenge the reader’s perception of what it means to be human, and engaging the reader in the posthuman protagonist’s experience of negotiating and redefining subjectivity.

There is a tendency in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults to use posthuman protagonists as focalisers through which the story is filtered. Manfred Jahn defines focalisation as “the submission of (potentially limitless) narrative information to a perspectival filter Practical reasons require speakers and writers to restrict information to the “right amount” – not too little, not too much, and if possible only what’s relevant” (94). Young adult dystopian

fiction tends to adopt what Gérard Genette identifies as “internal focalization” (189). In these narratives, the audience witnesses the story through the point of view of the character-narrator; that is, the perspectival filter is a character in the novel. The narrative strategy of focalisation is used differently in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. Sometimes the protagonist’s posthuman status is made explicit in the narrative, such as Lia in *Frozen* (2011) and Adam in *The Six*; other times this is implicit, revealed gradually to the reader just as the protagonist herself discovers her nonhuman/posthuman status, as it is for Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*. A change in focalisation occurs in novels such as *Pure* which is written in the third person, but alternates perspectives each chapter, with the focaliser’s name used to title the respective chapter. The use of the focaliser’s name at the beginning of each chapter offers the reader an opportunity to reconsider situations and characters involved in such situations; however, in *Pure*, all characters are definable as posthuman, from those who have been genetically modified and unmarred by the Detonations (the Pures) to those who have integrated organic and nonorganic aspects to their physical form (the wretches). Overall, the purpose of a posthuman narrator-focaliser is to challenge the reader’s perspective and experience of the nonhuman.

Selecting a corpus with posthuman narrator-focalisers reflects not only the trend for such narrators to be employed in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, but also the significance of point of view in children’s literature overall. John Stephens argues that “[p]oint of view is an extremely important feature to consider in analysing children’s texts because it has a crucial role in positioning readers and shaping readers’ responses to texts. In narrating a story from a particular point of view, texts offer readers a viewpoint from which to interpret that story” (“Narratology” 55-56). Point of view is especially significant in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults because it is used to align the reader with the other; a posthuman focaliser provides a filter through which the reader perceives and experiences the development of a posthuman subjectivity. The posthuman focaliser interrogates subjectivity and challenges notions of youth agency and identity, which, in turn, grants the same opportunity to the reader.

There is a dominance of American texts in my corpus; however, this is reflective of the ease with which such texts can be accessed as they are published internationally and dominate the market, even in Australia. Such texts are readily available to the adolescent reader in the form of books and ebooks via bookstores, online apps and ebook readers, and public and school libraries. In selecting the corpus for this thesis, I have chosen novels that represent recurring themes and ideas in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as a whole. Such texts typically use what might be termed a posthuman protagonist, that is: someone who is negotiating subjectivity based on understanding themselves as both human and nonhuman, their subjectivity informed by both natural and technological elements. Some of these characters are recognisable as cyborg figures; however, Hayles argues that the posthuman subject is not synonymous with 'cyborg'. Hayles proposes

the construction of the posthuman does not require the subject to be a literal cyborg. Whether or not interventions have been made on the body, new models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive science and artificial life imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components. (*How We Became Posthuman* 4)

As part of the construction of subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, common themes appear in the narratives. Key themes include the relationship between the developing subject and the home or family, the significance of the natural environment and nature, the demarcation between the realms of the real and virtual, and the perception of the body. All selected texts in this thesis address the relationships between people, nature, and technology, and explore the developing subject in a dystopian setting where places and spaces are key influences in the negotiation and construction of a posthuman subjectivity.

Approaching Subjectivity and Place in Contemporary Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

In her study of landscape in British children's fantasy, *Landscape in Children's Literature* (2011), Jane Suzanne Carroll identifies four topoi of landscape which she argues are "central to the landscapes of British children's fantasy" (13). Carroll develops a topoanalytical approach to children's literature, identifying the sanctuary topos, the green topos, the roadway topos, and the lapsed topos. While she identifies the application of the topoi to approaching British children's fantasy, there is opportunity to explore these topoi in dystopian fiction for young adults, particularly as dystopian fiction has been associated with the fantasy genre. I draw upon Carroll's topoi throughout my thesis as a framework for structuring my analysis of subjectivity and place in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. Such an approach to literary landscapes is especially relevant to my approach towards place in dystopian fiction, as there is ample opportunity to expand upon Carroll's methodology. Furthermore, adopting a topoanalytical approach to dystopian fiction for young adults allows for deeper understanding of the relationship between place and subjectivity. Throughout my thesis I draw on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces, particularly in demonstrating how places function to suppress or reward the development of subjectivity.

In chapter one, I establish a framework for examining space and place in this thesis, drawing on Carroll's topoanalytical approach to landscape in children's literature. I also explore concepts of posthuman agency and subjectivity, and the representation of home in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly the role that a sanctuary space plays in enabling youth agency. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, 'home' and 'sanctuary' are not necessarily synonymous, and the adolescent protagonist's rejection from the home space usurps the perspective of the home as a sanctuary. Defining and creating a sanctuary as well as achieving agency are related in narratives such as Mary E. Pearson's *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, Neil Shusterman's *Unwind*, and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*.

Similarly, the relationships between the developing subject and manifestations of green space represent the function of heterotopic spaces as permitting the interrogation and development of subjectivity, which is explored in chapter two. I draw upon ecocritical and ecofeminist ideas to explore the reconceptualisation of the green space with an analysis of *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, Heather Anastasiu's *Glitch*, and *Pure* by Julianna Baggott. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the green space literally exists outside of the known space; that is, beyond the community or society separated from the 'outside' world. I refer to these as dome or dome-like spaces. Through an ecocritical perspective, notions of place and place-connectedness are made significant to the developing adolescent protagonist, emphasising the role of real, physical places in the development of subjectivity. An ecofeminist lens brings into focus the significance of the relationship between the female adolescent protagonist and the natural world, emphasising the ways in which a dystopian setting oppresses both the natural world and the female subject. Ultimately, however, my analysis highlights the possibilities for the posthuman subject in a world that redefines and disrupts the boundaries between the natural/unnatural.

While the representations of home and the natural environment offer an experience of place that is tangible and real, in the twenty-first century there is an increasingly blurred line between the real and the virtual. I examine the representation of virtual space in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction in chapter three, drawing upon examples from *Ready Player One*, *Frozen* by Robin Wasserman, and Dan Wells' *Bluescreen*. Virtual landscapes have a similar function to the real landscape in that they, too, function as heterotopic spaces. However, virtual landscapes enable the subject to challenge the hierarchies that have otherwise constrained them in the real world, providing spaces in which the subject might experiment with identity, articulate multiple identities, and challenge and transgress the boundaries of the 'real' world. The analysis of virtual landscapes and identity-formation draws on ideas from posthumanism, particularly in understanding changing ideas of identity and processes of identity-formation.

In chapter four, I examine *Ready Player One*, *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad* by Reki Kawahara (2009), and *Unplugged* by Donna Freitas to explore the login sequence as a metaphor for identity in the twenty-first century. The space created by the login sequence allows subjectivity to exist as an assemblage, which is a posthumanist perspective of human subjectivity (Nayar 8). The subject as an assemblage ultimately needs to coalesce and it does so in the form of a body; what constitutes a body in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction and, indeed, the twenty-first century, is in a constant state of flux.

The changing body is especially pertinent in my textual analysis in chapter five, in which I posit that the body, too, is a place with which the developing subject relates. The body – like the home, the natural environment, and virtual worlds – is an environment with which and through which the developing adolescent interrogates notions of subjectivity. The body is a place that plays an integral role in identity-formation and maturation for the adolescent because it is a physical representation of the hierarchies the adolescent seeks to overturn. The body is a fundamental tool with which the adolescent succeeds in challenging and usurping such hierarchies. Representations of the body in texts such as *Frozen*, *Unplugged*, and *The Six* by Mark Alpert suggest the body is a changeable environment and is, like a posthuman model of subjectivity, fluid and unfixed. Yet the body is also integral to identity, and representations of this emphasise the significance of embodiment in constructing a posthuman subjectivity. Viewing the body as a place highlights the significance of embodiment in a world that is pushing the limits and definitions of the human form.

Young adult dystopian fiction allows the young adolescent reader to interrogate notions of subjectivity in a changing world. Such fiction offers metaphors for identity, representations of ambiguity, and invites the reader to reconceptualise notions of space and place, and how these relate to their subjectivity. The textual analysis in this thesis demonstrates how contemporary young adult dystopian fiction engages with ideas from posthumanism and ecocriticism, and represents place and place-connectedness as integral to the construction of a posthuman subjectivity. Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults challenges adolescent

readers to think about current social and political issues, and engage in debates about the relationship between people, nature, and technology. Through such narratives, young people are given the opportunity to consider and challenge the hierarchies that exist between these, and their own role in reinforcing or dismantling them.

Chapter One: Sanctuary and Agency

The very word 'home' conjures feelings of warmth and safety; it is both a place thrumming with the energy of family and close friends, and a sanctuary from the world where one can take respite. Individual imaginings of home may differ: some may consider the brick walls of a house more 'home' than the concrete height of an apartment block. Others might feel that the landscape in which the house is situated is more significant than the size or shape of the house. In children's literature, home spaces are traditionally associated with security and perceived as refuges for the child from which a protagonist departs and then ultimately returns. Notions of home and the concept of the home as a sanctuary are reconceptualised in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In such narratives, the adolescent protagonist is often represented as restricted or oppressed by the home space, and consequently forced to find or create sanctuary elsewhere. This chapter focuses on the representation of the home space, as it is typically the home that is the first place an individual inhabits, and it is often a significant place in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

The home space is explored in relation to youth agency, which, when approached through a posthuman lens, offers a foundation for understanding posthuman subjectivity. This chapter first establishes a framework for examining place and space that informs my approach to the representation of place in this thesis. I explore posthuman agency and subjectivity, concepts which are significant to the representation of subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. I then explore the representation of home spaces in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, and the role of a place of sanctuary to the developing subject's realisation of agency. The focus on and examination of the home space in this chapter reveals how contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults departs from traditional narrative structures in children's literature. The protagonist's departure from the home space allows for the young adult reader to question how they relate to their own home space, and how the home space impacts youth agency.

The analysis of Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011), Mary E. Pearson's *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008), and Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007) reveals how experiences of the home space and reconceptualisation of sanctuary in these narratives influence – and are influenced by – youth agency. Experiencing displacement and lacking a place that can be identified as 'home' often requires the need to reconceptualise the very notion of 'home'. Dorothy G. Clark suggests that "[w]hether the nineteenth century's cult of the domestic, reverence for motherhood, idealised childhood, and home as a haven in a heartless world ever truly existed, they are markedly absent by the end of the twentieth century" (196); it is this absence of the "home as a haven" that is evident in dystopian fiction for young adults. I contend that dystopian novels frequently complicate the nineteenth-century conceptualisation of home which Clark discusses.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, places are often hostile and oppressive, not only to reflect the powerlessness experienced by the developing subject, but also to represent the growing concerns of a world determined to categorise people based on their usefulness and ability to conform or concede. Physical home spaces cannot provide sanctuary in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction because it is the nature of the developing subject to require more than just walls and rooms. The narratives, instead, suggest what the developing subject needs is to recognise that a true home or sanctuary is created for oneself, based on one's self-acceptance and experiences of places and people.

Reconceptualising home space and establishing a sense of the ideal home results in the developing subject ultimately reaching a place of sanctuary and, in doing so, achieving agency. According to John J. Han et al.:

Young people tend to relate to the ongoing stress of fitting in with their peers; they harbor a constant anxiety and fear of being the one who stands out. On the other hand, young adults often feel that their individual freedom is being stifled by authority, most often their parents. Dystopian literature

portrays a world much like, yet much unlike, the currently known world, and since young adults are often the protagonists and guiding forces in these texts, it provides a space for young people to imagine themselves in dangerous, world-changing situations. (2)

Finding one's place is used metaphorically in the young adult novel; it is often in the period of adolescence that the young adult develops an understanding of their place in society and the world beyond. Becoming accustomed to society is an experience common to the adolescent protagonist, an experience to which the young adult reader can relate. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, this process becomes a literal experience where defining one's place in society is largely achieved through engagement with the places and spaces one inhabits.

In dystopian fiction, the relationships between people, nature and technology are interrogated and often informed by the individual's perception of and relationship to places and spaces. As the adolescent protagonist engages with places and spaces, and these relationships transform, they also develop the skills, knowledge, and awareness required to fit in to the world. Roberta Seelinger Trites suggests that the young adult novel "came into being as a genre precisely because it is a genre predicated on demonstrating characters' ability to grow into an acceptance of their environment" (19). The exploration and acceptance of one's place in the world is a defining factor in young adult fiction. Yet it is also challenged in dystopian fiction for young adults, particularly as the home space depicted in these narratives results in the adolescent protagonist rejecting the home environment to create one that is more suitable for themselves. Seeking "acceptance of their environment" is, for the twenty-first century adolescent, heavily influenced by the physical environment itself. Baccolini and Moylan argue

[the] dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible socio-political tendencies that could, if continued, turn our

contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside. ("Introduction" 1-2)

The "prophetic" nature of the dystopian imagination emphasises the fears associated with the possibilities for the future; however, in young adult fiction it is through the dystopian imagination that these fears are addressed, confronted, and overcome.

As terrible as the world may become, there is an optimistic approach to the individual's ability to thrive, represented through characters who depart from the home space and flourish because they are no longer denied agency. For example, Connor in *Unwind* discovers skills in mechanics and leadership that, had he stayed in the home space, may never have revealed themselves. Lawrence Buell opines that environmental issues "have become an increasing provocation both for artists and for academics, giving rise within colleges and universities to cross-disciplinary studies programs" (*The Future of Environmental Criticism* 5). In contemporary Western society, environmental issues and technological advances compete for social and political attention as they are coming to define Western culture in the twenty-first century. The relationship between humans and the environment is becoming tenuous as the sustainability of the modern Western lifestyle is questioned and technology seeks to provide answers and supplements to 'nature'. The contemporary Western adolescent finds themselves at a tentative point of balance between a possibly archaic ideology of childhood and nature, and the reality of a technology-driven lifestyle of instant information, communication, and consumer gratification – where does the adolescent fit in this world?

Making a Place for Posthuman Agency

People develop attachments to places, creating connections to locations that have been imbued with meaning and, from this connection to place, developing individual identity. As unique as identity is to an individual, so, too, is the meaning the individual finds in a place. Buell explains that 'place' has "by definition both an objective and a subjective face, pointing outward toward the tangible world and inward to the perceptions one brings to it" (*Writing for an*

Endangered World 59). The representation of place in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is made further complex by the role of technology simulating places through virtual spaces, and recreating or adapting natural landscapes in response to the changed world and its inhabitants. Clare Bradford and Rafaella Baccolini identify that 'space' and 'place' are two terms often used interchangeably, but define 'space' as "generally associated with large and abstract conceptions of spatiality" and 'place' as "the local and the bounded" (37). Constructs of place vary and in this thesis the term 'place' will identify the physical and social places depicted in the selected novels, and the reciprocal effect that the external, physical places have on the individual's subjectivity.

Humanistic geographers have identified place attachment as a significant part of an individual's identity. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that "[p]lace is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for another" (*Space and Place* 3). He refers to space as "more abstract than place" (*Space and Place* 6), and suggests that, once we come to know a space, it becomes a place. In young adult fiction, examining the meaning attached to a place by an individual offers much in terms of understanding their perception of and relationship to both nature and technology. Dystopian settings are often the result of an ecocatastrophe or nature's tryst with technology (for example, biotechnology). Bradley S. Jorgensen and Richard C. Stedman suggest that identity is created through defining oneself in relation to places, referring to this as place identity; they refer to sense of place as "the meaning attached to a spatial setting by a person or group" (233) and that sense of place "is not imbued in the physical setting itself, but resides in human interpretations of the setting" (233). The notions of space as abstract and place as concrete largely inform my approach to space and place in this thesis. My argument is that contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents subjectivity as embedded in the landscape; however, the very word 'landscape' must be scrutinised as its use varies when considering notions of space and place.

Landscape is used to refer to geographical locations. One may perceive the space of a landscape as open and simultaneously terrifying and liberating. Landscape becomes a place

when one perceives it has meaning, realising its history or experiencing it in some way that ensures one develops a connection – a sense of place. Tuan argues that space and place are interdependent when it comes to defining the ideas of space and place (*Space and Place* 6), suggesting that “[f]rom the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa” (*Space and Place* 6). While spaces become places because of the meaning people give to them, there must also be consideration as to how these places – and their imbued meanings – inform the development of subjectivity. Maarja Saar and Hannes Palang summarise that “people give meanings to places [because they need] to discover and evolve their identity” (11). In the field of children’s literature, places and spaces and how the individual perceives and relates to these influence identity. Places and spaces are not given meaning to evolve identity, but instead give meaning to identity itself. Kerry Mallan and Clare Bradford argue that “[t]he very notions of space and place evoke the related concepts of location, displacement, community, citizenship, and, of course, identity. Our sense of identity is dependent, among other things, on the place where we were born, grow up, and the spaces we inhabit” (48-49). The interrelationships and interdependence between places, spaces, and identity becomes something of a ‘chicken and egg’ paradox. Are places made meaningful because of who we are, or are we who we are because of the places that have meaning to us? The utilisation of the ecocritical and posthumanist frameworks allows for a more thorough interrogation of the representation of subjectivity and place in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly when addressing the interrelationships between people, nature, and technology.

Ideas of agency for the posthuman subject differ from agency for the liberal humanist subject. Agency, individuality, and subjectivity are distinctly humanist concepts. The notion of identity-formation from a posthumanist perspective is contradictory because one of the fundamental arguments in posthumanism is that there is no Self. Contemporary young adult fiction challenges the notion of the posthuman as having no Self by representing posthuman characters that *do* act as agents, interrogate subjectivity, and undergo an experience of identity-

formation. In doing so, such characters suggest that a posthuman future is not to be feared – the posthuman does not bring an end to humanity.

Posthuman subjectivity is dependent on the subject's relationship to the environment, and place within such a system. Sherryl Vint summarises that liberal humanism "makes absolute autonomy the primary basis for both subjectivity and agency" ("Theorising the Global") whereas the posthuman subject shares a collective agency with others ("Theorising the Global"). Vint argues that "models of posthuman agency are integrally tied to assumptions about human identity and agency in the present, material world" ("Theorising the Global"). Posthuman subjectivity differs from notions of the humanist subject, where the latter is fixed and the former is fluid. Clare Bradford et al. write "The humanist subject is characterised by an ideology of the self (and hence individual consciousness) as being essential and unique, and thereby possessing agency . . . In general, posthuman subjectivity is represented as fragmented, decentred, tenuous, constructed, hybridised, and enacted or performed" (157-158). Such ideas of posthuman subjectivity are represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through characters who seek to understand their place in a world that does not have a place for them. Robyn McCallum argues "ideas about and representations of subjectivity pervade and underpin adolescent fiction" (3). In her examination of dialogic conceptions of subjectivity in children's and young adult literature, McCallum notes that "[m]ainstream children's and adolescent fiction has been dominated by premodern conceptions of the individual, the self and the child associated with liberal humanism and romanticism" (3-4). Liberal humanism and romanticism continues to influence representations of the individual in contemporary fiction for young adults; however, dystopian fiction features characters who challenge humanist ideas. Concepts of subjectivity are thus reconceptualised through questioning and redefining the human.

Redefining the human and, consequently, subjectivity is achieved through the use of posthuman characters as focalisers and explicit discourses in narratives that question, challenge, and negotiate the humanist ideas. For example, Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* is positioned to engage in discussion and debate with her classmates, each of whom represent

different perspectives of what it means to be human. Ally is a passionate supporter of the Federal Science Ethics Board (FSEB), which seeks to define the physical make-up of the human, despite her own illness which demands prosthetics and organ transplants. These needs cannot be met while also complying with the FSEB's standards, thus Ally begins to die. In contrast, Dane is physically fit and healthy, and is – based on FSEB's statistics – more (physically) human than Jenna and Ally. However, Dane is emotionally and socially detached from his peers, and his sociopathic behaviours result in Jenna realising that “He's shown me how empty a one hundred percent human can be” (Pearson 216). The use of characters to represent different perspectives and examples of what it means to be human serves to challenge humanist ideas in order to reconceptualise the human.

In understanding how posthumanism informs children's literature, it is pertinent to examine the role of posthumanism in defining not only what it means to be human, but also the nature of subjectivity. Rethinking the 'human', thereby rethinking subjectivity, is a key influence in my approach to using posthumanism as a framework. The posthuman figure demands, through engaging with place, conceptions of subjectivity alternative to the human subject. Greg Garrard suggests that “cyborgs, feral and queer animals are complemented by genetically engineered organisms (GEOs) within a new, globalised frame of reference. Ecocriticism similarly must come to terms with GEOs and global biodiversity, as well as individual species” (180). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, subjectivity is negotiated only after interrogating identity in relation to the posthuman body and the body's relation to place – be it physical or cyber landscapes, natural or synthetic environments, or the individual's place in society. In young adult dystopian fiction both environmental landscape and the body can be the site of dystopia. The posthuman subject's relationship with the home space in *Unwind*, *Ready Player One*, and *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* challenges traditional notions of home and sanctuary, revealing a reconceptualisation of the home space in which the posthuman subject achieves agency and offers new interpretations of the human.

Notions of Home and Sanctuary

In children's literature, home is traditionally associated with security and is considered a place of sanctuary. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents ideas of home differently, subverting the notion of home as safety and comfort contained in a house. The experience of home differs from person to person, though it could be a fair assumption that most people understand the concept of home. Tuan argues: "We *think* of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well" (*Space and Place* 144), suggesting that homes are more than the structured lines of walls and floors and ceilings, they are the sensorial experiences which occur within the space. Tuan's argument that "[h]earth, shelter, home or home base are intimate places to human beings everywhere" (*Space and Place* 147) identifies a universal aspect to the notion of home. Contrasting home with places outside of the home, Perry Nodelman proposes that "homes tend to represent safety and boredom, places away from home danger and excitement" (9). One does not expect danger when one is at home, yet one is also denied excitement in such a place.

In children's literature, the home is represented as a sanctuary for the child from which a protagonist departs and then returns. The sanctuary that is left and then returned to is evident in novels such as C.S. Lewis's series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956). More recent texts continue with this trend, for example, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) sequence. The protagonist, Harry, lives in a home space that, despite the unsympathetic Dursleys (Harry's extended family), provides safety and protection from more sinister forces. The safety and protection of the home space is the foundation for what Jane Suzanne Carroll terms the sanctuary topos (see "Landscape in Children's Literature"). Jon C. Stott identifies the pattern of "running away to home" as a type of circular narrative common in stories for children, the purpose of which is for the characters to leave the home and then return with a changed perspective (473). Stott summarises: "During their escape they learn about themselves and about their society, and what they learn makes it possible for them to want to and be able to

come home” (474). The characters’ experiences while away from the home allow for “successful reintegration” (477) when they return. The pattern of “running away to home” implies that the home itself does not change, but the child matures and experiences a change of perspective that enables her or him to better appreciate the home. In this pattern, the child must change in order to conform to the home space that has been a previous source of dissatisfaction. Peter Hunt explains that “In texts for ‘younger’ readers, [the journey] is often a metaphor for exploration and education; readers go . . . [and] return to home and security, and to a satisfying psychological ‘closure’” (11). Stott’s identification of the “running away to home” pattern and Hunt’s exploration of the journey in fantasy texts contrasts with the representation of running away and concepts of journey represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

The notion of the home as being a place of sanctuary is true of most children’s fantasy literature, but the home space serves a different function in young adult dystopian fiction. Carroll explains that “[i]n literature narrative action is generated when the boundaries of sacred spaces [the home] are threatened, transcended, or transgressed” (22). Conversely, in dystopian fiction it is the home that is a threat to the developing subject. While not unique to dystopian fiction, the postmodern metaplot is the structure most often adopted by writers of such narratives. Melissa B. Wilson and Kath G. Short describe the postmodern metaplot as starting with a failed home, synonymous with a failed parent, and the significance of the child creating their own home:

In a postmodern metaplot the child leaves from a place the child doesn’t (or can’t) consider home to go on a journey, psychological or literal, to a new home that the child has constructed. The children don’t return to the same home, if they return home at all. The child protagonist constructs a new home because of an absence of home at the beginning or because the home is untenable . . . Home isn’t a place of refuge or comfort. Children must set out to make sense of the past in order to construct a better home, a place of their own creation. (134)

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, it is the failure of the home to provide an environment in which the developing adolescent may engage with and negotiate subjectivity that drives much of the plot forward. Wilson and Short state that “[a] failed home is one in which the child protagonist doesn’t feel loved, safe, or free to develop a sense of self” (135). Such an emphasis on the freedom to develop a sense of self highlights the relationship between the home and agency. The focus on the relationship between home and agency contrasts with notions of the home as sanctuary, as explored by Carroll, who argues that “the home is the site where the connection between human and landscape is at its most intense, where the boundaries between person and place, between the Self and the landscape dissolve altogether” (20). Carroll characterises the sanctuary topos with three main attributes: a strong vertical dimension, strongly demarcated boundaries, and a central chamber of space (17-18), and contends that “[s]acred space is often closely conflated with domestic space as the same physical and symbolic elements which distinguish sacred spaces also characterise domestic spaces” (18).

In writing about the tents and yurts used for shelter by nomads in Central Asia, Tuan states that “[t]he shelter is a microcosm” (*Topophilia* 131). Similarly, Carroll argues that “[t]he home is sanctified because it reflects, on a microcosmic level, the world as a whole” (19). What, then, does a failed home space say of the world?

Connor in *Unwind* runs away from home to escape being “unwound”, a process involving the harvesting of all organs and body parts. The punishment of being unwound is a consequence of Connor being perceived as a troubled teenager who will best serve society through organ donation; his potential as a mechanic or his natural leadership skills have not been realised by a society that seeks conformity and does not accommodate youth who do not meet this strict standard. Similarly, Wade in *Ready Player One* does not feel welcome in his Aunt’s trailer, where his belongings are taken and pawned, and his bedroom is a sleeping bag in the laundry, “wedged into the gap between the wall and the dryer” (Cline 13). Wade seeks alternative spaces to inhabit, from an abandoned van Wade calls his “hideout” (25) to an apartment he rents once he

has enough money. Yet none of these physical spaces are referred to as a home; Wade instead perceives his home and sanctuary to be in the virtual world. Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* lives in a house with her grandmother and mother, but does not use the word 'home' to describe the Cotswold Cottage. The house is frequently referred to as being an oppressive space, and the bedroom space – usually recognisable as a space of sanctuary for an adolescent – is used to control Jenna and deny her agency.

Given that the postmodern metaplot does not facilitate a sanctuary-like home space at the beginning, there may be opportunity for the adolescent protagonist to achieve a sanctuary/home space by the narrative's end. At the beginning of the narrative, the home space is not perceived by the adolescent protagonist to be a sanctuary, yet in establishing an alternative space identified as sanctuary, the space rarely resembles a home in terms of physical characteristics. Carroll's examination of the sanctuary topos focuses on built environments, yet the three attributes of the sanctuary topos are not characteristic of the home spaces ideal for adolescent subjects as represented in dystopian narratives. Instead, the attributes are most representative of the home space from which the adolescent protagonist flees.

The sanctuary topos requires re-definition in a dystopian setting as its association with the home space is no longer viable. If the home is a microcosm of society, then – in dystopian fiction – it is not a place of sanctuary. While Carroll attributes the sanctuary topos to being clearly defined by its physical qualities, the spaces of sanctuary established in dystopian settings are defined by the lack or reconceptualisation of what Carroll identifies as features of the sanctuary topos: strong vertical lines, demarcated boundaries, and central chambers of space (17-18). Expelled from the home space, adolescents are forced to create home spaces for themselves. These spaces are not defined by physical boundaries, but by experiences with people and objects. Above all, these are spaces that permit youth agency.

The Conditional Home and Agency

The relationship between the adolescent protagonist and the home space (or lack thereof) in dystopian fiction reflects the relationship between the developing adolescent subject and society. Above all, domestic or home spaces emphasise that, for the adolescent, it is time to move away from the childhood space and seek sanctuary elsewhere as they transition into adulthood. Robyn McCallum argues:

Representations of subjectivity in fiction are always based on ideological assumptions about relations between individuals, and between individuals and the world. The preoccupation with personal maturation in adolescent fiction is commonly articulated in conjunction with a perceived need for children to overcome solipsism and develop intersubjective concepts of personal identity within this world and in relation to others. (7)

Such a representation of subjectivity is achieved in the depiction of the home space and the adolescent protagonist's pursuit of sanctuary. Only through abandoning the childhood place can agency develop. While this may be perceived as rebellion against one's parents, in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, rebellion is against society itself. Trites argues that "YA novels serve both to reflect and to perpetuate the cultural mandate that teenagers rebel against their parents" (69). Such a mandate, however, is not represented as overt teen-rebels-against-parents in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Instead, such fictions represent the teen rebelling against society, rejecting the home space just as they reject society.

The rejection of the home and society is especially pertinent for the characters in *Unwind* and *Ready Player One*, where there is a lack of a recognisable home space and an element of homelessness or displacement established either immediately or fairly early into the narratives. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the home space is restrictive and oppressive of the individual. The notion of the home space as a physical place where an adolescent may be cared for, protected, or otherwise made to feel secure cannot exist in a dystopian setting; society, in this

context, is not caring or protective of the adolescent and the home space represents the lack of security and protection afforded to the individual in a dystopian setting. Sarah K. Cantrell argues that “the movement from stable, fixed places to ambiguous ones teaches protagonists and readers how to cope with the demands and difficulties of a wider, more complex world” (195). The stability of a fixed home space, as depicted in the previous examples, becomes one to which the adolescent protagonist cannot return because of the risk to themselves. While this risk is a physical threat to their lives, there is also risk to their expression of agency.

In children’s literature it is typical for the child protagonist to return home by the conclusion of the narrative, but the adolescent protagonist in dystopian fiction narratives is rarely able to do so. The home space may have become a hostile environment, may no longer be accessible, or may never have existed in the first place. The home is represented differently by each perspective in the novels examined in this chapter. While this problematises a strict definition of home as represented in the novels, it highlights the different perceptions and definitions of home that exist in contemporary Western society. The home space is, for Jenna, foreign and used to control her; to Wade, home is a notion rather than a physical place; and for Connor, the home as a place of safety and love is withdrawn from him and becomes a hostile place where he is no longer welcomed by his family. Despite the different perspectives of home represented in the selected novels, the sanctuary topos is evident, albeit subverted. The notion of home and the notion of sanctuary are analysed differently in each text, as the home is not, in these narratives, synonymous with sanctuary.

In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, Jenna’s relocation to California from Boston is partly a way for her parents to protect and hide their daughter’s very existence, but is predominantly the result of the Bio Gel in her body, which requires certain environmental factors to function. Her father informs her, “This location was chosen because it has the most constant temperate climate in the country” (Pearson 128). At the narrative’s conclusion, Jenna resolves “that one day . . . I will travel to Boston in winter and I will stay there, taking long walks and feeling the softness of cold snowflakes on my face once again, because no parent should outlive their child”

(264). That she could potentially live forever is tempered by the fact that she has no desire to do so because of her child – a key theme in the novel – and it reinforces her acceptance of what her parents and Allys’ parents chose to do for their children.

The relocation to Boston in order to eventually die reinforces the significance of place, while also creating a cyclical element to Jenna’s life. Of all the places she might go, Boston is where Jenna lived before the accident thus it is to Boston she will ultimately return. Yet this return is not recognised as a return home, but rather as an eventual destination. Furthermore, this return does not occur in the course of the narrative; just as her relocation to California occurred prior to the beginning of the narrative, Jenna’s return to Boston remains a future possibility beyond the final page of the novel.

Instead of representing Boston as a home space to which Jenna cannot return, the Cotswold Cottage is represented as a home space which is used to frame the development of Jenna’s subjectivity. Tuan suggests that, “[u]nique to human beings among primates is the sense of the home as a place where the sick and the injured can recover under solicitous care” (*Space and Place* 137) and it is the Cotswold Cottage that serves as the site of Jenna’s recovery. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the home space is more clearly identified as the Cotswold Cottage, though it is not a space from which Jenna can ever voluntarily leave. Her departure from this space may expose her to media attention, the Federal Science Ethics Board, and the risk of death. The narrative trajectory of much children’s fiction – separation, initiation, return home – is therefore undermined in this novel, which focuses much more closely on Jenna’s process of coming to terms with her newly-created self and the environment around her. Similarly, it is undermined in other contemporary young adult dystopian narratives which resemble a trajectory better simplified as: expulsion or exclusion, identity-formation and maturation, establishing one’s own home space.

While Jenna’s development is framed by the home space, Connor’s development in *Unwind* is initiated by his expulsion from the home space. In *Unwind*, an adolescent’s place in

the world is determined by their compliance and conformity. The home is depicted as conditionally available to the adolescent; between the ages of 13 and 18, a parent or guardian has the power to send a noncompliant adolescent for “unwinding”. Unwinding involves the harvesting of all body parts with the belief that this is the best way such an individual can serve society. The adolescent must behave and obey in order to transition through adolescence and into adulthood. Failure to conform results in the transitioning adolescent being rejected from the home space and sent to a harvest camp; the adolescent becomes an unwind, forced to stay in the harvest camp until the unwinding.

In writing about liminality, Pamela J. Bettis and Natalie G. Adams summarise adolescence as a liminal time in a person’s life; “Typically, adolescence is constructed as a time of life situated between childhood and adulthood. Its onset in the past has been set at 12 or 13 years of age, and its demise was thought to occur when adolescents leave home to start lives of their own making, usually at 18” (7). During this time, adolescents in *Unwind* may be signed over by their parents or guardians for unwinding. The adolescents themselves have little control of this decision, as it is a decision made by parents/guardians or mandated by the court as a form of punishment. Within the context of the social sciences and childhood studies, Allison James explores the shift in perceptions of childhood agency, asserting “For many adults, that children might be regarded as having agency may raise questions about what kind of agency that might be and how much freedom children might be permitted to have in the exercise of it” (43). Questions regarding what kind of agency and how much freedom children might be permitted are explored in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction with characters such as *Unwind*’s Connor, for whom agency is restricted and oppressed because adults in authority seek to limit the freedom of young people in his world. William A. Corsaro (2015) examines traditional and more recent perspectives of children and childhood, arguing

adults most often view children in a forward-looking way, that is, with an eye to what they will become – future adults with a place in the social order and contributions to make to it . . . the current lives, needs, and desires of

children are often seen as causes for alarm by adults, as social problems that are threatening, that need to be resolved. As a result, children are pushed to the margins of the social structure by more powerful adults . . . who focus instead on the potential and the threat of children to present and future societies. (6)

Such fears of children as “social problems” are highlighted in *Unwind*, where adults are given the power to make an ultimate choice over the life of an adolescent. That children might misbehave prior to the age of 13 without consequence suggests children are forgiven for a lack of forethought that is expected of an adolescent. There are several adolescent characters in *Unwind* whose perspectives are represented in the narrative. While Connor could be identified as the protagonist because the narrative begins and ends with his perspective, other characters are treated as equally significant and each contributes to a narrative that challenges notions of conformity, adolescent agency, and family and home. For the purpose of this chapter, I have focused on the experiences of Connor and Risa, as their relationship forms the axis around which most other characters are introduced and their experiences are informed.

Albert Bandura draws on social cognitive theory to identify four core properties of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (164-165), and emphasises personal efficacy as “the foundation of human agency” (170). Such qualities might be expected of an agentic subject, yet the age bracket of 13 to 18 in *Unwind* suggests that adolescents are not permitted the opportunity to experiment with what personal efficacy entails. Colin Macleod explores the nature of the relationship between authority and agency (54) and argues that “treating children as though they already have the competencies of mature agents contributes to the developmental processes through which they actually become mature agents” (58). The threat of a conditional home and safety dependent on compliance deprives the adolescent of true agency; youth in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction are expected to behave maturely and contribute to society, yet they are not trusted to be mature agents without the threat of adult intervention.

In her examination of young migrants' social and spatial experiences, Courtney T. Wittekind explores the relationship between social liminality and spatial liminality. The young people Wittekind interviewed are described as – and, at times, describe themselves as – “in-between”. Wittekind argues that “young people’s experiences of negotiating seemingly fixed boundaries – in dialogue with possible futures – might be best understood as embedded in a period of liminality” (182). Such experiences are represented in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, particularly as the characters themselves are represented as existing in “a period of liminality”, not only through their age, referenced as a liminal period, but also through social status and spatial positionality. The home space may become a hostile environment, may no longer be accessible, or may never have existed in the first place.

In *Unwind*, Connor’s decision to run away from home is not a reflection of his home lacking stability, it is a reflection of his parents seeking a stability they do not believe can exist with the presence of Connor and his ‘unacceptable’ behaviours. Connor’s abstract notion of home contrasts with the actual physical home space inhabited by his parents and brother. His “life on the edge”, a liminal space that distances Connor from the socially accepted norm, has led to rejection from his family home. Aware of his fate, it is further into the liminal space that Connor plans to run, further removing himself from the home space and from society. The novel begins with Connor’s evaluation of his sense of home. Sitting above a freeway, he reflects:

This place where they hide from the world is one of those dangerous places that make adults shake their heads, grateful that their own kids aren’t stupid enough to hang out on the ledge of a freeway overpass. For Connor it’s not about stupidity, or even rebellion – it’s about feeling life. Sitting on this ledge, hidden behind an exit sign is where he feels most comfortable. Sure, one false step and he’s roadkill. Yet for Connor, life on the edge is home.

(Shusterman 3-4)

The narrative focalises Connor's perspective and his feeling of liminality, and emphasises Connor's perspective as more valid than the perspective of adults. That adults might "shake their heads" suggests adults are dismissive of adolescents and their behaviours, unable to fully comprehend why adolescents do what they do. The lack of comprehension from an adult perspective is juxtaposed with the connection Connor feels to his seated position on the sign, which represents his liminal position within his family, and society itself. The reader is positioned to empathise with Connor and perceive adults as incapable of understanding adolescent experiences.

In *Unwind's* society, the ultimate power over adolescents resides with their parents and other adult figures. Connor's feeling of connection to "life on the edge" reflects his association with that space to "feeling life", which contrasts with his feelings toward the home space and his family; ironically, his parents have chosen to take away his life. He "wonders how he can call the place he lives home, when he's about to be evicted – not just from the place he sleeps, but from the hearts of those who are supposed to love him" (Shusterman 5). The direct correlation of the home space with the notion of family – "those who are supposed to love him" – is reminiscent of the notion of the home space as providing a nurturing, safe environment. Only by leaving the home space can Connor hope to gain control over his own life.

A home space is also conditional for Risa. Risa must prove her worth and value to society in order to maintain her place in StaHo (State Home). Risa represents the commodification of the subject; she must earn and continue to prove deserving of her place at StaHo, as space is at a premium. Despite the government's obligation to provide a home for children, the obligation only extends until the age of thirteen when, and if, their worth is demonstrated. Contrast is made between parents and jailors in Risa's reference to her piano teacher, "the closest thing Risa has to a parent" (Shusterman 19) whereas "[m]ost StaHo kids hate their teachers, because they see them as jailors" (19). However, Risa fails to impress with her piano performance and is informed she has "reached her potential" (22) and therefore she is no longer worthy of a place in StaHo. Yet upon her departure, the absence of her teacher and lack of farewell is what "hurts

Risa most of all" (25); whether it is because he is unaware of Risa's fate, uncaring, or upset is unknown to Risa, but her excision from the home space is immediate, and she is not permitted to return to the dormitories. Her last night is spent in "the guest room in the home's welcome center" (25), suggesting that she was never at home in StaHo and only ever a guest, her place only ever temporary.

Once expelled from the home space, being homeless replicates the instability of adolescence; homelessness in a dystopian setting creates further challenge and recognises that society may not always be able to accommodate the adolescent. In dystopian narratives, the adolescent protagonist challenges society and its authorities, exercising resistance against the authorities that seek to oppress and control them. Craig Jeffrey argues that "[y]oung people's agency can be in the form of open resistance as well as resourcefulness and an ability to survive" (248). Such qualities are represented through characters in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. In *Unwind*, the home space is a microcosm of society: oppressive, controlling, and inhibiting of agency. In contrast, the home space in *Ready Player One* represents homelessness and a sense of displacement experienced by Wade which reflects Wade's lack of place in society. Wade is not, strictly speaking, homeless at the beginning of the narrative. Physically, there is a place which he may consider a home, but this place lacks the security associated with the word. As an orphan, Wade lives with his aunt in a trailer that is overcrowded and in which he does not feel welcome. He sleeps in the laundry and watches the 1980s television sitcom *Family Ties* on his laptop, giving him cause to reflect that "I always found myself imagining that I lived in that warm, well-lit house, and that those smiling, understanding people were *my* family" (Cline 15). *Family Ties* (1982-1989) is an American sitcom about family life in the 1980s, which Wade perceives to be a representation of an idyllic family life prior to the current turbulent setting in which Wade exists.

The novel's plot follows Wade's experiences as he attempts to find the Easter egg in a virtual world called the OASIS, an acronym for Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation. In video games, an Easter egg is a hidden message or feature that can be discovered

by completing a specific task. Halliday, creator of the OASIS, has concealed an Easter egg that can only be discovered by completing a series of tests (referred to as “Gates”) that rely on knowledge and understanding of Halliday’s life, much of which is dominated by 1980s pop-culture. Success in these tests and discovery of the Easter egg results in inheriting Halliday’s estate – his fortune and corporation, which equates to control of the OASIS. Each individual test rewards the first three players who pass with a sum of money that can be used in the OASIS and the real world.

Watching *Family Ties* and other media from the 1980s is in part a form of study as much as it is a pastime. Wade’s escape into the sitcom demonstrates a nostalgia for notions of home and family, made especially significant when it is revealed that neither Wade nor Halliday have experienced stable home environments. Wade’s perception of home as a warm, well-lit house blurs the boundary between the virtual and the real, as his own home – his aunt’s trailer – is neither. Wade’s sense of home when watching the television show on his laptop is taken from him by his aunt, who confiscates the laptop to pawn for rent. Just as she denies him a home, she takes away the home Wade desires for himself.

In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the relationship between Jenna and the domestic space of the Cotswold Cottage is analogous to the relationship between the individual subject and society. Representing the conflict that arises between a parent’s expectations for a child and an adolescent’s desire for independence and autonomy, the Cotswold Cottage transforms from a place of healing and restoration to an oppressive space symbolic of Claire’s expectations of Jenna to conform and comply. Initially, the domestic space is perceived as a sanctuary, a protected space isolated from unwanted attention that would otherwise threaten Jenna’s very existence, and the Cotswold Cottage serves as a place of restoration for Jenna. Because of Jenna’s ignorance of her accident and the medical treatments she has received, her initial development revolves around recovering her memories and attempting to restore the identity of the person that she thought she was prior to the accident. The Cotswold Cottage is significant

in this process, serving as a metaphor for Jenna's restoration as the building itself is also being renovated and restored.

Jenna speaks of her mother's career as a restoration consultant, and reflects that "everyone wants to restore everything. Old is in demand" (Pearson 13); she recognises that "fixing me and the Cotswold are her [mother's] new careers" (13). By drawing attention to the fact that both Jenna and the Cotswold need "fixing", Pearson establishes an explicit connection between the Cotswold Cottage and Jenna's healing process. That both the Cotswold and Jenna are being "restored" and "fixed" represents her parents' approach to not only the house, but also to Jenna – both can be restored as they desire them to be, repaired and fixed until they resemble what they once were. The notion of restoration also suggests that both Jenna and the house are objects that might be "restored" and "fixed", rather than considering Jenna to be a person with agency.

The restoration and repair of the Cotswold Cottage is analogous of Jenna's parents' desire to restore and repair their daughter, offering a physical place in which Jenna can live as well as metaphorically embracing the nature of Jenna's development as perceived by her parents: controlled, restored to the original through modern methods, and "fixed". The place in which Jenna resides – the Cotswold Cottage – comes to represent her own identity, and the restoration of the Cotswold Cottage parallels the restoration of Jenna's memories. Yet just as the Cotswold Cottage is an artificial space, constructed into a domestic space, Jenna's own body, too, is an artificial space constructed to house her identity as Jenna Fox. The restoration of both the Cotswold Cottage and Jenna Fox is controlled and overseen by Claire. The realisation that Claire has control over both the house and Jenna changes Jenna's relationship to the domestic space from perceiving it as restorative to oppressive.

The Cotswold Cottage also serves as a metaphor for the restraints placed upon adolescents by their parents, emphasised when Jenna is on the verge of learning her exact origins. She describes the home environment thus: "the silence of the house is a heavy blanket.

It pins me to my bed” (Pearson 119). The house is no longer able to serve as a metaphor for her development because it has become oppressive. The “silence” contrasts with an earlier scene in the narrative in which Jenna explains “I stare at my awkward monster fingers and feel my clumsy feet sliding back and forth on the floor beneath me, listening to the creaks and ticks of the house and the heaves and sighs of restoration” (109). The “heaves and sighs of restoration” are not only indicative of the noises the house makes, but also of the effort required in restoration. Because of the first person narrative, Jenna’s personification of the house may also suggest she feels sympathy for it, thus the “heaves and sighs” are also felt by Jenna as she experiences a similar sense of restoration. Jenna’s perception of herself as having “awkward monster fingers” and “clumsy funny feet” suggests that she cannot be “restored” because these features are inherent to her physicality and cannot be changed. In fact, they have been changed from the body she once had and this has led to her negative self-perception. That the house is later recognised as silent may suggest that the restoration is as complete as it can be, and the oppressive nature of the restoration, as symbolised by the house that “pins” her to her bed, represents the fact that Jenna is oppressed by the place around her as well as by Claire’s attempts to restore her.

Jenna’s perspective of the house as oppressive correlates with Jenna’s confrontation with her parents as to the exact nature of how she survived the accident. The confrontation and revelation results in Jenna’s changed perception of the house: “all I see is a cold, silent house. Bricks sit in pallets, waiting to repair the veranda. Scaffolding for painters stands empty. All workers have been turned away. Restoration is on hold” (130). The perception of the house as “cold” makes it less welcoming; the word choice of “house” instead of ‘home’ indicates that the Cotswold Cottage is a place in which Jenna is not comfortable. The absence of workers and the abandoned bricks and scaffolding are further indicative of Jenna herself feeling isolated. That the “restoration is on hold” is representative of Jenna’s own stagnated sense of development as all she has worked towards in re-establishing her memory and attempting to restore her sense of self has been thwarted with the discovery that *who* – and *what* – she has thought herself to

be is false. Jenna's relationship to the Cotswold Cottage mirrors the oppression experienced by adolescents as they transition between childhood and the world of the adult.

While not expelled from the home space, Jenna does not feel 'at home' in the space, referring to it as the house or the Cotswold Cottage rather than 'home'. Jenna recognises that the Cotswold Cottage functions as a home space, but she does not feel a connection to the space. In this way, Jenna does not have a physical space she identifies as home or sanctuary. Jenna's lack of home or sanctuary is representative of Jenna's general feelings of disconnect to the world around her, as she struggles to understand not only who she is, but her very place in the world.

Jenna's inability to feel a sense of home in the house and her lack of control within the space is represented in her recollection of taste and immediate urge to make hot chocolate. Jenna immediately goes to the kitchen to prepare a mug of hot chocolate; this is one of the first independent actions Jenna takes, and the scene precedes her first day at school. Jenna has fought with her mother for the right to leave the home space and attend school, and significantly the action of making and drinking hot chocolate that precedes the first day of Jenna's 'freedom' instead reinforces the control that the house – and her mother – has over her. The thrill of making the hot chocolate is represented in the description of the process: "I pull cocoa and then sugar from the shelves. *Marshmallows! Lily has marshmallows, too!* I tuck the bag beneath my arm and let them all tumble onto the kitchen counter. Milk! A sauce pot! I remember! I pour. I stir. I make sense of a stove I have never used before. I feel full, powerful, like I haven't felt since I woke up" (Pearson 62). The use of exclamation marks and short phrases, "Milk! A sauce pot! I remember!", evokes a sense of excitement, and the empowerment Jenna feels reflects the empowerment an adolescent might feel when entrusted with something for the first time.

The focus on navigating the kitchen and then preparing the beverage could be considered a domestic scene. A young girl, excited, preparing a hot chocolate complete with marshmallows. Preparing the hot chocolate is one of the first instances in which Jenna is truly autonomous,

lacking supervision or interference from an adult figure. Jenna's ability to find the ingredients and then make the hot chocolate may be viewed as a heart-warming scene of domestic sanctuary; however, this quickly becomes horrifying when Claire and Lily enter the space: "I raise the mug like a toast to celebrate this new memory. I expect a smile – at least from Mother – but instead, as I bring the mug to my lips, her face wrinkles in horror and she yells, 'No!'" (Pearson 62). The description of Claire's face as depicting "horror" transforms Jenna's engagement with that space. From controlling the kitchen space and making the hot chocolate to being confronted by Claire and the demand "No!", Jenna's attempt at autonomy is quickly subdued. Claire's demand is made to protect Jenna from discovering she lacks the ability to taste, demonstrating the broader concept that an oppressor often operates with the belief that what they do is for the best.

Jenna connects the oppression of her identity-formation with her mother when Jenna concludes that "I'm certain it is Claire's fault. Everything . . . I don't trust her. She hovers, smiles, cries, and controls. Too much of everything. I need to get away from her" (64). The expansion of Jenna's spatial experience from being restricted to the home space to entering the school space is connected by Jenna's experience with the hot chocolate. Jenna's desire to develop autonomy, however, cannot take place in the home space as this is a space controlled by Claire. Jenna's desire to attend school reflects her desire to leave the home space and, with it, Claire's control. The hot chocolate scene reflects not only Claire's demonstration of control and protection over Jenna, but also Jenna's ignorance as to – and lack of control over – what has happened to her body.

Compliance and conformity are expected of the characters in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *Unwind* in order to be accepted in the home space; the conditional home is dependent on the characters lacking agency. Similarly, Wade is lacking a physical space that can be called home, suggesting that the home space is unobtainable in a society that encourages escapism and promotes a false sense of agency where one's choices and actions in the virtual world have little effect on the real world.

Heterotopic Spaces and the Reconceptualisation of Sanctuary

As a result of having to leave the threatening home-space, adolescents must create their own home-sanctuary in response to the inability for adults to provide such a space for them. The heterotopic spaces in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *Unwind*, and *Ready Player One* position the home space of childhood as an institution within which the adolescent cannot achieve agency. The reconceptualisation of home in dystopian fiction tends toward the home space becoming, for the developing subject, a heterotopia. Maria Nikolajeva suggests that “[t]he ‘hetero’ of the term ‘heterotopia’ emphasises dissimilarity, dissonance, and ambiguity of the worlds [in postmodern fantasy]” (“Fairy Tale and Fantasy” 143-144). In dystopian fiction, the adolescent protagonist is often represented as restricted or oppressed by the home space, and consequently forced to find or create sanctuary elsewhere. In this way, the home space is discovered to be not a sanctuary, but a heterotopia of deviation, an institution that enforces conformity. Furthermore, Stott’s “running away to home” pattern, which presents the idea of the home as being a place to which the protagonist might return and reintegrate, is rejected in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction because it is not the protagonist who needs to change; it is the home and the society in which the home is positioned that is challenged.

Heterotopic spaces, which serve as spaces in which the development of subjectivity is either suppressed or rewarded, exist “outside of all places” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24). Foucault identifies two types of heterotopias: crisis heterotopias “reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (“Of Other Spaces” 24), and heterotopias of deviation reserved for “individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm” (“Of Other Spaces” 25). Heterotopias are not freely accessible, as “[e]ither the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures” (“Of Other Spaces” 26). Cantrell utilises Foucault’s heterotopias in exploring the spaces in the *Harry Potter* series, arguing “that the

movement from stable, fixed places to ambiguous ones teaches protagonists and readers how to cope with the demands and difficulties of a wider, more complex world” (195).

In *Ready Player One*, the virtual world is represented as the home space. The OASIS functions as a crisis heterotopia, providing a space for all individuals because – in this dystopian setting – all individuals are affected by the ‘crisis’ of reality. The OASIS is the space to which Wade feels most connected, as it is “the setting of all my happiest childhood memories” (Cline 18). The virtual space is the only home that Wade has known because in the real home, Wade is not safe or cared for. The OASIS is inhabited by avatars, virtual representations of the real-world users. Wade’s avatar is Parzival, named after Percival, the Arthurian knight. The name is directly influenced by Wade’s desire to complete Halliday’s tests and find the Easter egg, drawing parallels between Halliday’s estate and the Holy Grail.

The OASIS supplements Wade’s lack of home space in the real world, as it is the virtual world that meets Wade’s emotional needs. The representation of the virtual world as fulfilling the adolescent’s emotional needs signals an ideological shift in the representation of the home space. In Wade’s case, the lack of a fulfilling physical home space leads to him only ever feeling at home when connected to the OASIS, providing Wade – and all people – a sanctuary from the real world. The OASIS is available to everyone, but access requires a console, haptic gloves, and visor, items that Wade considers to be his most valuable possessions (25). Equipped, “permission” is then required to enter the OASIS; a log-in sequence and the words “READY PLAYER ONE” separate the virtual and real worlds. Wade primarily identifies physical places in relation to their usefulness in his OASIS life. While his aunt’s trailer is his physical home, Wade identifies an abandoned van as his “refuge” (25). Wade also indicates that the most significant aspect of the van is that “it was a place where I could access the OASIS in peace” (25). When the OASIS is threatened, Wade must use online and offline tactics to protect the sanctuary space.

The threat to the home space and resulting need to protect it suggests a more traditional model of the home-away-home narrative structure. In this narrative structure, the home is

under threat and the protagonist must leave to protect it. Despite initial similarities to the home-away-home narrative structure in *Ready Player One*, it is ultimately adapted in the narrative. While Wade initially perceives that he must protect the OASIS, he also comes to understand and appreciate the value of real life relationships and connections. Through doing so, Wade realises the importance of the real world and real-world experiences in his reconceptualisation of home, ultimately asserting a preference for the real world over the virtual world.

The representation of Wade's preference for the real world over the virtual world demonstrates the tension that exists in current perspectives of technology, particularly the fears and concerns that adults have regarding young people's access to and use of technology. Through using technology to access and occupy virtual spaces, technology provides opportunities for adolescents to experiment with identity and the expression of agency. Technology empowers adolescents and, in doing so, challenges and subverts the power dynamics between adults and youth. I explore this in more detail in chapters three and four, in which I examine more closely the representation of virtual worlds and the spaces and places inhabited by virtual representations of the developing subject. I draw attention to the significance of the virtual world here to emphasise its role as a home space, a concept that challenges the traditional idea of a home as a house or other physical location. I further focus on the virtual world as a home space later in this chapter, as the representation of the virtual world in *Ready Player One* is reminiscent of the significance of virtual worlds in the lives of twenty-first century Western adolescents. My examination of the homelessness represented in *Unwind*, the home as oppressor in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, and the home as an intangible sanctuary space in *Ready Player One* represents concepts of home to which an adolescent reader may relate.

Sanctuary is found beyond the "strong vertical lines" (Carroll 18) of a house, and can only be discovered after challenging and removing demarcated boundaries between what is considered real and unreal. In *Unwind*, the eviction of Connor and Risa from their homes reflects their powerlessness and lack of agency. Like other expelled adolescents, they find their way to

the Graveyard, a place that is represented as the only space where adolescent runaways are truly safe, despite the government's awareness of its existence. The Graveyard is a place that gets unwinds and runaways "off the street" (Shusterman 261), reserved for runaways and demanding weeks of travelling and displacement for adolescents to gain access. The final stage of the journey to the Graveyard requires transportation in cargo boxes inside an airplane being sent to Arizona where decommissioned airplanes are sold off in parts, analogous to the unwinding process for which most of the runaways are destined. Submitting to the "rites" required to access the space, Connor is finally situated in a place that is, ultimately, recognisable as a crisis heterotopia.

The Graveyard is a refuge led by the Admiral, who has created a "functional society out of angry, troubled kids" (Shusterman 199). The Admiral is an adult and authoritative figure in terms of his former military status. While the Admiral initially declares the Graveyard to be "a dictatorship" (182), it is revealed to be a place that enables its adolescent citizens to become functioning members of society by supporting youth agency. Youth agency is supported by encouraging the adolescents to work within their strengths and interests, with the overall outcome to be contributing to the community until it is time for them to leave (i.e. turn eighteen and thus be safe from unwinding). The Graveyard exists as a microcosm of society, but in this society youth agency is recognised and encouraged. Connor's mechanical aptitude and leadership skills are revealed, neither of which were realised until his arrival at the Graveyard. The Admiral attempts to mentor Connor as a potential leader of the unwinds; however, as an adult, the Admiral is mistrusted by the adolescent unwinds.

The Admiral provides a place in which the adolescents can thrive; self-motivated and independent, they are able to make choices for themselves and therefore become, as a positive side-effect, productive members of the microcosmic society in the Graveyard. The Graveyard permits adolescents agency, and they are able to become the mature agents Macleod identifies when he argues "it appears that one way to accelerate the acquisition of agency is to assign relatively young children demanding 'adult' tasks, roles and responsibilities" (58). Many of the

adolescents in the Graveyard have had to, as Macleod articulates, “grow up quick” (58), acquiring agency in the process.

While harvest camps function as heterotopias of deviance, the Graveyard offers an alternative not only as a safe space, but also for the adolescent’s negotiation of subjectivity. Outside of the Graveyard, the opportunity to realise an agentic subjectivity and succeed in society has been denied to the adolescents, not by lack of expectation, but lack of autonomy. Furthermore, the potential of the adolescent, if sent to a harvest camp for unwinding, relies on the lack of autonomy and non-development of subjectivity, instead focusing solely on the function of their physical forms and what their body parts may offer other (presumably more productive) members of society.

Expressing agency empowers adolescents and enables them to thrive in the Graveyard, whereas the world outside the Graveyard has oppressed the adolescents and denied them agency. While the Graveyard is a place controlled by the Admiral, it is the adolescent inhabitants who make decisions regarding the day-to-day running of the Graveyard. The Graveyard also affords each adolescent a choice, rather than enforcing conformity and expectation. Risa reflects that it is a “lack of expectation that keeps the study jets full most of the time” (Shusterman 231), as rather than expecting the adolescents to succeed, they are given the choice to do so. With this increased freedom, they can pursue their own interests and achieve personal goals, as opposed to expectations that might otherwise be foisted upon them by adults outside of the Graveyard. However, the adolescents have an inherent mistrust of adults, and this results in a rebellion against the Admiral. Even though the Admiral involves the adolescents in the day-to-day running of the Graveyard, the adolescents perceive him to be untrustworthy and doubt his intentions. Suspicion of the Admiral eventually leads to a riot and destruction of the only place considered home to the unwinds.

Kim Rasmussen identifies the home, school, and recreational facility as corners of the “institutional triangle” (157), where children’s everyday lives take place. Adding to these spaces

are what Rasmussen terms “children’s places” (155), spaces that have meaning to or are constructed by children, as opposed to “places for children” (156), spaces made by adults for children. A “children’s place” is dependent on the meaning of, and relationship to, the place perceived by the child; the Graveyard exists initially as a “place for children”, made by an adult as a refuge for the escaped unwinds. However, within this space “children’s places” exist, controlled by adolescents and imbued with meaning beyond the understanding of the adult in charge. Adolescents push the boundaries of the sanctuary space within these places, challenging its status as sanctuary because of its creation by an adult. Can a sanctuary for adolescents exist if such a location is a “place for children” rather than a “children’s place”? The rebellion against the Admiral suggests that adolescents’ mistrust of adults can result in adolescents seeking to create a place of their own, rather than rely on one created for them. The rebelling unwinds perceive the Graveyard to be controlled by an adult figure with ultimate control, and they encourage others to believe this by spreading rumours and lies about the Admiral. Like the adult authorities who have attempted to control and oppress adolescents outside of the Graveyard, the rebellious group of unwinds seeks to replicate an oppressive society when they take over the Graveyard, resulting in the abandonment of the Graveyard.

The novel concludes with a return to and restoration of the Graveyard. Using the identity of a dead soldier, E. Robert Mullard, Connor assumes control of the Graveyard; however, Connor seeks to reconstruct the Graveyard with more transparency and involvement of its adolescent inhabitants. Connor’s youth positions him as a trustworthy figure of authority; Connor is perceived as a peer, rather than an adult figure distanced from the unwinds by age and status. As a sanctuary, the Graveyard is defined by “the music, the voices, the desert, and the sky” (Shusterman 335), contrasting with Carroll’s idea of the sanctuary-home space as one of vertical lines and demarcated boundaries. The graveyard is recognised as “a womb of redemption” (335). The juxtaposition of death and life in the depiction of the Graveyard as “a womb” symbolises it as a sanctuary space redefined by adolescents as a place for renewal. Expressing

agency enables Connor to create a sanctuary space that serves other adolescents and recognises their agency, too.

Connor's earlier identification of his preference for "life on the edge" identifies him as a character who occupies a liminal position in society, one that is initially defined as nonconformist and judged negatively by adults. At the novel's conclusion, Connor continues to occupy such a liminal position in society because he chooses to live in the Graveyard. Despite its liminality, the Graveyard is a place of sanctuary for adolescents seeking refuge from authoritative, oppressive adults. Connor represents youth agency as pertinent to the individual and able to impact the lives of others. Youth agency is, in *Unwind*, integral to challenging adults and a society that oppresses adolescents and denies them the opportunity to thrive.

While the characters in *Unwind* and *Ready Player One* must leave the home space in order to procure their own sanctuary in the world, *The Adoration of Jenna Fox's* Jenna is unable to leave the home space and it is instead used to control her. When Jenna is argumentative, her rebellion is temporarily suppressed by her mother's use of a command previously uploaded into Jenna's mind, telling Jenna to go to her room. If a house is "a microcosmic version of the world" (Carroll 19) then a bedroom might be seen as a representation of the individual who has claimed a place for their own, and thus a bedroom reflects the occupant. The instruction "Go to your room, Jenna" (41) is initially obeyed without question. The command forces Jenna to occupy a particular place, a place that has been made for her by her mother. Her bedroom is a generic place, lacking personal touches that would typically be associated with the bedroom of a teenager or any individual. A bedroom may function for an adolescent as a heterotopic space, providing personal space within a larger space owned by adults. Nina Robinson writes that, "the bedroom can be a place to escape the regulated aspects of young people's daily lives" ('An Easy Read?'), a place in which an adolescent may be alone. Hillevi Ganetz argues that "[t]he girl's room is a protected place" (88) in which a girl may gather with friends or be alone. She further explains that "[t]he girl's room is a free space within the family, where secrets, dreams,

conversations, media consumption and identity experiments can go on without parental involvement” (89).

The concept of the “girl’s room” suggests an adolescent girl’s bedroom functions as something of a crisis heterotopia, yet it is in complete contrast to the bedroom Jenna inhabits. Jenna is sent to her room when she deviates from Claire’s wishes, suggesting instead that the bedroom reserved for Jenna is a heterotopia of deviation. Jenna’s bedroom is far from “a place to escape” or a “free space” void of parental involvement. Jenna describes her bedroom as “a cold room. Not in temperature, but in temperament. It reflects nothing of the person who inhabits it. Or maybe it does” (Pearson 15). The room is yet to be decorated and personalised, just as Jenna’s identity is yet to be established. Her constructed body, like the bedroom, awaits an identity unique to Jenna.

Jenna does as she is told and reviews her life through movies created by her parents; both the reconstructed Jenna and her bedroom are extensions of her mother’s control against which she rebels in order to establish a sense of independence and autonomy. Jenna needs to re-define the relationships that have been placed upon her by her mother’s attempts at “restoration” and develop and mature into an autonomous individual. While the Cotswold serves as a metaphor of restoration, it is not restoration that Jenna needs as she is not the Jenna that her mother perceives her to be. Subjectivity is personal and identity cannot be constructed or restored by another; Jenna’s mother may have influence over the restoration of the Cotswold Cottage, but it is Jenna alone who must discover who she is.

Jenna finds sanctuary in the woods beyond the confines of the Cotswold Cottage and it is through interacting with this natural place that Jenna comes to accept herself. The novel ends “two hundred and sixty years later” (Pearson 263) when Jenna has found a sense of home and sanctuary. Jenna’s sense of home and sanctuary is tied, partly, to the Cotswold Cottage, but – most importantly – is spoken of when she is situated in the garden feeding the birds. While the physical place is unchanged, what has changed is Jenna’s acceptance of her body, her social

position, and her relationship to the natural world. Jenna's relationship to the natural world will be explored specifically in chapter two; in exploring the creation of a home space or sanctuary, it is of note that Jenna is only able to achieve this after merging her relationship with the constructed home and natural woods, reflecting the merging of her constructed body and 'natural' Self. Like Connor and Risa's Graveyard, for Jenna, sanctuary can only be discovered after challenging the boundaries that prevent her from feeling connected to the natural world. Jenna is assured a home space as a result of the challenge and subsequent removal of demarcated boundaries between what is considered natural and unnatural.

Jenna's physical isolation from people outside of the home space identifies her as occupying a liminal position in society. Jenna's isolation and liminal position is also a result of her illegal and ethically questionable existence. Both Jenna and Connor of *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *Unwind* respectively, are marginalised characters representative of the liminal position of the adolescent, caught between childhood and adulthood. *Ready Player One's* Wade, in contrast, is representative of a society that, in the novel's setting, has marginalised all citizens regardless of their social status. In *Ready Player One*, Wade – like many others – occupies the virtual world of the OASIS as a substitute for an unsatisfying existence in the real world. The OASIS is represented as better than the real world; in the real world, space is a luxury few can afford, and thus the OASIS provides an illusion of space and solitude compared to the overcrowded real world.

Wade lives in the Stacks, so named for the stacking of mobile homes into precarious towers "to maximize the use of ground space" (Cline 21), enabling people to live within walking distance of the city despite the housing shortage. Wade demonstrates, like many others depicted in the world of *Ready Player One*, a preference to primarily exist in a sanctuary space that does not, strictly speaking, exist. Wade clearly identifies the OASIS as the place where he most feels comfortable and 'at home'. The OASIS is a place where Wade is unmonitored, or, when being monitored (as is the case for attending school), can manipulate the virtual world to give himself more freedom.

Wade's physical home spaces undergo change throughout the narrative. Initially, Wade lives in his aunt's trailer, but this is destroyed along with surrounding trailers, suggesting the loss of home and community. The trailer is destroyed by IOI (Innovative Online Industries) following Wade's success in the first of Halliday's tests. IOI is a telecommunications company that charges people to access and use features of the OASIS. The company is represented as the epitome of corporate greed, and a branch of IOI, the Sixers, is dedicated to finding Halliday's Easter egg. Wade and other characters are concerned that the amalgamation of IOI and the OASIS would result in the OASIS becoming an exclusive space, available only to those who can afford access. IOI is represented as a threat to the sanctuary space of the OASIS, just as they are a threat to Wade himself. After the destruction of the trailer, Wade, having just passed the first of Halliday's tests, has enough money to rent an apartment. Wade never leaves his apartment, partly for fear of being found by IOI and because he is determined to find the Easter egg. Neither the trailer nor the apartment conform to the notion of a home space; they function to provide access to the OASIS, but are in no way places that nurture the individual. Eventually, Wade is transported to Morrow's home, a sanctuary on loan. Morrow was Halliday's best friend, a respected programmer and leader in virtual and digital technologies in the narrative's setting. Morrow's offer of sanctuary endorses Wade's desire to inherit Halliday's legacy.

Since Wade's physical spaces represent the ambiguity of existence in a dystopian setting, Wade's virtual home space offers a sense of stability. Wade's experience of the virtual world and his ability to create a personal space in the OASIS is a demonstration of his newfound wealth and social status, something he does not enjoy to the same extent in reality. While the OASIS continues to function as a crisis heterotopia, the physical spaces he inhabits become increasingly reminiscent of heterotopias of deviance, culminating in Wade's 'imprisonment' in IOI Headquarters. Accessing the OASIS comes at a real-world cost, and it is this debt that allows IOI to imprison debtors and force them to 'work off' what is owed – which can never be fully repaid, thus forcing debtors into a life of slavery to the very space that once served as sanctuary.

Virtual / Reality

Ready Player One suggests that technology can create home-like spaces in terms of their physical form; however, as is the case in *Unwind*, the true experience of home is in relationships and connections to other people. Coupled with a sense of purpose and agency, connections to places can only be achieved through conscious awareness of the space surrounding the adolescent. While physical space in the novel is vulnerable and unstable, the virtual world has remained the one 'constant' in Wade's life. In the narrative, the twenty-first century is defined by its economic and environmental failings; the OASIS serves as a respite from this reality.

Initially, the OASIS is a tool used by Wade's mother to keep him entertained while she is at work, then it becomes the setting of Wade's formal and informal education. Despite the failings of the world, Wade states, "Luckily, I had access to the OASIS, which was like having an escape hatch into a better reality. The OASIS kept me sane. It was my playground and my preschool, a magical place where anything was possible" (Cline 18). Anna Craft identifies two sets of ideas that may influence adults' actions and discourses in relation to digital media and childhood: "childhood at risk" and "childhood empowered" (176-7). Craft further argues, "There are, then, two clearly competing discourses: young people as vulnerable and at risk; or alternatively as capable and potent. The former perspective imbues anxiety about the digital revolution; the latter embraces it as exciting and enabling" (178). The tensions between these contrasting ideas are depicted in young adult dystopian fiction, which tends to acknowledge both perspectives in the representation of virtual experiences. Wade perceives his own early exposure to the OASIS as transformative, giving him the opportunity to truly experience the world. Wade's connection to the OASIS represents the connection that a child has to the home space, as it is in the virtual space that Wade is able to feel comfortable, safe, and develop a sense of self. The OASIS as home space is the space that comes under threat in the narrative; thus, Wade's efforts to find the Easter egg is not only for the financial benefits, but also for the desire to protect the OASIS from IOI.

Within this virtual space exist several home-like spaces. For example, the Basement is a chat room designed to emulate the basement in Morrow's childhood home that served as a social and, later, business hub for himself and Halliday. The space introduces the reader to the concept of reconstructing spaces from the real world in the virtual world, as well as draws parallels between Halliday and Morrow, and Wade and Aech. Aech is Wade's best friend, though they only know each other through the OASIS. Their interactions predominantly occur in the Basement chatroom, which functions as a place that could be interpreted as a sanctuary space. The Basement – the original real-world space and the reconstructed virtual space – is a significant place for the adolescent in *Ready Player One*, representing a place of identity-formation for the adolescent male. The significance of the Basement to the adolescent male is subverted when it is later revealed that Aech is a female, suggesting that true sanctuary spaces do not discriminate against or restrict those who need access. The narrative identifies Morrow's basement as a place that is, to Halliday, symbolic of the central chamber Carroll attributes to the sanctuary topos (17-18). The "central chamber" is available to Wade only when logged in to the OASIS, emphasising the significance of the virtual world to the notion of sanctuary in the novel.

As virtual realities become more 'real', the utopian possibilities of a virtual world in place of an increasingly dystopian-esque reality emphasise the growing preference for virtual spaces over the real. Social interactions are increasingly driven by social media over real-time meetings and conversations. danah boyd¹ and Alice Marwick argue "[s]ocial network sites have become the modern-day equivalent of the mall or movie theater, a place where teens can hang out with friends and run into other friends and peers" (7). boyd and Marwick explore the idea of "networked publics", which are "simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. Facebook, for example, serves both as a networked public

¹ danah boyd's legal name is not capitalised; boyd's preference is for her name to be written in lower case, see boyd, "what's in a name?".

itself and as a site upon which networked publics gather” (7). In playing a social role, networked publics “[enable] people to make sense of the world around them and understand their relationship to society” (7). Thus, these technological areas are recognisable as heterotopic spaces for young people to gather.

Technology offers twenty-first century youth the opportunity to construct their own spaces in which they may negotiate subjectivity, just as the OASIS offers this opportunity to Wade. Wade’s sanctuary exists in the OASIS while he simultaneously exists in the deteriorating real world. Wade’s agency is dependent on his relationship to the virtual world, suggesting that virtual worlds – and the sanctuaries created by adolescents within – are significant to identity formation. Geordy G. Reid and Wanda Boyer argue that “traditional identity claims have largely been offline or in person, in environments where deviation from the established social norms was unacceptable. This results in the suppression of one’s true self, which ultimately hinders identity exploration in the public sphere and consequently jeopardizes a sincere claim and its subsequent cognizant placement and acceptance” (246).

Adolescents freely experiment with identity and act as autonomous agents in the OASIS, without fear of judgement. Flanagan explores cyberspace within the context of digital citizenship and the development of agency, including the representation of cyberspace in realist fiction as it pertains to identity-formation in the real world (see *Technology and Identity*). Flanagan explains, “Individual protagonists are able to connect to virtual communities through cyberspace, and it is through their experiences with these communities that they attain a sense of their own worth” (*Technology and Identity* 22). In young adult dystopian fiction, technology is represented as creating new spaces which affect youth agency; *Ready Player One* highlights the role of technology in constructing space and place in the twenty-first century, and the ability for adolescents to achieve agency within such spaces and places. Posthumanism, as Flanagan outlines, “seeks to reformulate and revision the humanist subject in the modern digital era” (*Technology and Identity* 11). There is an emphasis on agency in such a reformulation in young

adult dystopian fiction, as evidenced in *Ready Player One*. Agency is one such notion that is reformulated as a result of the individual's experience in and relationship to virtual worlds.

There is an ideological tension between the exploration of the posthuman subject in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults and the humanist subject that is emphasised in the conclusions of these narratives. A key concept for the humanist subject is the notion of agency. The humanist subject is particularly emphasised in the conclusion of *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *Ready Player One* which depicts the protagonists, Jenna and Wade respectively, as achieving agency by the conclusions of the narratives. Hayles argues that an emphasis on agency, an attribute associated with a humanist subject, places more value on agency than on the posthuman (*How We Became Posthuman* 279), and identifies that the posthuman is only embraced if there is a preservation of agency, and resisted if agency is denied (*How We Became Posthuman* 279). Such a preservation of agency is visible in the conclusions of these novels, which depict the posthuman as agent. While Hayles is critical of the "grafting" of the posthuman onto the "liberal humanist view of the self" (*How We Became Posthuman* 286-7), it is perhaps, in these narratives for young adults, integral in facilitating an ideological shift in representations of technology.

In virtual spaces, adolescent protagonists seek solace, escape, or utilise virtual spaces as heterotopic spaces where their development of subjectivity and the claiming of agency is made possible. While living in a small room "dominated by my OASIS immersion rig" (Cline 191), Wade is able to access the OASIS and the home he has created for himself there: "My stronghold was my home inside the OASIS. My avatar's sanctuary. It was the one place in the simulation where I was truly safe" (201). At the beginning of the narrative, the OASIS itself is identified as a familiar, home-like space for Wade. Once Wade has acquired enough money to use in the OASIS, he purchases a virtual asteroid that he names Falco. Wade constructs a "stronghold" on Falco, and uses the words "home" and "sanctuary" as nominal descriptors for this virtual environment.

Wade acts independently within the OASIS – there is no adult supervision or intervention when it comes to Wade’s well-being. Wade’s accomplishments within the OASIS provide him with opportunities previously denied to him in the real world – the prize money from the first test and endorsement deals provide Wade with the means to rent an apartment in the real world equipped with the latest technology to access the OASIS. An adult intervenes only when Wade and his friends are under direct threat from the Sixers (IOI) in the real world; however, this “intervention” recognises and supports Wade’s agency. Morrow offers Wade and his friends “sanctuary” so that they can focus on completing the final test without fear of the Sixers. Morrow explains, “I want to offer the four of you sanctuary at my home here in Oregon . . . I can provide each of you with a state-of-the-art immersion rig, a fiber-optic connection to the OASIS, and anything else you might need” (315). The sanctuary of Morrow’s home primarily functions as a place to safely access the OASIS. Morrow’s description of the sanctuary on offer focuses on the technology available to Wade and his friends. The emphasis on technology in describing the sanctuary suggests that accessing the OASIS is synonymous with a sanctuary space.

While *Ready Player One* considers the role of the virtual in constructing notions of home and sanctuary, the narrative ultimately privileges real-world places and relationships over the virtual. The virtual world enables Wade to experience and express agency, providing a space in which he engages with subjectivity until it is revealed to be a false sanctuary. Not only is Wade physically vulnerable in the real world, he also becomes increasingly aware of his loneliness and isolation as a result of his dependence on the OASIS.

The novel concludes with a distinct preference for the real world over the virtual world; however, Wade would not have had the opportunity to act as an agent if not for the virtual world of the OASIS. Wade’s achievements within the OASIS directly impact his development in the real world. The novel concludes with an optimistic perception of reality, made possible after Wade finds the Easter egg, inheriting Halliday’s estate and gaining control of the OASIS. As a consequence of completing the various tests – and the experiences and relationships that result from these – Wade learns the real world cannot be replaced by the virtual. The optimism

towards the real world at the novel's conclusion contrasts with the novel's initial pessimism, just as Wade's isolation at the beginning contrasts with the friends he has gained by the end. Despite the final sentence indicating Wade having "absolutely no desire to log back into the OASIS" (Cline 372), the significance of the virtual world to Wade's agency cannot be denied. The virtual world provides the heterotopic space in which Wade may express agency, which empowers Wade in the real world.

While the OASIS serves as a crisis heterotopia at the beginning of the narrative, Wade becomes aware that the OASIS is a distraction from the real world, ultimately proving itself to be a prison, not a sanctuary. Wade describes his apartment as small and designed to shut out the real world, complete with black paint over the windows and several security systems in place to prevent his need to interact with the world outside (Cline 190-191) and then describes, in detail, the equipment that dominates the space, just as the OASIS dominates his experience of space and place. He realises the rig is "an elaborate contraption for deceiving my senses, to allow me to live in a world that didn't exist. Each component of my rig was a bar in the cell where I had willingly imprisoned myself" (198). Wade's construction of a stronghold on "the rocky surface of my own private asteroid" (200) demonstrates the isolation he experiences in reality. He shuts out the real world and confines himself to the apartment, just as he selects a "planetoid" of his own because "My avatar needed a stronghold, and I didn't want any neighbours" (200). Avatars can be killed, resulting in players having to start again; however, this can only occur in certain areas of the OASIS. Constructing a safe place in the OASIS ensures Wade's avatar cannot be killed when inhabiting the virtual world, as this would directly impact Wade's real world. If Parzival is killed in the OASIS, then Wade would not have the financial resources to fund his real-world existence.

The need to create one's own home space or sanctuary is represented in *Ready Player One* as coming with the risk of self-imposed isolation and loneliness. Wade explains: "When you owned your own world, you could build whatever you wanted there. And no one could visit it unless I granted them access, something I never gave to anyone" (200-201). While Halliday has

constructed the OASIS and given access to everyone, the privatisation of spaces within the world suggests an encouragement of social isolation. The OASIS is more desirable than the real world, therefore offers a better life to be experienced in the virtual space. Insidiously, the OASIS subsequently suggests building a personalised, exclusive world and locking out others, just as reality has been locked out. Wade can exert full control over his own constructed places within the OASIS, a control that does not extend to the places he inhabits in the real world.

Wade comes to realise that isolation in the virtual world is ultimately undesirable, as an existence in the real world facilitates friendships and connections the OASIS would otherwise deny. However, if not for the virtual world of the OASIS, pursuit of Halliday's Easter egg, and friendships forged through these experiences, Wade's perception of the real world might be quite different. Don Passey et al. define digital agency as "consisting of digital competence, digital confidence and digital accountability [and] is the individual's ability to control and adapt to a digital world", arguing that digital agency empowers people and their use of technology (426-7). Digital agency as a measurement of competence and confidence may be perceived as natural competencies for young people today. These "digital natives", as defined by Marc Prensky ("Digital Natives"), are empowered by digital technologies such as virtual reality and social network sites. Technology and the spaces and places created by technology are unique facilitators of youth agency, providing liminal spaces where adolescents may thrive as autonomous individuals, in control of their own virtual worlds and virtual identities.

Conclusion

Characters and settings in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction offer the reader opportunities to question their own place in the world by experiencing alternative perspectives offered in narratives. Such perspectives challenge the lack of agency permitted of adolescents, no longer children to be cared for, yet not quite adults trusted to function within and contribute to a society that is, itself, dysfunctional. In examining the significance of the concept of agency in Childhood Studies, Florian Esser et al. argue that children are marginalised and excluded, and

have limited rights; “Children often go unseen and unheard, and have relatively few visible opportunities to influence society” (Esser et al. 3). Young adult dystopian fiction specifically challenges the perspective of children as going “unseen and unheard” with the use of adolescent protagonists as focalisers for the perspectives of children and young adults who demand to be seen and heard; it is their influence that is integral to the betterment of a society made dystopian by adults. Most significantly, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction offers reconceptualised notions of home, encouraging adolescent readers to consider the kind of world they might hope to build for themselves. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer argue that in children’s fiction, children who do experience the difficulties of life alone are eventually “rewarded with a secure home life where others will look after them” (198). The reward of “a secure home life” is not the case in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, as adolescents are typically represented as caring for each other, thriving in sanctuaries where relationships are established based on equality and reciprocity. Rather than having a place “where others will look after them”, these adolescents look after each other, each able to achieve agency and act autonomously. In dystopian narratives for young adults, youth agency is represented as integral to the development of better societies. Such narratives suggest that by giving adolescents voice and opportunities to act, dystopia may be disrupted.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, being “looked after” is less about a parental figure taking charge and more about realising healthy connections to people – a realisation that can only occur once the adolescent achieves agency. In caring for others, Connor and Risa create a sanctuary for other displaced adolescents. Wade is entrusted with the fate of the OASIS and, with it, the power to affect change in the world once he chooses to care for others more than he cares for himself. Connor and Wade are each able to act as agents by creating and sharing sanctuary spaces with others. Rather than being looked after by adults, they are charged with looking after other youth in their midst. Through sharing spaces and considering the needs of others, other adolescents, too, are allowed sanctuaries in which they may enact agency.

In pushing and challenging the boundaries of home, Jenna seeks to construct a new personal identity and place independent of the reconstruction forced upon her by her mother. The novel concludes with Jenna reflecting on her place in the world, which has changed because of her activism. Jenna's activism has been informed by her own perception of self, resulting in challenging society to accept her – and others like her – just as she has come to accept herself. Sanctuary spaces created by adolescents may be perceived by adults differently. Rasmussen observes that “children's spaces” are perceived by adults as “examples of disorder, mess, destruction and prohibited behaviour” (162). Sanctuary spaces are liminal spaces; to adolescents, these are important spaces central to their expression of agency.

Rather than marginalising children and adolescents, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction emphasises the importance of their voices and ideas, and the possibilities for adolescents to be agents of change. Myrna Margulies Breitbart compares the use of public space by middle class youths and those who are less privileged, suggesting the former is compliant when it comes to accessing public spaces and can “seek refuge” (307) inside private settings. Less privileged youth, in contrast, “are using street art, design and performance as mechanisms for reclaiming a space for themselves in urban life, or simply as outlets for creative expression and survival. They are attempting to revision and generate homelike qualities in otherwise unwelcoming and unsafe spaces” (308). Connor's initial perception of himself as existing in a “life on the edge” is realised by the conclusion of the novel through the creation of a space that exists for those pushed to the edges of a society that denies youth agency.

Eberhard Raithelhuber argues that a conventional understanding of agency positions the child as able to affect change and explores how the child expresses agency “in the context of constraining and enabling conditions” (91). Relational approaches to agency, in contrast, consider that agency “does not always have to be embodied . . . It can be distributed among various participants in action” (95). In *Unwind*, Connor represents that youth agency can be used to empower others; similarly, in *Ready Player One*, Wade represents that youth agency enacted in virtual worlds can empower the individual in the real world. Wade's lack of desire to log into

the OASIS at the novel's conclusion signifies the possibilities for Wade to use his changed perspective of people and relationships, and newly acquired wealth and control of the OASIS, to challenge the economic and environmental failings that define the dystopia of his world. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, it is through achieving agency that gives Jenna the confidence to speak up for herself and, when the time comes, advocate for herself and her friend, Allys, both of whom challenge the ethical and legal norms of the society in which they live. Ultimately, youth agency is represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as having the potential to positively impact other individuals – particularly the marginalised and oppressed – resulting in positive potentiality for future society. Youth agency is achieved once the individual breaks free of the oppressive and hostile spaces that seek to deny agency, represented through the home space and the individual's desire to create a true sanctuary.

In depicting a world rife with ambiguity, the relationship between home spaces and the developing subject in dystopian fiction does not imply sanctuary is necessary in order to negotiate and establish subjectivity. Rather, it is in realising subjectivity and achieving agency that a home space can be actualised. Access to such sanctuary spaces is not restricted to the individual and a chosen few, but made available to any who seek the same sense of home and community. Home, then, is not a space defined by its central spaces or lines and boundaries, but by the sense of shared purpose and a desire for positive change. Home is reconceptualised as a space that welcomes others regardless of their differences, backgrounds, and past transgressions. The reconceptualised home space is an unbounded, unrestricted sanctuary available to those who need such a space. Agency is represented as a requirement for adolescents so that they may create the sanctuary they envision for themselves and others. Such a sanctuary is not a physical construction, but achieved through connecting with people, purpose, and place.

Chapter Two: Beyond the Dome

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction reimagines and redefines the boundaries between people, nature, and technology. Such narratives pivot on the adolescent protagonist's renegotiation of the conventional definitions of 'human' and 'natural'. The depiction of a community separated from the outside world is a common trope in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Moving beyond the dome is thus an apt metaphor for exploring the transgression of boundaries between human/nonhuman and nature/technology. The experiences and perceptions of characters that transition between the dome and the outside world remind us that young people are constantly engaged in the process of boundary-crossing. Just as fictional characters experience a story-world in which the binaries of human/nonhuman and nature/technology are challenged and collapsed, young people in the twenty-first century are similarly positioned to interrogate the possibilities of their own relationship with nature and technology beyond the hierarchical structuring of these relations in accordance with Humanist ideology. In the previous chapter, I examined the representation of the home space and the role of the sanctuary space in the developing subject's realisation of agency. I now explore the relationships between the developing subject and the manifestations of green space in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Previously, I drew on sociological perspectives of agency in order to consider how youth agency impacts and is impacted by the sanctuary space; in this chapter, I explore the representation of green spaces and their inter-relationships with constructed communities – domes and dome-like spaces – and the development of subjectivity.

In exploring subjectivity and green spaces, I draw upon Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces, where green spaces in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults function to suppress or reward the development of subjectivity. I posit that the representation of green spaces in these narratives presents paradoxical messages to the adolescent reader when it comes to considering the relationship between people, nature, and technology. Just as the home space is reconceptualised in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, green

spaces present a challenge to the adolescent reader – they may function to control or liberate the developing subject. *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008) by Mary E. Pearson, *Glitch* (2012) by Heather Anastasiu, and *Pure* (2012) by Julianna Baggott represent general trends in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults in their depiction of the relationships between natural landscapes and subjectivity. Each depicts characters and settings that occur after an event that has drastically altered the population and world, and each represents different perspectives of the relationship between green spaces and subjectivity. I also consider ecofeminist perspectives in my analysis of these texts, as they focus on the development of a female protagonist. The dominance of female protagonists in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults is a contributing factor to the selection of the three texts examined in this chapter. In chapter five, I specifically examine the representation of male and female characters in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly in relation to the body and embodiment. This chapter focuses on the relationship between the female protagonist and the natural environment, and considers the ways in which green spaces function as heterotopic spaces which inform the female protagonist's subjectivity.

A central concern for ecocriticism is that of the human/nonhuman. Cheryll Glotfelty argues “[a]s a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (xix). Ecocriticism's focus on the representation of the environment in literature is guided by questions such as those detailed by Glotfelty for when ecocritics examine texts:

“Ecocritics and theorists ask questions such as: How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself

affected humankind's relations to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?

(xviii-xix)

Many of these questions are considered in my analysis of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction throughout this thesis; however, they particularly inform my textual analysis in this chapter. In addition, exploring representations of nature and the role of physical settings also benefits from an understanding of what Jane Suzanne Carroll terms "the green topos" (49). Carroll suggests that "green space is the fundamental constant in landscape by which the built environment is almost incidental in comparison" (49). She argues that green space is manifest in bounded and unbounded spaces: the garden and farm, and pleasance and wilderness respectively (50).

While Carroll identifies four sub-topoi within the green space topos, these vary in their representation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. The garden, for example, is considered an extension of the home space in children's literature (Carroll 50-52). However, in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction there is a tendency to represent the garden as part of a protected, 'dome' space which becomes a metaphor for control and oppression – not only of the natural environment, but also of the individual. While the wilderness may be perceived as "antithetical to home and safety" (77), the opposite frequently occurs in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, where the wilderness is instead reconceptualised as a place of sanctuary. Green spaces are reconceptualised in young adult dystopian fiction, and function as heterotopic

spaces. In young adult dystopian fiction, green spaces often literally exist outside of the known space, that is, beyond the community or society separated from the 'outside' world – in this way, they may be perceived as “outside of all places” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24). While Foucault suggests heterotopias are either compulsory to enter or require certain permissions (“Of Other Spaces” 26), in young adult dystopian fiction, the entering of green spaces is often done covertly. Leaving the separated society and entering the outside world – and thus gaining access to green spaces – emphasises the exclusive nature of accessing a heterotopic space.

The popularity of dystopian fiction has seen a flood of texts imagining a dystopian future, each suggesting various ways that ‘life as we know it’ may come to an end. Lawrence Buell refers to the apocalypse as a “master metaphor”, suggesting that “we cannot begin to talk or even think about the nature of nature without resorting to [master metaphors], whether or not we believe they are true; and our choice of metaphors can have major consequences” (*The Environmental Imagination* 281). He identifies the apocalypse as a master metaphor of the twenty-first century because “since the invention of nuclear weaponry [we have] been forced to confront more seriously than ever before the possibility of the imminent end of life as we know it” (*The Environmental Imagination* 284). Now, nuclear catastrophe is not the only concern when it comes to ending life as we know it. Biological warfare, natural disasters brought on by climate change, and scientific advancement in genetic engineering, cloning, and virus mutations are all possible catalysts for an environmental apocalypse. The natural environment is interconnected with technology and science, and this connection may lead to the destruction of nature and a re-positioning of technology. The latter plays a part in altering the people that inhabit the dystopian landscape, transforming them physically and subsequently transforming the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘human’. With such transformation comes a struggle to understand and define oneself within this context.

The representation of nature as being closely aligned with the child is not new to children’s literature. Alison Waller argues that “[s]tudies of space and place in literature, particularly children’s literature, rely heavily on Romantic ideas about nature and its influence

on individual imagination and growth. Real and fantastic landscapes provide the setting for adventures and character development but also reflect the child's status as *natural*" (304). The emphasis on being 'natural' is complicated in dystopian settings in young adult fiction, as being 'natural' does not always mean being able to survive.

The Romantic ideas of nature and identity inform much of children's literature. The Romantic association of childhood with nature has left an enduring legacy in Western cultural constructions of 'the child'. Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd attribute the child's presumed "privileged relationship to nature" (6) to the "legacy of romantic and Victorian literature, which emphasized – often to the point of absurdity – the child's proximity to the natural world and consequent purity" (6). Both Romanticism and liberal humanism have provided principles upon which ideologies of childhood and adolescence have been constructed in contemporary Western culture. Bryan Moore explains that the Romantics "responded to the Industrial Revolution by rejecting the scientific view of a mechanical universe" (87), yet where once the intrinsic connection between the child and nature was promoted and idealised, in dystopian fiction the young adult is forced to find her or his place in an unstable world dominated by technology (the mechanical) that the Romantics sought to reject. Indeed, it is often only through technology that the young adult can find a 'safe place', such as a virtual reality or protected community, and it is often only with technology that the future of the natural world can be simulated or recreated.

The significance of place in dystopian fiction is especially relevant to the developing subject as the very landscape in which she or he is situated is often depicted as existing in a state of flux. The transformation of the landscape through large-scale disaster leads to an interrogation of environmental issues and of the role of the environment in the development of subjectivity. Places "constitute a locus for individual and cultural identity" (Mallan and Bradford 55) and the developing subject relies on engagement with place in order to interrogate their subjectivity.

The notions of 'place' and 'place-connectedness' are significant to ecocritical debate particularly as 'place' is indicative of landscape, environment and location – all of which can identify internal and external spaces occupied by the individual. Waller writes: "the rise of ecocriticism and ecological approaches to literature has helped shift attention away from an exclusive focus on the social world toward a consideration of physical and geographical spaces and how they inflect selfhood" (304). Exploring place in young adult dystopian fiction through an ecocritical lens highlights the relationship between the adolescent protagonist and nature. In young adult dystopian fiction, the relationship between people and nature serves a didactic purpose in promoting environmental awareness in the reader; however, it also encourages the reader to interrogate notions of human and nonhuman. What makes a human 'natural' and therefore *human*, and not machine or animal? The perspective of human/nonhuman and natural/unnatural is specifically explored in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through characters who engage with this question.

In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, Jenna learns she is not 'human' as defined by the Federal Science Ethics Board (FSEB), yet considers herself more human than, for example, the sociopathic Dane. Jenna's relationship to, and experience of, the natural world affirms her perspective of herself as 'natural' and therefore human. Similarly, the boundary between human/machine/animal is represented in *Pure* where such boundaries are blurred and, for some, non-existent. The wretches embody all aspects of these traditionally separate concepts as their bodies are fusions of human, machine, and animal. These fusions become a part of the individual's identity; in some instances, the fusions override the 'human' aspect of a person, as exemplified by Bradwell. Bradwell, whose body has fused with those of birds, is identified by Pressia as "the boy with birds in his back" (Baggott 40) – it is his nonhuman characteristic by which he is defined.

In other situations, the relationship between people and technology is often represented through virtual worlds, and technological enhancements of the organic body. Such representation further encourages interrogation of human and nonhuman; the machine is part

of the human. Characters in young adult dystopian fiction typically conclude that regardless of their nonhuman parts, what makes one 'human' still separates them from machine or animal; this perpetuates the hierarchical binarisms that both ecocritical and posthumanist perspectives seek to overturn. Yet by accepting the machine or animal parts of one's body, one is also accepting that being human is being a congeries. Pramod K. Nayar summarises: "Critical posthumanism sees the human as a congeries, whose origins are multispecies and whose very survival is founded on symbiotic relations with numerous forms of life on earth" (9). The perception of the human as a congeries is represented in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults.

The role of the environment and place in the individual's development and growth is significant in young adult dystopian fiction as the instability of the world is made to represent the instability of adolescence. Children's literature and young adult fiction have an especially socialising function. In their exploration of spatiality and identity in children's texts, Clare Bradford and Raffaella Baccolini emphasise the significance that space, place, and travel play in identity-formation (40-41). Bradford and Baccolini argue that "[t]he central concern of children's literature is, in fact, the identity formation of young protagonists and their progress toward enhanced ways of being in the world" (40). In the twenty-first century, the physical and social place of the adolescent has never been more precarious; dystopian fiction offers a transformed setting in which the young adult protagonist must find their place in a changing world. Sara K. Day et al. suggest that it is "[t]hrough utopian and dystopian writing, children learn about social organization" (7). Texts for children and adolescence have a fundamentally didactic purpose. In a society dominated by discourses of climate change and environmental concerns, it is perhaps unsurprising that contemporary dystopian fiction promotes a "greening" (Greenway 146-147) of the young adult reader by presenting the natural environment as an important determining factor in the formation and development of adolescent identity.

In order to negotiate one's subjectivity, the young adult must explore the physical environment to find his or her social place; the quality of this 'place' is then consequently

dependent on the subject's interaction with the wider environment. Karen Malone draws upon examples of the child-animal relationship observed in La Paz and ideas from new materialism and posthumanism to challenge anthropocentric ideas of the relationships between the child and nature. Malone argues there is a resurgence in the "children in nature" movement (43), which has "primarily been orchestrated around a fear that children are lacking opportunities to be connected to 'nature'" (43).

In contemporary Western society the issues of climate change, overpopulation, over-extension of the earth's resources, nuclear energy, genetic engineering, organ and limb transplants and reconstructions, biological warfare, and the increasing social dependencies on technology for communication and education are all significant themes in social and political debate. Elaine Ostry suggests that "the future young adults face is that of a science fiction novel come to life . . . If adolescence is the time when one considers what it means to be human, to be an individual, then there has never been a period of history when it has been more difficult to figure this out than now" ("Is He Still Human?" 222). These issues are especially explored in dystopian fiction through representation of the inter-relationships between people, nature, and technology. The Romantics criticised industry in preference for the pastoral, yet now the contemporary Western adolescent lives in a society driven by industry – and in which the natural landscape must be sought out, away from the computer screen or gaming console.

Young adult dystopian fiction is typically set after the human population has been drastically diminished. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the Aureus epidemic is responsible for the death of billions², a consequence of antibiotics becoming "useless" (Pearson 36). In the novel's setting, the FSEB has responded by implementing laws to prevent the recurrence of such an

² The novel does not specify exactly how many have died world-wide from the Aureus epidemic, only that twenty million died "just in this country" (Pearson 36), referring to the United States of America, and there is reference to a quarter of the world's population dying as a result of the epidemic.

epidemic. In *Pure*, the Detonations is a nuclear event that has resulted in survivors becoming fused to the objects around them at the time of impact. Those who were inside the Dome are unaffected, while those outside the Dome have become physically deformed in such a way that even their genes are impacted, mutations passing on to babies: “The mutations caused by the Detonations settled deep into the survivors’ genes. Babies aren’t born Pure. They are mutated, born with traces of their parents’ deformities. Animals too. Instead of starting anew, the breeds only seem to get more convoluted, a mix of human, animal, earth, objects” (Baggott 30). The Community in *Glitch* functions with the suppression of emotion in its inhabitants, a consequence of wars arising from “greed and anger and hate and indifference” (Anastasiu 13) resulting in the survival of “a small percentage” (30) who had predicted and planned the subterranean Community. Continued survival has resulted in logic and order – the suppression of emotions and perception of such as dangerous and animal (13).

While such an approach to restoring the environment and having humans inhabit it harmoniously may be key in a deep ecology approach, young adult fiction prefers to focus on the impact such events have on the developing subject within this context. Jenna’s very existence is illegal and contrary to the regulations set out by the FSEB; Pressia and other wretches live a life of hardship and harbour desires for the world as it was before, or to be pure and without mutation; Zoe perceives herself to be a traitor and “a ticking bomb” (13) that could destroy the Community that she perceives as the only safe place left.

There is a tendency in young adult dystopian fiction for the setting to be a result of eco-catastrophe. The natural world in *Pure* is changed in such a way that pristine nature is impossible outside of the Dome; the environment can consume and fuse with organic and artificial materials, making it a formidable force. The belief that the surface is toxic in *Glitch* renders the natural world too dangerous for habitation. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, Lily, Jenna’s grandmother, is a member of the World Seed Preservation Organisation, its primary purpose to preserve the original species of plants (38). Jenna’s own relationship to the natural environment is represented as an integral part of her identity-formation, particularly in her

reconceptualisation of the human and perception of herself as 'natural'. Thus, the significance of the natural environment in these texts reveals contemporary ideologies of adolescence and nature that are reflective of the twenty-first century Western context in which the novels have been published. Nature plays a significant role because it is nature that is threatened or has been threatened in the dystopian world. In representing a preference for nature over technology, the novels create something of an ideological dilemma. Where Romantic and humanist principles define nature and the natural environment as pertinent to the development of a child and significant to the experience of childhood, the contemporary young adult typical of Western society is raised in an urban environment with an abundance of technology.

Pertinent to the exploration of place and subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is an acknowledgment of the legacy of feminist discourses to both ecofeminism and posthumanism. To illustrate this, I draw upon N. Katherine Hayles' use of Balsamo's statement "My mother was a computer" in the title of her book that explores the impact of digital technologies on subjectivity. In the prologue to her book, Hayles explains that in the 1930s and 1940s "people who were employed to do calculations – and it was predominantly women who performed this clerical labor – were called 'computers'" (*My Mother Was A Computer* 1). Hayles' explanation establishes that people were computers *before* any technological intervention was required in terms of their physical or mental state. Furthermore, that women were typically employed as computers encourages a typically unacknowledged connection between technology and *women*. Technology and feminine subjectivity are often explicitly linked, and this connection is a significant discourse in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction (Flanagan, *Technology and Identity* 107). There is an abundance of female protagonists within the genre; male characters exist, but typically as love interests for the female protagonists. Debra Dudek refers to *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Divergent* (2011) to argue that "romance serves as a subplot that nevertheless functions to undermine the power structure [in the trilogies]" (163), and further examines the connection between love and rebellion in two dystopian trilogies. This perspective draws attention to the empowerment of female

protagonists resulting from the romance and relationships they experience over the course of the narrative.

The relationships between females and technology and males and technology differ, with female characters having a penchant for introspection not typical of male characters. In their exploration of nature and agency in young adult dystopian fiction, Megan McDonough and Katherine A. Wagner suggest that “a female protagonist’s awakening is catalyzed by her experiences within nature and that these experiences shape nature into a place ideal for claiming her agency” (157). There is a tendency for nature to be overtly referenced in dystopian narratives featuring female protagonists rather than those with male protagonists, which has influenced the selection of texts explored in this chapter. Nature and natural environments are marginalised in Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (2011), which I examined in the previous chapter. The conclusion to the novel occurs in a natural setting – outside and offline – but it is a green space that is heavily cultivated and controlled. Wade enters a hedge maze to find Art3mis/Samantha and, after conversing, realises he has “absolutely no desire to log back into the OASIS” (Cline 372). The maze is a replica of the labyrinth from *Adventure*, an Atari video game famed for being the first video game to feature an Easter egg (see Porges). The maze’s function as a space is purely symbolic and is not representative of a green space which has informed the development of subjectivity. In contrast, Jenna’s relationship to the natural environment as represented in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* is integral to her subjectivity. Similarly, Zoe in *Glitch* experiences an immediate, innate connection to the natural environment represented in the narrative, despite being conditioned to fear the natural environment and perceive it as toxic and dangerous.

Fusing feminist and ecological thinking, ecofeminism encourages the consideration that neither humans nor nature should be positioned within a hierarchy, but rather considered as parts of the same system. Ecofeminism “is apt to perceive the world as always already a dystopia” (Bradford et al. 84). Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that there is a connection between patriarchal oppression and environmental issues, writing:

How the planet and human beings evolve into the future will depend on how we understand the human impact on the planet. If we continue to understand our role as rooted in the old paradigm of capitalist patriarchy – based on a mechanistic world-view, an industrial capital-centred competitive economy, and a culture of dominance, violence, war and ecological and human irresponsibility – we will witness the rapid unfolding of increasing climate catastrophe, species extinction, economic collapse, and human injustice and inequality. (xix)

The desire to destabilise the hierarchical frame that positions humans above nature is fundamental to ecofeminism. The overturning of hierarchies and dismantling of binarisms is particularly necessary for the developing adolescent subject as depicted in young adult dystopian fiction. Through engagement with place, adolescent characters challenge binarism, because the developing subject often exists on the boundaries. Clare Bradford et al. explain that ecofeminism

draws from feminism the understanding that Western patriarchal thinking is based on binarisms, that is, opposed pairs of concepts organised hierarchically: mind over body, spirit over matter, male over female, culture over nature, reason over emotion. The eco element of ecofeminism demands an interrogation of the nature/culture binary as a step towards dismantling the other binarisms and for creating an environmentally aware society in which often discounted values (friendship, nurturance, love, trust) shape human subjectivity. (85)

The ecofeminist interrogation of androcentrism suggests the need to restructure the hierarchy that positions male humans as superior to all else whereas the ecocriticism focus on anthropocentrism calls for a re-examination of the human as being the central species. Greg Garrard summarises that “[d]eep ecology identifies the anthropocentric dualism

humanity/nature as the ultimate source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices, but ecofeminism also blames the *androcentric* dualism man/woman” (26).

Where nature was once viewed as inherent to the experience of childhood and development of selfhood, contemporary young adult fictions represent changed perspectives of nature and technology, and the subsequent negotiation of subjectivity. Such narratives explore the ways in which science and technology affect human identity and experience because the possibilities of technology are, in the twenty-first century, rapidly becoming probabilities. Leo Marx argues: “[t]he pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination” (*The Machine in the Garden* 8). While his seminal study *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* was first published more than fifty years ago, the “middle landscape” proffered by Marx is especially relevant in exploring the blurring of boundaries between nature and technology in young adult dystopian fiction. John Lark Bryant refers to Marx’s concept of the pastoral ideal as “sentimental”, summarising that the pastoral ideal is “the sentimental belief that man can live in a ‘middle landscape’ situated between nature’s primitivism and civilisation’s authority” (64). Such a concept is critiqued by Howard P. Segal who argues “[t]he originality of the middle landscape lay in its accommodation of nature to [widespread industrialism], which was the severest form of civilization yet to appear. That in the process of accommodation the middle landscape transformed nature and civilization alike is a point missed by Marx and others” (138). The transformation of nature and civilisation is interrogated in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, where civilisation is represented by science and technology.

While Marx’s study focuses on the pastoral ideal in American culture, nostalgia for nature – and the pastoral ideal in which the individual might reside between nature and civilisation – permeates much of the current Western social and political discourse. More recently, Marx notes the “[r]evulsion at the technocratic direction of American life” (“Afterword” 494). Marx refers to this “revulsion” as a

collective mentality [that] has informed many of the dissident movements adhered to by discontented Americans. I have in mind environmentalism, the antinuclear movements . . . the voluntary simplicity movement, as well as “green” tendencies within the feminist, gay rights, Native America, African-American and Hispanic movements. (“Afterword” 494)

Environmentalism and what Marx refers to as “‘green’ tendencies” in movements for the rights of peoples historically oppressed and denied equality in a white, patriarchal society inform not only social and political debate in the twenty-first century, but also the underlying messages in contemporary children’s literature.

Still influenced by the notion of nature as idyllic, children are encouraged to participate in the natural world, often with the view of encouraging environmental awareness and, to varying degrees, environmental activism. Elizabeth Thiel and Alison Waller write:

what is evident in much children’s literature is an appreciation of the natural world, a sentiment that exposes the Romantic ideology that lies at the heart of much writing for children, particularly that of past centuries. (1)

British picture book author Michael Foreman states that he has “always felt that children would be very receptive to ideas about the environment and, with their constant access to television, knew as much, if not more, than their parents about the growing problems of pollution. Certainly, they seemed more concerned” (8). Harold Fromm, however, argues quite the opposite, writing that the average American child is distanced from nature.

‘Meat’ consists of red geometrical shapes obtained in plastic packages at the supermarket, whose relationship to animals is obscure if not wholly invisible. Houses are heated by moving a thermostat and clothes are washed by putting them into a washing machine. Even the child’s most primitive nature functions are minimally in evidence and it is not surprising that various

psychological problems turn up later on in life when man's sensual nature has in some way been concealed at every point by technology. (Fromm 33)

Furthermore, Fromm suggests that the effects nature has on man (sic) are "*mediated* by technology so that it appears that technology and not Nature is actually responsible for everything" (35).

Such a perception of nature and technology, and the relationship of human beings to both, suggests a confusion of boundaries between nature/technology, and the consequent disregard for nature in favour of technology. Jean Webb also addresses a confusion of boundaries between nature/technology, suggesting that "[t]he contemporary child's experience of and relationship with nature is far more sanitised and distanced than, say, Kenneth Milne's, the brother of A.A. Milne, recalling long country walks as a boy in the 1890s" (258). Webb acknowledges that experiences in nature are "limited to organised activities, such as the scouting movement or through school trips" (259). A relationship between people and the natural environment should be encouraged beyond the limitations associated with "organised activities" within nature.

A re-connection between the individual and nature is represented as integral to the development of subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Neil Evernden argues that the role of the environment in relation to the individual has changed, and now "we must deal instead with the individual-in-environment, the individual as component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment" (97). The notion of the individual as a "component" of the environment shares similarities with the posthumanist idea of the human being a part of network or system, rather than existing independently of the world around them. While protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction interrogate conventional ideologies of subjectivity by engaging with the environment, part of their identity-formation arises through developing a meaningful connection with the environment and perceiving themselves as a part of nature, rather than existing in opposition to or outside of the natural environment. For

example, Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* who struggles with the conflicting messages she receives regarding what it means to be human and natural in a setting that is dominated by social and political debate surrounding the purity and originality of organisms, as represented by the FSEB and the World Seed Preservation Organization. Jenna's eventual acceptance of herself as human despite her artificial body is symbolised by the birds' willingness to eat from her hand. Jenna's identity-formation is largely informed by her connection to the natural environment.

The natural environment is often presented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as a determining factor in identity-formation, which thus encourages the young adult reader to consider current environmental concerns. Thiel and Waller assert

the child reader is being encouraged to play an active role in determining the future of the earth. Numerous publications invite readers to engage with green issues, from recycling to conservation, while texts for older readers . . . depict the devastation wreaked, by man, on the modern world. (1)

The consequences of continued exploitation of the natural environment and disengagement from nature are typically depicted in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction; such issues are recognisable catalysts for the dystopian landscapes represented in these narratives. Alice Curry suggests that in such texts, "young people's social and political struggle and maturation is indivisible from the needs of the earth" (5). The connection between adolescent protagonists and the natural environment is typically represented with elements of nostalgia for an earth and ecological balance that no longer exists, reflecting the Romantic notion of the child inherent in nature. In being invited to "engage with green issues", adolescent readers are presented with a representation of nature that encourages them to consider the possibilities of its absence in the not-too-distant-future.

Current concerns for the environment are defamiliarised in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction and represented as inevitabilities in these narratives. The use of

defamiliarisation suggests that the worlds depicted in such texts are real possibilities for the adolescent reader. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'defamiliarise' as a transitive verb "to present or render in an unfamiliar artistic form usually to stimulate fresh perception" (Merriam-Webster). In Russian Formalism:

[t]he literariness or artfulness of a work of literature, that which makes it an aesthetic object, resides entirely in its devices, which should also form the sole object of literary studies. The aesthetic value or purpose of art, embodied in the devices, consists in creating in readers or viewers a heightened awareness, making them see things anew . . . This is achieved through disrupting or radically modifying the familiar, automatic perception habits as regards literature, language, or reality and (re)creating instead novelty, surprise, strangeness, and unfamiliarity with regard to one or more of them. (Margolin)

Defamiliarisation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction modifies the familiar world of the early twenty-first century and its environmental concerns by representing such concerns as realities that have caused the dystopian society to come into being. In presenting current concerns for the environment as inevitabilities in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, narratives highlight the potentially devastating effects of ignoring climate change, for example, and thus call the reader to take preventative action. Defamiliarisation also positions the reader to interrogate subjectivity through the experiences of the adolescent protagonist navigating such a world. Maria Nikolajeva identifies that dystopias for young readers utilise the double estrangement effect; "while the reader is not familiar with the rules of the society presented in a novel, the characters are not aware of the 'normal' world" (*Power, Voice and Subjectivity* 74).

McDonough and Wagner suggest that "[t]he belief in nature as refuge, as a safe and peaceful place, is a common thread" (158) in novels similar to those selected for this thesis. Nature as refuge is depicted in *Glitch*, with the representation of Zoe's instant connection with

nature. In contrast, *Pure* represents the experience of being in a landscape void of 'nature'; in the absence of nature and its associated safety, the landscape is hostile. Both *Glitch* and *Pure* feature oppressed teenagers, utopian societies revealed as dystopian once one questions them, and protagonists that challenge the traditional binaries of nature/technology and human/nonhuman. Jenna in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* has a different experience; however, as an illegal cyborg, she is positioned to challenge and engage with the social and political discourses surrounding such binaries. In these narratives, the adolescent protagonist frequently acts to subvert and interrogate such boundaries, particularly because they themselves identify as both human and nonhuman. Pressia has a doll's head in place of a hand, her adolescent body fused to an inescapable symbol of childhood; Zoe cannot survive in the natural world without the assistance of technology to protect her from going into anaphylactic shock; Jenna is a human consciousness existing in a nonhuman body, and her journey of self-acceptance is dependent on her experiences with and in natural environments. Identity-formation is thus depicted as dependent on the developing subject's engagement with and subsequent collapsing of the boundaries between nature/technology and human/nonhuman.

With increasing frequency, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction depicts the nonhuman as human and the human as nonhuman; it is becoming difficult to discern the boundary between the natural and the unnatural. It is through the exploration of and relationship with natural landscapes that permits the young adolescent protagonist to transcend of boundaries. Day et al. contend that "the female protagonists of contemporary young adult dystopias occupy liminal spaces as they seek to understand their places in the world, to claim their identities, and to live their lives on their own terms" (3). The adolescent protagonist questions their own 'humanness' from such liminal spaces; Jenna, Pressia and Zoe are recognisably human yet they are also nonhuman – Jenna for her synthetic body, Pressia for her physical attributes, and Zoe for the chip that controls her emotions and thoughts. The use of such characters as focalisers aligns readers with the nonhuman subject position, making it possible for the reader to challenge the boundaries that exist in their own world.

The Dome Space

The construction of habitable space for humans in a dystopian landscape literally separates the adolescent subject from nature and natural landscapes. Such a construction demands separation from 'the outside' as a condition of survival in the dystopian setting. Nikolajeva suggests that "[g]eographically, a dystopian society is necessarily isolated from the rest of the world; it is an enclave . . . The implication is that the citizens are kept in ignorance about the ways and habits outside of their own community" (*Power, Voice and Subjectivity* 75). Separation from the outside world, as depicted in *Glitch*, results in the characters developing a fear of what lies beyond the familiar home space. The Community is a subterranean structure of several levels. Citizens are encouraged to report "anomalous" behaviour observed in others, and Regulators, Monitors, and cameras throughout the Community ensure constant surveillance of its citizens. The constant surveillance in the Community is reminiscent of the panopticon, in that its purpose is control and order. Victoria Flanagan contends that young adult novels "construct the surveillance subject as fragmented and necessarily plural, thereby engaging with a posthuman model of subjectivity" (*Technology and Identity* 149). Zoe is constantly concerned about being reported for deviant behaviour, especially as she is not able to control when she glitches and becomes a fully aware individual.

The use of first person narration in the novel allows the reader to sympathise with Zoe's anxiety when it comes to protecting herself, and to understand Zoe's fear of discovery if she does not feign compliance. Zoe perceives herself as the threat, reflecting: "The Community was the safest place that ever existed. The only danger in this world was me" (Anastasiu 13). Zoe perceives herself as a threat to the Community because of her glitching; however, it is Zoe's humanity that is being suppressed by the Community. Zoe describes a moment when a young child nearly falls on the train tracks, and she is unable to help because to do so risks exposure (21). The danger to the Community is not that Zoe is glitching, but that the Community has made it impossible for Citizens to possess the 'humanity' to save a life.

The dome space in young adult dystopian fiction ultimately functions to oppress the individual despite its appearances of protecting its citizens. As I explored in chapter one, the dome space functions similarly to the home space in such narratives. The departure from the home space, as I previously examined, represents a departure from a space that is hostile and oppressive for the adolescent protagonist. Similarly, the dome space represents a community that rejects the nonconforming adolescent. Like the home space, the adolescent protagonist does not return to the dome space with a changed perspective, ready to be a functioning member of the society they initially rejected (or that rejected them). Instead, the adolescent seeks to establish a society that embraces the individual, rather than expecting the individual to conform to established norms. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the society that has been separated from the hostile 'outside' world functions as a microcosm of the twenty-first century's institutions. The seemingly utopic space is revealed as a dystopia because it demands conformity. The representation of the dome space enables the adolescent reader to consider and challenge the expectations and assumptions society places on the adolescent.

The Community functions as a heterotopia of confinement, a space made compulsory because, from Zoe's perspective, the Surface is uninhabitable and the Community is the only space safe for human habitation. Thus when Zoe goes to the Surface the reader shares her terror for the 'deadly' outside air. The description of "tumors . . . Boiling skin. Slow, painful deaths" (Anastasiu 43) ensures the reader understands the significance of Zoe's transition into the world beyond the Community.

As a heterotopia of confinement, to leave the Community is to defy the control the Community has over Zoe. Roberta Seelinger Trites argues:

When ideologies in YA novels focus specifically on government, they tend to convey to adolescents that they are better served by accepting than by rejecting the social institutions with which they must live. In that sense, the

underlying agenda of many YA novels is to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance. (27)

While such an agenda of indoctrination is apparent in the narratives discussed here, encouraging adolescent subjects to rebel against the government and its institutions is a common trope in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly as it is typically because of the government and its institutions that the adolescent protagonist is deprived of agency. Day et al. argue

adolescent women protagonists . . . both recognize their liminal situations and, over time, use their in-between positions as a means for resistance and rebellion against the social orders that seek to control them. (3-4)

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction encourages rebellion yet also enforces a degree of social acceptance. In Zoe's case, leaving the Community is defiance against the government, yet this is only after it is exposed as corrupt and therefore necessitating rebellion.

Adolescent defiance functions similarly in *Pure* as Partridge's fear of the outside world manifests itself when he prepares to leave the Dome. Like the Community in *Glitch*, the Pures have inculcated a fear of what exists beyond the Dome that protected inhabitants from the Detonations and now protects them from the wastes and the wretches that inhabit it. Also similar is the revelation that the institutions designed to protect the individual – represented by the dome community – are corrupt.

In contrast to the first person narrative and single point of view offered in *Glitch*, the use of third person narration and alternating points of view in *Pure* present the reader with insight into multiple characters' perspectives of the outside world. By the time Partridge plans to leave the Dome, the reader is already familiar with the world beyond, having experienced it through Pressia's perspective. According to Partridge, the world beyond the Dome is

a land filled with wretches, most of whom were too stupid or too stubborn to join the Dome. Or they were sick in the head, criminally insane, virally compromised – already institutionalized . . . Now most of the wretches who survived are atrocities, deformed beyond human recognition, perversions of their previous life-forms. In class, they’ve been shown pictures, stills frozen from ashfogged video footage. Will he be able to survive out there in the deadly environment among the violent wretches? (Baggott 66-67)

As a heterotopic space, the Dome exists to protect its inhabitants from the “deadly environment” outside. However, the Dome is also recognisable as a social institution, a place governed by surveillance and regulation. There is a paradox in Partridge’s fear that the wretches are those who were “already institutionalized”, as the Dome is recognisably an institution very much representative of the panopticon in its use of surveillance and institutionalisation of gender roles and gender expectations.

Partridge initially perceives the world beyond the Dome as a heterotopia of confinement – a place that functions, as Sarah K. Cantrell summarises, as “spaces that conceal the so-called unsightly from public view, since in Foucault’s analysis these spaces house the sexually active, the imprisoned, the mentally ill, or the dead” (198). There is irony in this, too, as the Dome is recognisably a space in which its inhabitants are confined yet Partridge perceives that it is the world beyond this Dome that is, instead, “institutionalized”. Partridge’s fear of the “deadly environment” and “violent wretches” is, unlike Zoe’s fear of the “toxic” Surface, not misplaced. *Pure* begins with a prologue in which the Dome is identified as governing not only the Pures inside it, but also the wretches outside. The prologue is presented as a story told to Pressia by her grandfather, using the pronoun ‘you’ to position the reader as Pressia. The final line of the message from the Dome is “[f]or now, we watch from afar, benevolently” (Baggott 2); if not for the adverb “benevolently”, the idea of being “watch[ed] from afar” could be considered negatively as voyeurism.

Beginning the novel with a story not of the Detonations, but of the Dome's message to the wretches delivered by "some kind of air mission" (Baggott 1) alludes to the control that the Dome has over both Pures and wretches. Furthermore, it emphasises the role of the Dome and the significance of surveillance in the narrative. Trites argues that "in the adolescent novel, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are" (3), and it is in this way that the world 'outside' offers a heterotopic space in which the protagonists may interrogate the society from which they have departed. Fears of this outside world are indoctrinated in the protagonists as a mode of control over their possible transgression. Leaving the security of a known, albeit oppressive, environment is motivated by Zoe's need to escape being reported as anomalous, Partridge's desire to find his mother, and Lyda's desire to help and possibly marry Partridge. Such motivations are, in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, integral to the adolescent protagonist departing from an oppressive, controlling environment to an environment in which there is greater potential for the interrogation of subjectivity and development of agency. Moreover, they are motivations that send them into the world beyond the dome.

The first chapter of *Pure* is told from Pressia's point of view, thus the reader is already familiar with the dangers that lie beyond the Dome. Pressia's perspective contrasts with Partridge's fears, which focus more on the types of people he may encounter. To Partridge, the "deadly environment" is secondary in significance to the "violent wretches". The reader, however, knows this expectation to be false. Partridge's anticipated experience of the outside constructs the space to be hostile and dangerous; while the reader knows this to be true from previously experiencing the outside world through Pressia's perspective, the reader also knows that Partridge's fears are misplaced.

In contrast to Partridge's preparation to venture beyond the Dome, Lyda's departure is forced upon her and thus little preparation time is granted. Lyda's entry into the outside world is compulsory, made so because of her 'deviation' which places her in a vulnerable position. Lyda is promised an escort and the possibility of returning to the Dome after completing her mission:

“We have a plan and it requires your participation,” Willux says. “You’re going out.”

“Where?”

“Out of the Dome to the other side.”

“Out of the Dome?” It’s a death sentence. She won’t be able to breathe the air. She’ll be attacked. The wretches will rise up, rape her, and kill her. Outside the Dome, the trees have eyes and teeth. The ground swallows girls who have any bit of their human shape left. They are burned alive at stakes and feasted on. This is where she’s going. Out. (Baggott 366)

The repetition of “Out of the Dome” establishes not only Lyda’s disbelief as to where she must go, but also her fear of the world outside the Dome. Lyda fears both the environment and its inhabitants. To Lyda, there is nothing hospitable or potentially redeeming about the outside world; “the wretches will rise up, rape her, and kill her” and “the trees have eyes and teeth”. The trees, in this description, are not personified – the reader is already well aware that the fusion of human bodies to organic and artificial objects is common in the wastes, and some trees do, indeed, have eyes and teeth.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction tends to represent initial relationships with the world beyond the dome as influenced by the explicit separation of the characters from the natural landscapes. In exploring the depiction of natural environments in such narratives, it is also necessary to examine representations of the urban environment, as the developing subject’s experiences with these two environments are typically inter-dependent. Relating to one environment often relies on the experience of another, as indicated by Michael Bennett and David Teague who argue

[i]f we acknowledge that the ethical impetus behind ecocriticism is about analysing our relationships with, and representation of, the environment, then it surely must turn its attention to the built environment as well as the

‘natural’, if only to notice that the natural, the rural and the pastoral, come into being as such when they are contrasted with the unnatural, the city or the urban. (75)

Further to Bennet and Teague’s argument for contrasting the natural (rural and pastoral) and unnatural (city and urban), there is also an opportunity to perceive the contrast in natural/unnatural representations of the posthuman subject.

In *Glitch*, the representation of both urban and natural environments are indicative of emerging representational trends in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. The urban environment is described as “monstrous” and awful while the natural environment is “colourful” and awe-inspiring. Zoe’s first experience of the Surface is with an urban environment. In addition to fears about the toxicity of the Surface, Zoe is immediately overwhelmed by the space and lack of clearly defined walls and boundaries. The first-person narrative ensures Zoe’s perception of the Surface evokes the overwhelming nature of the experience:

There was so much space.

Huge, horrible open space, interrupted only by giant steel buildings jutting upward . . . I’d lived my entire life going from room to room, tunnel to tunnel . . . I could always reach out a hand to find a wall, ceiling, or another subject. Here I reached out and I touched nothing. (Anastasiu 51-52)

Such a response to the open space is antithetical to what may be expected of Zoe’s response to the outside world. Instead of being in awe of the open space, Zoe experiences something akin to agoraphobia and she experiences a panic attack.

The defamiliarisation of the city suggests to the reader that the urban landscape is an undesirable space, regardless of what kind of place one has left in order to enter the urban environment. The “giant steel buildings” are reminiscent of skyscrapers; however, Zoe’s description of the buildings “jutting upward” suggest a violent, grotesque element to their

stature, particularly in their relationship to the expanse of the sky, which is described as “beautiful and horrible all at the same time” (52). Such defamiliarisation may cause the reader to question the urban landscape in which they themselves reside, and challenge their own concept of space.

The representation of the “beautiful and horrible” urban landscape contrasts with Zoe’s first experience of the natural environment, the description of which emphasises the colour green. Zoe describes it as “the most colorful sight I had ever seen . . . So much green” (76). There is contradiction in the description of the natural environment as “colorful” as the adjective “green” is used repeatedly, and few other colours are mentioned. Carroll suggests that “[o]ver the years, attitudes towards wilderness have changed dramatically. To the modern, eco-friendly mind, wildness is attractive” (76). The earlier perspective of the urban landscape suggests a wildness and savagery with its “monstrous uneven teeth”; however, Zoe’s description of the wilderness reflects such an eco-friendly perspective. Zoe’s experience of “so much space” (51) in the urban environment is juxtaposed with her experience of “so much green” (76) in the natural environment.

In the natural environment, the vast space of sky is filtered through the surrounds of trees and bushes; it is literally the “green” that helps Zoe accept the green space of the natural environment in which she finds herself. While Zoe finds the urban space overwhelming to the point of having a panic attack, she finds the green space “colourful”. The urban environment is represented as threatening with its “monstrous uneven teeth” (54), yet it is the natural environment that may literally kill Zoe. Zoe’s fears of toxic exposure when she had the panic attack in the urban landscape are repeated when she experiences the same difficulty breathing once more. Zoe’s difficulty breathing in the natural environment is, however, anaphylaxis and the natural environment is a direct threat to Zoe’s life. While her response to the urban environment is emotional, her reaction to the natural environment is physical. Zoe’s anaphylaxis becomes a tool used against Zoe by the Chancellor who manipulates Adrien to replace Zoe’s immunotherapy shots with more allergens instead, ensuring that the Surface is a more deadly

option to Zoe than the offer of a place in the Community. The Chancellor explicitly threatens Zoe with the fact that “[t]he outside world is completely deadly” (288), further inhibiting her desire to escape.

The dome space is represented in these narratives as a space that separates the individual from experiencing an environment that, unlike the dome, is uncontrolled and potentially threatening. The dome space also functions to create a clear boundary between what is expected of the individual and what the individual is truly capable of achieving, if only permitted to explore beyond the dome. The landscapes that exist beyond the dome are represented as integral to the adolescent’s maturation and identity-formation. By crossing the boundary of the dome, the individual is able to challenge the boundaries that have constrained them.

Green Spaces and Identity

In chapter one, I posited that the reconceptualised home space functions as a heterotopia; green spaces often have a similar function in terms of affirming subjectivity. Green spaces offer an escape from the initially oppressive home space, particularly for Jenna (*The Adoration of Jenna Fox*) and Zoe (*Glitch*). The green space functions to validate subjectivity, particularly in settings where the adolescent subject uses the green space to escape or seek refuge from the home space. The four sub topoi identified by Carroll as representative of green space in children’s fantasy fiction – the garden, the farm, the pleasance, and the wilderness – are reconceptualised in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In *Glitch*, for example, Zoe’s brief engagement with the natural environment suggests an experience with what Carroll terms the pleasance. The pleasance is an unbounded green space “beyond the reach of the city and of civilisation” (Carroll 69) and is generally perceived as positive. Carroll describes the pleasance as “ideally suited to human habitation and the struggles and hardships presented by rough or inhospitable terrain are conspicuously absent here” (70). Similarly, the representations of the pastoral in *Pure* is subverted, and the depiction of the wilderness in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* is as a place of solace.

The oppression and control Jenna experiences are not as extreme as those experienced by the characters in *Glitch* and *Pure*, though valid nonetheless. Oppression and control result in life-or-death scenarios in *Glitch* and *Pure*; however, in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the protagonist's desire to move beyond the oppressive home space is perhaps more familiar to the young adult audience. As I argued in chapter one, in children's literature, the home space is perceived as a sanctuary to which the child returns; in young adult fiction, the home space is often reconceptualised as an oppressive space from which the adolescent must seek sanctuary. The home space may, to the adolescent reader, represent a place from which they wish to sever childish connection in order to proceed into adulthood. Other spaces, then, become more significant to the adolescent. Jenna's departure from the home space and the experience of oppression and control is represented through her desire to attend school, which, in turn, increases her exposure to experiences and relationships beyond the home space.

While the school is not a green space itself, it is a school with an emphasis on ecosystem studies (Pearson 48). The school functions as a heterotopic space within which Jenna explores the relationship between the individual and the natural world, which then informs her own identity-formation in relation to nature and the natural. When Claire drops Jenna off at the school, Jenna reassures her mother that she will be all right, fearing "she will have a last-minute change of heart, will control me in that way she does and force me back into the car just by saying my name. It is like we are both fighting for control of Jenna Fox" (65). By referring to herself in the third person, the direct allusion to "control of Jenna Fox" suggests a fragmentation of identity – there is the subject represented in the first person narrative, and the subject "Jenna Fox" that exists as a separate identity from the narrator. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that that subject "Jenna Fox" can be controlled by Claire and Jenna herself reinforces the idea of the home space being used to control and oppress the adolescent protagonist; just as the Community instils fear of the Surface in its Citizens, and the Dome educates its young inhabitants as to the dangers and violence existing outside, Jenna's experiences beyond the home space are integral to the interrogation and development of subjectivity.

In children's literature, there is a tendency to represent green space as permitting generally positive experiences; Curry notes the trend in some young adult novels to "look to the post-natural landscape not as a space of threat but as a potential space of human belonging" (42). The landscape as a "potential space of human belonging" is subverted in *Pure* in the representation of the natural landscape as being a wild, dangerous place. While Zoe and Jenna are both ultimately able to perceive the natural landscape as places of beauty and deserving of awe, the natural landscape is a place to be feared in *Pure*. Such a negative construction of the natural landscape subverts the tendency in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction to represent natural landscapes as places of sanctuary. A landscape alive with Dusts and Beasts is capable of consuming what remains of the human population. The 'natural' landscape is dangerous because of its potential to consume Pressia, rather than providing opportunity for her to revel in the natural world. There is further irony, however, in the use of the term "Deadlands" to describe the landscape that surrounds the city in which Pressia has lived since the Detonations. While the landscape is called the Deadlands, it is described as "ever so slightly alive. Occasionally, something will ripple under the surface, roaming Dusts, a creature that's become part of the earth itself" (Baggott 164).

The barren landscape and its name suggests that life is impossible in the Deadlands, yet the landscape itself is alive, and the potential for death is less connected to the fertility of the land and more relevant to those who venture into it. When Pressia is attacked by Dusts, the narrative describes the strength of the Dusts trying to pull her, and while there is description of individual Dusts taking turns to attack her, the increase in number as several appear before her leads to the description: "The earth is pulling her in" (316). The transition from describing Dusts pulling at her to grouping the Dusts as a collective "earth" in this description emphasises that it is the landscape itself that is a danger to Pressia. Descriptions of the anthropomorphic environment ensure the reader is constantly aware of the dangers inherent in the landscape. As a result of the Detonations, the earth is now a threat – literally because of the Dusts that are a part of it, and figuratively because it is no longer able to sustain crops and livestock for human consumption. Indeed, it is now the land that consumes the human.

The Dusts represent the threatening aspect of a human body becoming too enmeshed in the landscape, an interesting representation when considering the idea that humans require relationships to place and landscape in order to develop a sense of identity (J. Anderson 52). There is direct reference in the narrative to survivalists “who thought they saw the End coming, before the Detonations, and moved out into the woods [and] were swallowed into the trees” (Baggott 33). Television shows such as *Doomsday Preppers* make for both entertaining and informative viewing in the present day, with judges critiquing the survival strategies of people planning for a pending apocalypse; in *Pure*, however, those who planned on surviving by living in nature have actually been “swallowed” by the natural landscape in which they sought refuge. Their survival is now literally bound to the natural environment.

The natural world is rife with the potential for life; symbolically, nature and natural imagery represents life and renewal. The symbolic concept of nature and life/renewal is challenged in *Pure*, which depicts a landscape that literally comes alive, yet its shape and form is destructive and life-threatening. Notions of ‘mother earth’ suggest the natural world as nurturing, life-sustaining, and caring for its inhabitants. Carroll explores “how pleasure and death are intimately related in both the bounded and domesticated, and in the unbounded, wild forms of the green topos” (50); such an ‘intimate’ relationship is depicted in *Pure*. The landscape embraces both life and death; the notion of the natural environment being ‘alive’ is taken to a deeper level when such life is more than the green life of trees and fertile earth, with the life of the landscape given more physical aspects reminiscent of human and animal parts. The landscape literally *comes alive*, taking shape and form which is, ultimately, threatening to any who enter it. Lyda’s fear of the ground swallowing girls and trees with eyes and teeth present a more threatening perception of the ‘life’ of the natural environment.

The threat of the natural environment is directly experienced throughout the novel with Beasts and Dusts threatening – on more than one occasion – Pressia and her friends. The narrative explains Dusts and Beasts as hybrid creatures, the results of human life forms becoming enmeshed with the environment and animals:

Dusts are those who fused with the earth; in the city, they fused with the blasted buildings. Most of them died shortly after the Detonations . . . But some survived because they became more rock than human, and others proved they could be of use, working in conjunction with Beasts, those who fused with animals. (Baggott 33)

Such a description suggests the potential for humans to quite literally become a part of the landscape – natural or urban; however, it is to the detriment of their humanity. The tendency of Dusts and Beasts to prey on the wretches could be construed as cannibalistic if not for the perception that they are a different species to wretches, who have maintained most of their human characteristics despite the nonhuman parts that have been embedded in their bodies. The term “Dusts” may evoke natural imagery, yet there is no distinction between Dusts fused with either earth or buildings, implying that the Dusts themselves have fused with landscape, regardless of its natural or urban qualities. Humans require sustenance; the earth and buildings do not accommodate mouths or digestion capabilities. Humans are, in a sense, unable to truly become a part of the landscape because their own bodies and the requirements of such bodies do not permit it. Those who do survive “became more rock than human” suggesting that it is the *lifeless* aspect of the landscape – the rocks – that permit the human aspect to live. There is irony in such a notion, that rock has better attributes than the organic flesh and bone of humans when it comes to survival in this dystopian landscape.

The existence of the Dusts and Beasts has the potential to destabilise the hierarchical relationship between human and nonhuman, yet instead they are perceived as something ‘other’ to Pressia and the other characters. According to Nayar, critical humanism “ranks the human above the animal because it is assumed that the animal is not aware of being an animal, whereas the human is aware of her/his ‘humanness’” (11). Wretches, then, are considered to be more ‘human’ than the nonhuman Beasts and Dusts because they have retained recognisably human traits and are aware of themselves in a way that Beasts and Dusts are not – at least insofar as the audience can identify through the narrative perspectives.

Despite its brief representation in *Glitch*, the green space is most significant to Zoe's experience of the Surface, aesthetically pleasing and desirable despite its threat to her life. Through Zoe's narrative perspective, *Glitch* articulates a preference for the natural environment, made inaccessible by the oppressive manoeuvres employed by the Chancellor and the Community. Despite the aesthetic appreciation for nature, the protagonist cannot exist in nature because nature has been rendered a threat and thus it is – as the first novel in the trilogy – an unobtainable existence. Zoe must be separated from nature by inhabiting a physical place or by wearing a biohazard suit, both of which create physical barriers between the protagonist and the natural environment. Zoe's brief interaction with the natural world, however, causes Zoe to understand that the world beyond the Community is neither toxic nor oppressive of the individual. Zoe's desire for agency motivates her to leave the Community despite the potential risks.

Lawrence Buell writes that "[t]he fear of a poisoned world is increasingly pressed, debated, debunked, and reiterated" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 30). The notion of the Surface as toxic is used to control the individual in *Glitch*; however, its literal "toxicity" when it comes to Zoe's health encourages the reader to engage in what Buell refers to as "toxic discourse" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 30), as he suggests "the act of imagining it [toxification] . . . will mainly reinforce the desire to do away with it" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 54). Zoe's panic attack in the urban environment is similar to her difficulty breathing in the natural environment. The latter, however, is anaphylaxis as the natural environment is a direct threat to Zoe's life. Through Zoe's point of view, the reader experiences the fear of the urban and the beauty of the natural, and witnesses the threat of a poisoned world to an individual. Toxicity further separates Zoe from engaging with the natural environment, which potentially inhibits her ability to develop as a subject beyond the confines of the oppressive Community. Zoe's relationships with nature and interaction with natural places is limited by her body's rejection of nature and dependence on technology to facilitate her interactions with the world beyond the Community. Zoe cannot freely access the Surface and the biohazard suit

demands an element of 'purification' identifiable as a requirement of entering a heterotopic site (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 26). Zoe's dependency on the biohazard suit also presents a paradox for her maturation and growth, as technology is the cause of her literal and figurative separation from nature yet it is also the only means through which she may ultimately interact with and inhabit nature.

The experience of green space is different for Jenna. Unlike Zoe, Jenna is encouraged to experience nature and the natural environment. The overgrown, unkempt garden in which Jenna first attempts to feed the birds with Mr Bender is reminiscent of a bounded garden turned unbounded pleasure. The forest could be represented as wilderness; however, it is represented as pleasure – the only threat in the forest is the human element, represented by the character Dane. Such a space is appealing for an individual seeking escape from oppression, and it is Jenna's engagement with the green spaces surrounding the Cotswold Cottage that is represented as integral to her identity-formation.

Pearson makes overt references to the significance of nature and the natural environment to the development of subjectivity with frequent references to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Jenna's first experience of school is defined by her surprisingly detailed knowledge of the text, and her constant corrections of her classmate's discussion on *Walden*. Jenna emphasises Thoreau's experience at Walden being "a private journey as much as a public one. He was searching for his personal essence as much as he was making a political statement" (Pearson 72). Jenna's summary of Thoreau's experience directly relates to Jenna's own experience with nature and the natural environment. Jenna consciously draws parallels between her own experiences of the natural environment to that of Thoreau's, observing that Mr Bender's house "reminds me of Thoreau's Walden" (175), suggesting it is Mr Bender who shares in Thoreau's desire to seek "his personal essence" in nature. Lily's failed plans to move to Tuscany are acknowledged as "Lily's own little Walden never realized" (189). Such references emphasise that every character engages, in some way, with nature and the natural environment, and such engagement is represented as ideal. Jenna's recognition that other characters in the novel have

their own way of engaging with the natural lead to her own desire to engage with nature, and to define herself as 'human' and 'natural'. That each person might have their own Walden also reinforces the concept of green spaces as heterotopic spaces, in which the subject may consider notions of human, natural, and, ultimately, their own subjectivity.

Intertextuality functions in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* to emphasise the connection between nature and human identity. However, the added aspect of technology – as represented by Jenna herself – complicates this dynamic and allows for the interrogation of the conventional relationships between nature, technology, and identity. While the intertextual references to Thoreau's own journey and search for "personal essence" suggest that Thoreau's experiences in nature are similar to Jenna's, Jenna's perception of herself as 'other' leads to a deeper interrogation of the role nature performs in identity-formation. Jenna's consideration of nature in her definition of identity culminates in her discovery of a 'backup' kept on a computer, forcing her to question the singularity/plurality of identity. Seeking refuge from the discovery in the forest, Jenna questions, "Which is the real me? The one in the closet or the one here on the forest floor?" (Pearson 197). Jenna establishes that "the real me" is the latter because it is that version of Jenna Fox that possesses memories and experiences not stored on the backup.

The cyborg is perhaps the most recognisable figure when one considers the posthuman body. Part human and part machine, the cyborg represents the possibilities for the human body when merged with technology. Nayar suggests that "[t]he age of the integral/integrated, bounded body and identity is over: all are multiples, fluid, networked and capable of morphing into, or connecting with, some other body/ies as never before" (55). While a part of Jenna's identity-formation is largely influenced by her perception of her 'posthuman' body, it is embracing this body as a site in which her identity as Jenna Fox can exist that allows Jenna to develop a sense of identity that transcends the perception of her body as 'unnatural'. The overt use of a cyborg figure in the characterisation of Jenna ensures that Jenna's interrogation of subjectivity engages with notions of both the human and posthuman subjects.

A key aspect of Jenna's experiences with and relationship to nature and the natural environment lies in her perception of herself as something 'other' or unnatural. Throughout the novel, she questions the very definition of human and considers her identity as a human within a *posthuman* body; Jenna's questions align her identity as human with the natural, and challenge her consideration of her body as unnatural. That the birds do not come to eat from her hand is perceived by Jenna as validation that there is something *unnatural* about her body. These are hands that she describes as being something perfect yet not entirely 'right':

I bring them [her fingers] together, fingertip to fingertip, like a steeple. Each one perfect in appearance. But something is not . . . right. Something that I still have no word for. It is a dull twisting that snakes through me. Is this a tangled feeling that everyone my age feels? Or is it different? Am I different? I slide my steepled fingers, slowly, watching them interlace. Trying to interlace, like a clutched desperate prayer, but again, I feel like the hands I am lacing are not my own, like I have borrowed them from a twelve-fingered monster. And yet, when I count them, yes, there are ten. Ten exquisitely perfect, beautiful fingers. (Pearson 83-84)

Jenna's perception of her fingers as being "not my own" and instead "borrowed from a twelve-fingered monster" suggest that there is a disconnection between Jenna's identity and her body. Jenna feels displaced from the body she inhabits, an experience she queries as to whether or not it is a result of her own difference or a universal experience for adolescents. The ambiguity as to why Jenna feels different draws direct attention to the similarities in experiences shared by teenagers and the posthuman figure. While I explore the relationship between the body and subjectivity in more detail in chapter five, it is notable that Jenna's acceptance of herself is heavily dependent on her perception and ultimate acceptance of her body as a part of her *natural* identity, despite the unnatural aspects of its construction.

The “steeped fingers” and the “clutched desperate prayer” draws upon the religious references made throughout the novel by Lily. Jenna’s grandmother is often depicted praying, crossing herself, and – early in the novel – meets with a local priest, Father Rico, both of whom are members of the World Seed Preservation Organization, “a group committed to preserving original species of plants” (38). Just as she seeks to preserve “pure” plant seeds, Lily also seeks to preserve the original Jenna and struggles to recognise Jenna as the *real* Jenna Fox. When Lily takes Jenna to the mission, Jenna describes parts of a conversation she overhears between Father Rico and Lily:

Their voices rise and some words drift across the expanse of the courtyard.

“Pure.”

“Unadulterated.”

“Original seed.”

“Untouched DNA.” (38)

Lily’s desire to promote the “pure” and “untouched” plant species over those that have been engineered parallels her relationship with Jenna. A huge impact on Jenna’s existence is the consequence of the Aureus epidemic that killed a quarter of the world’s population (37). The epidemic was a result of antibiotics being overused, leading to the development of a deadly strain of bacteria (37). The potential consequences of ‘going too far’ in human dependence on science and technology is a dominant theme in the novel. Lily’s resistance to accepting Jenna as her granddaughter, and as Jenna Fox, suggests that Jenna may be denied recognition as a *human* should the world become aware of her existence.

The Adoration of Jenna Fox emphasises the significance of the natural environment for the adolescent protagonist’s development through these dialogical discourses. Allys’ emphasis on the importance of the natural environment and criticism of the changes the landscape has undergone as a result of human interference offers dialogue in which Jenna is forced to question

the nature of what she is. Allys educates Jenna about the Federal Science Ethics Board (FSEB) and medical advancements such as Bio Gel, and clarifies that “[o]nly biodigital enhancement up to forty-nine percent is allowed to restore some lost function and that’s it . . . by restricting how much can be replaced or enhanced, the FSEB knows you are more human than lab creation. We don’t want a lot of half-human lab pets crawling all around the world, do we?” (Pearson 95-96). The idea that the FSEB is “trying to preserve our humanity” (96) drives much of Jenna’s identity-formation when it comes to interrogating the notion of being human when she is, as a percentage, ten percent her original self. Much of Jenna’s interrogation of being human is dependent on her relationship with nature, and her acceptance of herself as human relies on perceiving herself as natural.

In *Glitch*, however, Zoe’s development is suspended at the end of the novel to allow for her development to continue in a further two novels. What is explored in *Glitch* is Zoe’s realisation of emotion and creativity, both uniquely human qualities that are suppressed by the V-chip implanted in all Citizens’ brains. Technology suppresses the qualities that make an individual ‘human’; emotions are perceived as unnecessary and blamed for the wars that led the destruction of the Surface. Zoe is forced to hide the pictures she draws because they are physical evidence of her anomalous behaviour. However, Zoe’s powers of telekinesis are perceived as having evolved as a result of adaptation in response to the V-chips, as Adrien explains: “We’ve started developing abilities that get around their programming, making neural connections to subvert the hardware” (Anastasiu 89). While the notion that the telekinesis is a ‘natural’ evolution, it is also – by the third novel – the only way Zoe can survive in the natural world, by using telekinesis to control her allergic reaction to nature. In the novel *Glitch* this ability is not yet realised; however, the necessity of her ‘evolved’ power in existing in nature is a significant part of Zoe’s ultimate development in the series as a whole. *Glitch* concludes with the symbolic departure from the Community with an accompanying sunrise, Zoe clad in a biohazard suit and face mask to protect her from her allergies. Despite this, she perceives the sunrise as beautiful and accepts it as a symbol of hope.

In contrast, engaging with 'nature' is rendered virtually impossible in *Pure* because nature is no longer an idyllic place with which the developing subject may engage and find respite or answers to their existential questions. Instead, the landscape is hostile and dangerous. Of particular significance is the representation of the pastoral in *Pure*, which has the storybook motifs recognisable in the pastoral sub-topos identified by Carroll, but it is soon rendered hostile to the individual. Carroll acknowledges the tendency to romanticise the farm in children's literature, describing the farm as "a bounded space brought under human control . . . the antithesis of the barren and hostile wilderness" (60). Such a space is described from Pressia's point of view as she perceives "farmlands surrounded by more Deadlands" (Baggott 265). Juxtaposed with the hostility of the Deadlands, the farmlands are perceived as a controlled, cultivated space. Pressia describes "lush fields" (265) and "grazing fields" (266); however, there is something 'other' about these farmlands. Pressia's descriptions identify first the pastoral ideal, then identify how the farmlands do not conform to this ideal:

There are lush fields, not exactly windswept wheat, but something darker, heavier, dotted with what seem to be small yellow flowers, rows of barren staked stalks, and other greenery heavy with unidentifiable purplish fruit . . . There are grazing fields of bulky animals that are shaggier than cows, with longer snouts, hornless. They teeter slowly on hooves out near a stand of greenhouses. (265-266)

The description establishes that the farmlands are not the pastoral ideal by including references to the "unidentifiable purplish fruit" and "bulky animals". The animals are not able to be named, but Pressia's point of view clarifies to the reader that they are *not* cows.

Despite the defamiliarisation of the pastoral ideal Ingership and his wife are insistent that the pastoral ideal is maintained. There is an element of performativity in the representation of the farm and farmhouse. Pressia describes: "The road twists along, leading to a yellow A-frame house and, a bit off the road, a red barn built up and painted brightly as if nothing had ever gone

wrong. It's so astonishing that she can barely believe it" (266). The yellow A-frame house and the red barn are images that are representative of a pastoral motif that could be portrayed in any children's picture book. Pressia's astonishment at the sight could be construed as a typical 'city-dweller' reaction to the pastoral; however, the colour of the barn exists "as if nothing had ever gone wrong", establishing that such an image is far from the norm within this dystopian setting. Pressia compares what she sees to her experience in the city where people keep their plants inside to prevent theft, and the inability to sustain an animal for eventual eating when people are struggling to sustain themselves.

Despite all the food Pressia sees growing, little of it is edible. Carroll suggests that farming "exemplifies not only a struggle against the wilderness but a battle for growth and renewal" (61), and Ingership's farm represents the desire for the earth to once again sustain crops and livestock. While farming has traditionally been a practice involving dependency on the natural environment to cooperate with the harvest and slaughter of crops and animals respectively, Ingership explains that agricultural practices have been adapted in response to the changed environment, particularly in terms of "tinkering in the coding" (Baggott 266). The ultimate irony, however, is that most of the food can be consumed, but has little nutritional value.

Pressia eats oysters with Ingership, a food typically associated with luxury and special occasions. Soon after eating the oysters, Pressia becomes ill and Ingership tells her "I invited you to try all of the food . . . But I didn't promise you could keep it. Tell me it wasn't worth it! Tell me!" (Baggott 283). Ingership then demands of his wife "Get me to the bucket! I'm burning, darling. I can feel it in my limbs now. I'm burning bright! Burning!" (284). Ingership's consumption of the oysters is perceived by Ingership as a luxury that comes with a feverish, vomiting consequence. That Ingership is fully aware of the consequences of eating the oysters yet eats them anyway suggests there is a metaphor in this experience when it comes to considering the consumption of the earth's resources and the devastating effect over-consumption has had on the environment. The idea, then, of the farm as "a battle for growth and renewal" is no longer able to exist in this setting because Ingership's agricultural pursuits in

service to the Dome are complicated by the Detonations' impact on the landscapes and its ability to sustain crops and livestock. Not only is the altered natural environment made hostile by the presence of Beasts and Dusts, it is also hostile to the possibilities of agricultural success.

Glitch and *Pure* are distinctly dystopian with their overtly oppressive societies, hostile landscapes, and life-or-death scenarios that force the protagonists to challenge and question their understanding of the world, each other, and themselves. Both of these novels clearly utilise a society separated from the 'outside' as a mode through which control and oppression are directly challenged. The control and oppression in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* is more subtle, and the world is certainly not as hostile in comparison to the Dusts and Beasts of *Pure* or the potentially toxic rain in *Glitch*. While all three novels are set in the future, the future imagined in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* is more aligned with the reader's context, particularly as it is more akin to an ecological utopia, which "insists that humans should treat and use the natural surroundings with care: contact with nature is considered to be of great importance" (de Geus 22). The representation of a more realistic future makes it easier for the reader to empathise with Jenna, as Jenna's development of subjectivity – like that of the typical Western adolescent today – is influenced by her parents, friends, and society. Most significantly, the protagonist is encouraged to foster a positive relationship with nature. Ostry argues that "[e]cological utopias . . . bring teenagers the unmediated experience that helps them face reality and take responsibility – and grow up. In nature, teenagers find the unmediated, raw experience that cities cannot give them" ("On the Brink" 106). While the protagonists in *Glitch* and *Pure* are encouraged to fear nature and the natural environment as a mode of control, Jenna is instead encouraged to understand the negative impact humans have had on nature, and consequently assist in restoring nature to its original – unaltered by scientific intervention – form. The concept of restoring nature to make amends would resonate with the contemporary adolescent reader, as environmental discourse often reiterates humans as both the destroyer and saviour of nature and the natural world.

The environmental discourse in the novel is made explicit through Jenna's attendance at a school with an ecosystems focus, and particularly reinforced through her relationships with Lily and Allys. Consequently, Jenna's experiences of nature and the natural world are not immediately negative; while she has been warned about straying from the house, the natural world is not represented as a direct threat to her. Nature and the natural environment is presented to the reader exclusively from Jenna's point of view. Much of her internalised concerns and fears are contemplated when Jenna is outside in the natural environment or reflecting on the natural environment and its relation to her identity-formation and acceptance of her body. Foucault identifies heterotopias as having "a function in relation to all the space that remains" ("Of Other Spaces" 27) and may have a role "to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" ("Of Other Spaces" 27). In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, the green space functions as such a "perfect", "meticulous" heterotopic space in juxtaposition to the "messy", "jumbled" internalised space that is Jenna's subjectivity. Jenna is able to develop a sense of identity through engaging with green space.

There is little demarcation between the house's garden and the overgrown garden in which Jenna encounters her first friend and where the birds, which become a recurring motif in the novel, gather. Aside from the "heavy wooden door" (Pearson 18) that separates the house from the garden, there is little boundary preventing Jenna from entering the natural space. Venturing from the house, the only boundary is the word "careful": "*Careful*. The word comes again, like a hedge in front of me, but pushing from behind, too" (19). The comparison of the word to a hedge indicates its function as a boundary, a preventative measure to keep Jenna from straying too far from the house. Hedges can function as a natural fence or boundary in a garden, thus the word "careful" is given a tangible image, one the reader associates with nature. Curry draws on arguments from Naess to summarise "[i]dentification with the natural world . . . serves to allow humanity to perceive no boundaries between the human and nonhuman worlds, and thus to treat defence of the environment as self-defence" (161). The breaching of the

boundary between garden and wilderness is depicted as a conscious action by Jenna. Despite the invisible boundary conjured by the word “careful”, Jenna is determined to breach the boundary of the wilderness/garden, which is representative of Jenna’s developing confidence in pushing the boundaries her mother has placed upon her. Jenna initiates a relationship with nature as a result of this boundary-breach, which leads to Jenna identifying with the natural world. Jenna’s relationship to the natural world subsequently results in a discourse that challenges and ultimately dislodges the boundaries between human and nonhuman.

Taking Flight: natural motifs

A recurring motif that is adopted in both *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *Pure* is that of flight and creatures of flight, specifically butterflies and birds. Maria Mies summarises “[t]he demand for self-determination, for autonomy with regard to our bodies and our lives, is one of the fundamental demands of the women’s movement” (218). Self-determination and autonomy are themes in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction that are often linked to the female characters whose bodies take on physical features beyond their control; specifically, nonhuman aspects such as the doll’s head fused to Pressia’s hand, and the manufactured body into which Jenna’s mind has been uploaded. There is inherent symbolism in motifs of flight, particularly in considering notions of freedom in relation to subjectivity. The use of birds and butterflies as symbols for female protagonists in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction contrasts with the technological aspects of the dystopian setting and characters represented in such narratives. Feeding the birds becomes a recurring motif in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*. The connection between nature and subjectivity is distinct in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, and Jenna’s conscious interrogation of subjectivity allows for the posthuman figure to define what it means to be human. There is a distinctly humanist conclusion to the novel, and Jenna’s identification of herself as ‘human’ despite her ‘posthuman’ body represents the tensions that exist in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as a result of the changing perceptions of and relationships between people, nature, and technology.

The birds come to represent Jenna's developing relationship to the natural world in synchronicity with her development of subjectivity. The birds initially reject Jenna's attempts to touch or feed them, and Jenna comes to perceive this rejection as a consequence of her status as 'unnatural':

He hands me the tub of seed, and I scoop out a handful. I put my palm out and wait. They chirp from the nearby jacaranda but don't budge from their perches. I thrust my palm out farther. We wait and are silent. I am careful not to move. I *am* patient.

They don't come.

"Maybe they're full," Mr Bender says. "You come back anytime, Jenna, and give it another try."

...

"I will," I tell him. He stands and throws his few remaining seeds into the boxwood. A ruckus of chirps follows. They weren't full. (Pearson 24)

The positioning of the short sentence "They don't come." is visually isolated from the rest of the text as a single-sentence paragraph. The placement emphasises the significance of the sentence, and the implicit suggestion that Jenna interprets it as a personal rejection. Jenna's interpretation of the birds' reaction to her is reiterated with the short sentence: "They weren't full." which concludes Jenna's initial experience with the birds and her first experience leaving the house and entering the natural environment. Jenna's experience feeding the birds affirms Jenna's belief that there is something 'other' about her. Jenna feels out of place in the Cotswold Cottage and in the woods that surround it, reflecting that she feels there is something not quite right about her existence at all. While Mr Bender is welcoming and encouraging of Jenna, the birds' apparent rejection of Jenna suggests a discord between the 'unnatural' body and the natural environment. Jenna's understanding of the situation is later revealed as a false interpretation, as Jenna realises that the birds are not as discerning as she first thought.

As Jenna constructs her identity, she comes to understand why the birds rejected her; however, it is not until her concept of identity as something rigid and clearly defined is challenged by Mr Bender that she is accepted by the birds, and thus able to accept herself:

We reach the circular clearing where he feeds the birds. "Here," he says as he removes his jacket. "I've been borrowing Clayton Bender's identity for thirty years. Let me share it with you for a few minutes." He places his jacket on my shoulders and then takes my palm and rubs it with his own. "Turns out that birds have a better sense of smell than most people thought."

We sit on the log bench and he fills my palm with seed, and even though it is only for the briefest moment, a sparrow lands and flies away with a beak full.

"See? They're used to you now. Next time you won't need me."

I decide that sometimes definitions are wrong. Even if they're written in a dictionary. Identities aren't always separate and distinct. Sometimes they *are* wrapped up with others. (Pearson 221-222)

The birds' acceptance of Jenna is assisted by Mr Bender's 'loaned identity'. The transferral of identity perhaps signifies the over-dramatising of the search for identity, as Jenna realises the ease with which she could have been accepted all along, if only she would accept herself. The novel ends with Jenna explaining that "today, like each time they have landed on my hand for the past two hundred years, I wonder at the weight of a sparrow" (265). In being accepted by nature, Jenna is able to accept who she is, and eventually society can accept her, too.

Birds and creatures of flight are also a recurring motif in *Pure*. Pressia creates small insects and creatures from recycled metal and wire, recreating nature with artificial media. Pressia's preference for the butterfly represents her appreciation for the beautiful and delicate, elements that struggle to exist in a world of "ash and dust" (Baggott 1). Pressia is nearing the age of

conscription for Operation Sacred Revolution (OSR), a militia that rules the outside world and seeks to overthrow the Dome. The novel begins with Pressia and her grandfather planning for her concealment from the OSR. The butterflies Pressia makes are flightless, perhaps symbolic of her pending confinement to the barbershop. Pressia's creations are juxtaposed with the wire bird Lyda makes that is exhibited in a student art show (70); Pressia's metal and wire insects give her an opportunity to create something beautiful in a bleak environment and ultimately can be used to barter for food and other necessities.

In the Dome, Lyda's wire bird has no practical function beyond the aesthetic, and Partridge is condescending at the suggestion the boys learn about art: "what good would it do us [boys] to know how to make a wire bird?" (71). Partridge's perception of wire birds being useless and impractical to survival is incongruous with Pressia's experience. In contrast, Pressia's knowledge of art and the making of wire insects is, for her, a matter of survival because she is able to trade the sculptures for food.

Lyda's confinement following Partridge's escape from the Dome is frequently defined by her experience of an artificial window. She refers often to the window when her perspective is narrated; however, the first description of the space and the window focuses on the fake window and the possibility that a bird has "fluttered by": "The fake sunlight image of the window flickers as if birds have fluttered by. Is it part of the program? Why would she even think of birds passing by a window? There are so few birds in the Dome. Occasionally one will escape an aviary. But this is rare. Were the birds from her imagination? Some deep recess of memory?" (109). The notion of birds in an aviary 'escaping' into the Dome is another use of irony in the novel, drawing overt attention to the fact that the inhabitants of the Dome are themselves caged. The flicker of a possible bird flying by at the fake window is most likely a programming error or an imagined flicker; however, the recurring motif of birds throughout the novel serves many purposes depending on the characters.

In Lyda's case, Lyda is confined in what is recognisable as a mental institution, thus birds symbolise her captivity – even if Lyda were to leave the room, she is still confined to the Dome itself. Lyda is forced to consider Partridge's fate, questioning: "Is he lost? Is he gone? Like an aviary bird?" (111). When she finally leaves the Dome, Lyda sees "something cutting across that sky. A real bird" (377). Lyda's previous inability to define whether or not she was seeing a bird or a programming error in the fake window contrasts with her certainty that she is seeing "a real bird" once outside the Dome. The image of a bird suggests hope and freedom, both in terms of finding Partridge and in terms of leaving the confinement of the mental institution. Yet this is undermined by her hope to return to the Dome, which undercuts the freedom of "a real bird" in flight when compared to the possibility – and her desire for it to be realised – of returning to the Dome after achieving her goal.

Confinement and the image of caged birds is also used when Pressia, Bradwell and Partridge meet the Mothers in the Meltlands, who distance themselves from men and refer to men instead as "Deaths". In the novel, the Feminine Feminists, an extreme feminism movement, has resulted in an emphasis on the female in a domestic role, represented by the distinct boundaries between the female and the male in the Dome. Yet outside the Dome, the Mothers in the Meltlands recognise the oppression of their lives before the Detonations for what it was, thus the referral to men as Deaths. Our Good Mother likens herself and other women to birds in her description: "While we banged the shutters of our homes like trapped birds and beat our heads on prison walls, we watched them" (Baggott 322). The use of simile in comparing the women to "trapped birds" correlates to Lyda's entrapment in the Dome. Lyda and other females in the Dome are living the oppressed lives previously experienced by the Mothers; however, Our Good Mother makes distinct reference to the fact that women forced to live under such oppression are "trapped birds".

There are no *truly* pure humans in *Pure* – the Pures themselves are genetically modified and the wretches are fused to other organisms and objects. The blurring of boundaries between human/animal/machine/object is suggested in the bird names given to human characters. The

very names “Partridge” and “Sedge” are direct references to types of birds; a partridge is a non-migratory gamebird (“Grey Partridge Facts”) yet the image of a plump partridge that does not wander too far from home contrasts with Partridge as a character, who runs away from the Dome in search of his mother. His brother, Sedge, may be named for the sedge warbler, a small bird that migrates between the UK and Africa (“Sedge Warbler”). The term ‘sedge’ is also a collective noun for a group of bitterns, herons, or cranes (“Collective Nouns for Birds”). As a collective noun, the name “Sedge” is an accurate representation for a character who has been genetically altered with aspects from several animals.

Sedge is initially believed to be dead, but is later revealed to be a part of the Special Forces, and he is described as almost unrecognisably human. Ingership describes the Special Forces soldiers as “[i]ncredible specimens. More animal than human but perfectly controlled” (Baggott 282). Unlike the wretches, the fusion of the Special Forces soldiers to weapons and animals is controlled compared to the random fusions that have impacted the bodies of the wretches. The description of the Special Forces soldiers contrasts with the earlier description of the wretches as “mutated”, suggesting that intentional fusion is acceptable because the special forces soldiers can be controlled, while the fusions that took place in the wretches have become mutations. Distinct species have become indiscernible; humans as a species are no longer ‘pure’, but a congeries of the organic and artificial. The dominant aspect defines a person as human, Beast, or Dust, or animal if there is no human aspect to the organism. Whether a human has become a physical assemblage of human, animal, and machine or a genetic assemblage of hawk vision and bat echolocation sonar, the characters are distinctly *posthuman*.

Birds as a recurring motif in *Pure* are also evident in the character of Bradwell, who has actual birds embedded in his back. The birds are Bradwell’s defining feature; Pressia remembers him as “the boy with birds in his back” (Baggott 40) before she is able to recall his name. Identifying Bradwell by his nonhuman feature suggests that Bradwell’s identity is bound to a feature that is the result of the Detonations; however, identity in *Pure* is, for all wretches, tied to their physical forms. Bradwell’s ownership of his nonhuman feature contrasts with the

relationship Pressia has to the doll's head fused to her hand. Pressia often attempts to hide this feature, and has attempted to sever it from her physical form. The attempt to sever the doll's head from her body is a metaphor for an adolescent female attempting to sever her connections to childhood in order to move into adulthood. Both characters engage with these physical aspects of their bodies in *Pure*; however, because it is the first book in a trilogy, both Bradwell and Pressia alter their perceptions of their own and each other's bodies across the trilogy. Bradwell's comfort with the birds that have become part of his body contrasts with Pressia's self-consciousness of the doll's head fused to her hand; fusion to the organic is perhaps more 'natural' than fusion to the artificial – assuming one does not lose one's humanity and turn Beast or Dust.

The natural motifs of birds and butterflies in *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *Pure* further demonstrate the representation of the connection between female protagonists and nature, which has been the focus of this chapter. Jytte Nhanenge argues

[i]n the Western world the oppressive conceptual frameworks that have justified domination of women, Others, and nature are patriarchal. It has historically identified women with nature, emotion, and the realm of the physical . . . When the system decides that women are closer to nature, then women also become less human than men are. Hence, women merge with nature. Being part of the non-human nature means that women only are semi-human. (108)

The use of birds and butterflies as symbols for female subjectivity in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults reinforces the traditional identification of women with nature; the added factor of female characters who are recognisably nonhuman or whose bodies challenge notions of the human make these boundaries clear to the reader. The breaching of boundaries between human/nonhuman are made more significant through challenging and redefining the human to be inclusive rather than excluding or sub-categorising the nonhuman and semi-human. The

female characters – Jenna, Pressia, Lyda, and the Mothers – seek to understand themselves in relation to the natural world and utilise birds and butterflies in order to achieve this. In doing so, they assert a clear message to the reader of self-determination despite systems that have sought to oppress the individual.

Conclusion

The nonhuman subject becomes ‘natural’ and develops subjectivity through developing a relationship with, and understanding of nature and the natural environment. Green spaces thus function as heterotopic spaces in young adult dystopian fiction, juxtaposing the natural and unnatural to emphasise their incompatibility. Yet ultimately it is the developing subject who perceives the natural and the unnatural not as binaries, but as capable of co-existing, often in the subject themselves. The experiences and perceptions of characters transitioning between the separated community and the outside world remind us of the conventional understanding of adolescence as a liminal state in which subjects typically challenge the boundaries of adult authority.

The necessity for symbiosis between nature and technology is integral to Zoe’s survival. Zoe’s limited experience with the natural world is significant enough that she is willing to risk her own life by re-entering the green space if it means having the opportunity for agency. The literal potential for the landscape to consume the characters in *Pure* personifies the earth in a way that clearly contrasts with traditional notions of ‘mother earth’; the earth itself is hostile and can no longer support and sustain the idyllic green spaces of Romantic ideology. Yet nature and the natural environment remain integral to the interrogation of subjectivity, as represented by Jenna. Even Pressia, Partridge, and Bradwell seek solace in natural imagery such as the artificial butterflies. Regardless of whether the natural environment will send the individual into anaphylactic shock, come to life and swallow the individual, or threaten the individual’s perception of herself as natural and therefore human, it is in the green spaces that exist beyond the controlled, oppressive space that the individual may develop subjectivity.

Through questioning what it means to be human and re-negotiating relationships with the natural world and technology, adolescent protagonists in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction seek to move beyond the dome of binarisms and hierarchical structures. Instead, they seek to create a world where, to paraphrase Clare Bradford et al, human subjectivity is shaped not by binarisms, but by values such as friendship and trust (85). The interrogation of the notion of 'human' challenges the reader's ability to distinguish between what is human and nonhuman, and how the posthuman subject might relate to the natural environment, and to technology. The function of green spaces as heterotopias in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is especially significant when considering the increasing the impact of technology on subjectivity and notions of place, which is explored in the next chapter.

The previous chapter examined how and why the adolescent subject leaves the home space in order to redefine and establish a sanctuary space. In this chapter, the examination of the relationship between the subject and green spaces reveals how such spaces function as heterotopias that enable the adolescent to develop subjectivity beyond the society that has enforced conformity. One way that the adolescent subject can achieve an agentic subjectivity is by crossing the boundary and entering the green spaces that support subjectivity. The representation of the female adolescent protagonist as seeking alignment with nature and the natural world reinforces existing notions of the female and nature; however, it also highlights the significant impact binarisms have had in oppressing both the developing female subject and the natural world. Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults not only represents the current concerns for the environment expressed in Western social and political discourse, these narratives also highlight the experiences of women in settings that focus on overcoming oppressive societies.

The use of the natural world to control Zoe and prevent her from leaving the Community demonstrates how oppressive governments that seek to deprive the individual of personal freedom might be challenged as a result of the female connecting to the natural world. Similarly, Jenna's identity-formation is directly informed by her relationship to nature and the natural

environment, emphasising that a female's individual connection to the natural is superior to the definitions of natural and unnatural that society might attempt to enforce. Through adopting an ecofeminist perspective of the posthuman female protagonist in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, my analysis in this chapter reveals that the connection between the female and the natural supports the disruption of the boundaries created by patriarchal hierarchies. Through the disruption of these boundaries, space is created for the natural/unnatural to not merely coexist, but to merge as the congeries identified in posthumanist theory. Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults therefore represents the relationship between subjectivity and place within a twenty-first century context that addresses the connections between people, nature, and technology.

Chapter Three: Virtual Places

Technology is changing the way people live in the twenty-first century. With a swipe and a few taps, we can video call another continent – the only limits are one’s data allowance and connection speed. A few clicks on the computer, and we can access a live view of the galaxy from the Hubble telescope (“Space Telescope Live”). Simple voice commands can tell us where the nearest Italian restaurant is located, when it opens, and how busy it typically is around the time we plan on eating. With the right app, we can book a table with a few swipes and clicks. The ease of accessing information is also changing the way in which we think and learn. In researching the function of the Internet as an external memory system, Betsy Sparrow et al. found that “processes of human memory are adapting to the advent of new computing and communication technology” (778). Sparrow et al. suggest “We are becoming symbiotic with our computer tools, growing into interconnected systems that remember less by knowing information than by knowing where the information can be found” (778). Such a symbiotic relationship reflects a posthuman “that embraces the possibilities of information technologies” (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 5). As human memory adapts to the possibilities of information technology, this version of the posthuman becomes a real possibility. Clare Bradford et al. emphasise the possibilities for new relationships between human/machine and biology/technology (181); such relationships transgress and reformulate the dualisms that have traditionally been dominant in Western ideological paradigms, particularly Renaissance Humanism. Lawrence Buell suggests that “both the bad things and the good that happen to human beings and other life-forms self-evidently occur when their bodies are physically located somewhere, in particular locations” (*Writing for an Endangered World* 55). However, the physical location of one’s body is challenged when one considers cyberspace as a place. Buell’s focus is on physical locations; however, virtual places are becoming increasingly significant for the developing subject as, for some young people, online worlds and relationships are becoming more accessible – and more important – than offline in real life (IRL) experiences.

Virtual places are now, perhaps more than ever before, preferred spaces through which young people experience the world. In contemporary Western culture, adolescents increasingly perceive cyberspace as providing a place for socialising, entertainment, and even education. Shawn P. Wilbur defines the virtual community as “the new middle landscape, the garden in the machine” (51). Through engaging with virtual spaces, young adults are, indeed, forming new relationships between human/machine and biology/technology. Intangible spaces such as cyberspace are equally significant to the development of subjectivity as tangible spaces such as those identified in the preceding chapters of this thesis. In the first chapter I identified that the reconceptualised home space functions as an integral aspect of youth agency enacted, and in the second chapter I analysed the function of the natural environment in the development of female subjectivity. In both chapters, I posited the home space and the green space function as heterotopic spaces; similarly, virtual landscapes function as heterotopic spaces in which the adolescent protagonist may negotiate his or her subjectivity.

A key aspect of contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults is the way in which alternative spaces are offered to the adolescent protagonist so that they may develop subjectivity beyond the confines of a place that seeks to oppress them. In this chapter, I examine how virtual space is represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction and how such spaces function to give a voice to adolescents. I focus on the spaces and places created by technology – specifically, cyberspace and virtual worlds – and how they serve to enable youth to disrupt and challenge the real world. Spaces created by technology function as heterotopic spaces as they are spaces in which an individual may challenge the hierarchies that have otherwise constrained them in the real world. In examining representations of technology and virtual landscapes in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, I also explore the interrelationships between the developing subject, the real world, and the virtual world. In the virtual world, the developing subject may wear an identity – or several identities – which enables the interrogation and development of a real-world subjectivity.

Virtual worlds, according to Mark Childs, “offer an opportunity for people to express the self they feel they ‘truly’ are. However, they also provide an opportunity to try out a different identity, and test the extent to which this connects with their conception of self” (21). Cyberspace and virtual worlds offer intangible spaces for the developing subject to engage in identity-experimentation that informs their identity-formation. The representation of virtual worlds in Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (2011), Dan Wells’ *Bluescreen* (2016), and Robin Wasserman’s *Frozen* (2011) share similarities and differences, reflecting the varied trends and tensions in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Furthermore, the relationship between the developing subject and virtual spaces challenges and redefines notions of subjectivity and identity in the twenty-first century.

Traditionally, dystopian texts have presented technology as disempowering and often use the posthuman figure as a representation of how technology may ravage the human body if left unchecked. Recently published young adult fiction situates the posthuman protagonist in the dystopian setting not as a warning, but with a sense of optimism. Victoria Flanagan observes there has been an “anti-technology representational paradigm in children’s literature” (*Technology and Identity* 2) as a result of concerns regarding the impact of technology on humans; however, there is a paradigmatic shift in more recent texts that is representing technology as “enabling, rather than disempowering” (*Technology and Identity* 2). What seems to be common in fiction published in the early twenty-first century is a posthuman figure that represents a very real possibility for the future of the body. Rather than serving as a figure of fear, the posthuman figure is one of re-invention for the individual. Technology and its development of virtual spaces enables the developing subject to engage in identity-formation in ways that physical spaces in the ‘real’ world do not.

The topoi identified by Jane Suzanne Carroll in her examination of landscape in children’s literature lacks a topos that could be considered exclusive to virtual spaces, particularly as her research focuses on the fantasy genre rather than science fiction; thus, such spaces are not contextually relevant. Virtual reality is, however, a place where one can enact fantasy and it is

in this way that it may be perceived as an extension of the fantasy genre. While previously I have drawn on the topoi identified by Carroll in exploring the relationships between physical space and subjectivity, in this chapter I turn my focus to cyberspace and virtual worlds. The four topoi identified by Carroll offer a framework for a topoanalytical approach to landscape, yet in a techno-centric twenty-first century context, there is a growing need to consider the virtual landscapes created by technology.

The idea of humans changing their behaviours in response to technology is criticised, particularly by parents of young people using technology in ways that may be unfamiliar or misunderstood. Melissa McNamara suggests that “[t]echnology is so integrated into teens' lives that it's difficult to measure where their offline life begins and their online life ends” (McNamara). I posit that, for some adolescents, there is little difference between offline and online life; rather, they have a symbiotic relationship and adolescents do not discern between the two. There is one life, offline and online are both aspects of this.

The tension between the positive possibilities of technology and the fear of the impact technology is having on the way in which we connect with one another are represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In *Ready Player One*, for example, the novel represents a clear preference for the real world over the virtual world once the protagonist realises the significance of relationships and connecting to people as they are, instead of as they present themselves through avatars. Yet Wade's experiences in the virtual world are integral to his maturation and identity-formation, leading him to this understanding of discerning between the real and virtual. McNamara's acknowledgement of the positive impacts of technology on young people is a viewpoint that often conflicts with parental perceptions, as indicated by her inclusion of comments from a parent who viewed such behaviour as inherently anti-social: “One time she spent the night with a friend whose father had computers networked in his house and they spent the evening in separate rooms on IM” (McNamara). McNamara's article was published in 2006, and it could be considered dated given ‘IM’ is no longer the communication mode of choice amongst adolescents. Yet it does articulate ideas that remain relevant today,

particularly in representing parents' fears as to how adolescents are using technology. Sherry

Turkle writes:

The Net provides many new kinds of space. On one end of the spectrum, I interview couples who tell me that they text or e-mail each other while in bed. Some say they want to leave a record of a request or a feeling 'on the system'. And there are family blogs – places to announce a wedding or the progress of an illness or share photographs with the grandparents. These are all places to be yourself. At the other end of the spectrum, there are places where one constructs an avatar – from games to virtual communities – where people go to find themselves, or lose themselves, or to explore aspects of themselves. (*Alone Together* 209)

All of these places are represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, reflecting a range of ideas around the spaces created by technology. Ultimately, the representation of virtual space emphasises it as an arena in which the subject may interrogate notions of subjectivity and concepts of identity.

The web series *Video Game High School* (2012-2014) offers a visual representation of the blurred boundaries between the real and the virtual. Set in a future where video games are a popular competitive sport, the series follows BrianD's experiences as a student at Video Game High School. In the first episode of the series, the opening scene depicts a combat situation ("Shot"). With guns blazing, armed soldiers duck and weave across the screen. The vivid colours and the frantic actions as the soldiers dodge bullets lends the scene a distinct sense of realism. Yet when hit with a bullet, the victim's body flashes either blue or red, and then disappears. The flashing colour and disappearance of the body is the first sign to the audience that things are not as real as they seem. As the enemy closes in, one of the soldiers yells, "Where's BrianD?" ("Shot" 00:00:57-00:00:59) The scene then cuts to a teenage boy riding his bicycle along a leafy suburban street; this is the BrianD to whom the soldier was referring, running late and further

waylaid by the neighbourhood bullies. When Brian finally arrives home, he rushes to the computer in his bedroom, which displays a full screen image that reads “Field of Fire”. The scene cuts to soldier BrianD appearing in the game, heavily armed and quick to gun down approaching enemy soldiers.

The juxtaposition between the real world and the virtual world is made evident throughout the opening scenes of the first episode, and continues throughout the series. There is little to distinguish the real world from the virtual world. The audience must rely on their ability to recognise when the characters are ‘in game’, picking up visual cues from costuming and scenery. The dramatisation of the video games as live-action sequences is recurrent in the series, often cutting between images of the player sitting at a computer screen and the scene taking place in the game. In the first episode, establishing the connection between the real world and the virtual world establishes the central premise of the series.

The series often explores issues from the real world through virtual-world experiences, particularly as the school the students attend is solely focused on the students’ performances in different video games – from Field of Fire (reminiscent of *Counter-Strike* or *Battlefield 3*) to Axe Legends (similar to *Guitar Hero*). What is not shown, however, are the sequences involved in transporting BrianD between the real world and the virtual world – the login and logout sequences. Perhaps the deliberate removal of this distinctive process challenges the viewer to work out what is real and what is virtual; perhaps the login sequence is so habitual, it is not important to BrianD or even to the viewer. The login sequence itself is significant in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction because it tends to be represented distinctly in such narratives. This chapter focuses on the virtual worlds created by technology; however, in chapter four I explore the significance of the login sequence and how it functions to provide access to the virtual worlds discussed here.

The opening scenes of the first episode of *Video Game High School* are comical and, particularly for gamers, familiar. While the realism of the live-action representation of the virtual

world is not a current reality for gamers, it represents the reality of gaming in the twenty-first century: it may not look real to onlookers, but it feels real to the players. Virtual worlds are taken seriously by their users – social media offers virtual spaces in which our own lives are represented, or we choose to represent parts or variations of who we are. Video games, especially massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) and Multi-User Domains (MUDs), offer opportunities to socialise and interact with people around the world, as well as role playing a different identity. A seventeen year old female could log in to an MMORPG and become a forty year old male troll; simultaneously going on adventures as a troll, the human is also able to converse with other players about the game and their own life³. *Bluescreen's Overworld* is an example of a multiplayer online game which permits the use of avatars and screen names in place of real-world identifiers. Overworld is the world that the audience is first introduced to at the beginning of the novel. The OASIS in *Ready Player One* is an example of such a virtual world, but on a larger scale, as it contains many virtual places within the larger space of the OASIS.

In the first episode of *Video Game High School* ("Shot"), soldier BrianD has come to the rescue of his friends, yet events in the real world cannot be paused. Brian is called away from his computer to find the cat, leaving soldier BrianD frozen in position, mouth uttering the words, "Cheeto ... come here, Cheeto" ("Shot" 00:05:19-00:06:51). In the virtual world, a teammate explains to the others that BrianD is "AFK"⁴ ("Shot" 00:04:30-00:04:40). Brian's real life impacts his gaming persona in this sequence, and, once enrolled in Video Game High School, Brian's gaming skills impact on his real life. Falling too far in game rank, for example, leads to expulsion from the school. The series brings together the real world and the virtual world, representing

³ See Turkle *Life on the Screen* for insight into the roles MMORPGs and MUDs play in identity-formation.

⁴ 'AFK' is an acronym for 'Away From Keyboard'.

the increasing pressure virtual worlds exert on human subjects. BrianD's identity as a soldier is influenced by his real life identity, just as his real life identity is influenced by his virtual identity.

With a growing number of people exhibiting signs of addiction to the Internet in the late 1990s, Kimberly Young applied the clinical criteria used to define pathological gambling to researching Internet addiction. Young ultimately concluded that Internet addiction exists and negatively impacts the lives of those addicted, likening the Internet to alcohol as a form of escapism (22), and arguing that "[a]ny internet user can be hooked by the power, simulation, and excitement of going on-line" (24). Young explains that it is "[i]n the safe haven of cyberspace you share your deepest feelings, offer your strongest opinions, and reach out to people much faster and more openly than you would in real life" (21). As the founder of the Center for Internet Addiction, Young's research focuses on the addictive nature of the Internet, and it is not uncommon for warnings regarding use of the Internet to pervade media today.

Messages of danger ensconce social media and the Internet, reflecting attitudes towards public spaces and fears of places such as parks and "stranger danger" (boyd, *It's Complicated* 103). danah boyd suggests, "[t]he same fears that shaped children's engagement with parks and other gathering places in the latter half of the twentieth century are now configuring networked publics created through social media" (*It's Complicated* 104). Such fears are enhanced when the concept of gaming and virtual worlds is raised, particularly as screens receive an increasing amount of attention. Jane E. Brody declares "[t]oo many of us have become slaves to the devices that were supposed to free us . . . I fear we are turning into digital robots" ("Screen Addiction"). While there are attempts to counteract the negative perspectives of technology, there is a distinct nostalgia for a time 'before screens' represented in Western media. Such perspectives of technology are often represented in science fiction produced for adolescent readers. Noga Applebaum argues

adults' increasing anxiety regarding young people's use of technology, born
of the Romantic perception of childhood as innocent combined with the fear

of being left behind in the technological race, has shaped SF novels for young readers. (154)

Applebaum's exploration of technology in science fiction for children highlights the "technophobic agenda" (1) of such narratives for young people. However, as Flanagan observes, there has been a decline in such negative depictions more recently, where "a small but continually increasing number of children's authors are beginning to produce narratives about technology in much more life-affirming and positive ways" (*Technology and Identity* 2). Alice Bell also suggests that criticism of science and technology is "not as dominant as it has been in the past, and would seem to be mixed with approaches that, to some extent, show children enjoying the benefits promised by science and technology" (94). As perspectives of science and technology change, so, too, do their representation in texts for young people.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction tends to represent more positive perspectives of technology. In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008), the world has been drastically impacted by the Aureus epidemic which results in criticism of the world's previous dependence of science and technology (especially vaccines and antibiotics). Despite such criticism, science and technology are also represented as key factors in a world in which parents do not have to outlive their children *because of* technological advancement. While the narrative focuses on Jenna coming to terms with who – and what – she is, the overall perception of technology is one of hope. As I argued in chapter two, Jenna's identity-formation is dependent on her relationship to nature; this suggests that technology is viewed more positively because there is increasing recognition that celebrating technology and its possibilities does not equate to privileging it over nature. Both nature and technology can coexist and support one another in their existence. Jenna's relationship to nature enables her to accept the technology that has given her a second chance at life. Bradford et al. acknowledge the potential for virtual reality to function as heterotopias, arguing that virtual reality narratives

utilise the potential for computer technology to construct virtual realities which parallel, simulate, intersect with or constitute an alternative to 'real' lived experience, and thus function as utopian or dystopian heterotopias.

(171)

The representation of virtual realities in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction tends to depict virtual reality as a utopian heterotopia, contrasting with the dystopian reality of the setting.

William Gibson first used the term 'cyberspace' to name the virtual world that was the setting of his novel, *Neuromancer* (1982)⁵. The term is now used to identify the 'space' of online computer networks. Mark Nunes explains "[a]s the commercial and public use of the Internet grew exponentially in the 1990s, the term 'cyberspace' began to occur with greater frequency and encompassed a greater range of meanings as shorthand for the neither-here-nor-there experience of place produced during online interactions" (*Cyberspaces* xv). Despite such a "neither-here-nor-there experience of place", cyberspace has become a virtual 'place' in which individuals communicate, seek entertainment and information, and develop a sense of community.

The community of cyberspace is the experience of place represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, highlighting the importance of cyberspace in the lives of adolescents today. The real-world experiences of Lia in *Frozen* are mirrored in the virtual world, and vice versa. *Ready Player One*'s Wade can affect change in the real world as a result of his virtual-world experiences. Marisa in *Bluescreen* draws on the courage she has expressed and experienced through her online persona, Heartbeat, in order to take action in the real world.

⁵ The original use of the word 'cyberspace' in the context of an online networked computer system appeared in Gibson's *Burning Chrome* (1982). The use of 'cyberspace' in *Neuromancer* popularised the term as it is used today.

Flanagan acknowledges that fictions published in the past decade normalise experiences in cyberspace as part of childhood and adolescence (*Technology and Identity* 162) and argues that “[t]he digital sphere now plays a pivotal role in the development of child subjectivity” (*Technology and Identity* 163). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the representation of technology is entwined with notions of subjectivity. Technology is not only changing our behaviours, it is also creating new spaces which affect the construction of individual subjectivity. Maree Kimberley writes:

Fiction aimed at young adult readers often attempts to help the target audience come to terms with finding a sense of identity, and navigating a way to live that makes sense to them, in a period of life characterized by intense emotions, rapid change and emerging independence. In a posthuman world, these issues still exist, and will potentially intensify under the added stress of living in an age of rapidly advancing technology. (124)

The impact of technology on adolescent subjectivity is often depicted in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through characters that move towards the development of a posthuman subjectivity. Posthumanism seeks to open up new understandings of what it means ‘to be human’ precisely by focusing on relationships with space and place.

Technology creates environments that are inhabited by the individual, albeit not in a physical sense. At present, virtual realities have not reached the fully immersive experience depicted in science fiction texts, though rapid developments in technology are making this a very real possibility in the near future. Nunes suggests that the acceptance of “cyberspace as a space has not needed to wait for the arrival of bodysuit-and-goggle ‘virtual reality’; for literally millions of users, cyberspace already exists as a *place*, as real as the work and play conducted ‘in’ it” (“Virtual Topographies”). For now, our ability to connect to the virtual world is predominantly through a screen – computer, tablet, or mobile phone. Increasingly, however, the virtual world is becoming more immersive.

Technology *is* change – it changes how we perform tasks, we change in response to technology, and there appears to be an endless cycle involving people and technology when it comes to considering changes, changing, and changed. There seems to always be something new in the realm of technology, whether it is a new version of a mobile phone or the latest gaming console. Right now, in the twenty-first century, technology is constantly developing and, with this, people are constantly adapting their behaviours to keep up with the demands of technology. In contrast, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction typically represents technology as ‘fully developed’, in that its uses in the areas of education, entertainment, and leisure are not only normalised, but depicted as essential.

Technology is typically represented as being at its peak or having achieved the ideal hardware and software for its seamless integration into the world and, specifically, into the lives of the characters. In such narratives, representations of technology and virtual worlds focus on interrogating what it means to be human in a world dominated by such technological advancement. Technology and virtual worlds contribute to the development of recognisably ‘posthuman’ subjects. N. Katherine Hayles argues:

As long as the human subject is envisioned as an autonomous self with unambiguous boundaries, the human-computer interface can only be parsed as a division between the solidarity of real life on one side and the illusion of virtual reality on the other, thus obscuring the far-reaching changes initiated by the development of virtual technologies. (*How We Became Posthuman* 290)

A posthuman subject can traverse the real and virtual worlds, existing in both worlds simultaneously. Scott Bukatman suggests that “[v]irtual reality represents an attempt to eliminate the interface between user and information” (151). He refers to the interface as “a crucial site, a significantly ambiguous boundary between human and technology. The interface relocates the human, in fact *redefines* the human as part of a cybernetic system of information

circulation and management” (152). While a limited perception of the human subject creates a division between real life and virtual reality, virtual reality strives to traverse such a boundary, thus demanding a reconsideration of the subject itself. Pramod K. Nayar writes: “The autonomous human is seen in critical posthumanism as a fiction. The human has co-evolved with both technology and other organisms, and even human perceptions are structural changes wrought in the biological system as a response to the neighbourhood” (35). The posthuman subject may, therefore, eliminate the boundary between the real and the virtual as it co-evolves with technology and the spaces and places it creates.

Virtual worlds enable individuals to push the conventional boundaries of selfhood – anonymity and the ease of transformation makes this a process that is potentially safer for the individual than what it would be if such experimentation took place in the real world. Hayles suggests

the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals. (*How We Became Posthuman* 3)

The representation of characters that perceive virtual and real worlds as one and the same demonstrates this posthuman view, particularly as contemporary young adult dystopian fictions employ both worlds as significant places for identity-formation.

Presently, it is social media that is playing an increasingly important role in the lives of young people. boyd acknowledges that teens “go online to socialize with friends they know from physical settings and to portray themselves in online contexts that are more tightly wedded to unmediated social communities. These practices . . . encourage greater continuity between teens’ online and offline worlds” (*It’s Complicated* 38). Similarly, Flanagan writes

cyberspace is not represented as something that is experienced 'separately' from the young protagonists' social reality. Instead, it is experienced in conjunction with their everyday lives, and the behaviours that they engage in while online are as integral to the construction of their individual subjectivities as anything else. (*Technology and Identity* 156)

There is consistency between identity in the real world and identity in the virtual world, facilitated by social media that encourages the sharing of real experiences through virtual platforms. While this allows for identity to be stable in both worlds, there is also the possibility for young people to experiment with different identities through, for example, selecting what of the real world is shared in the virtual world. Rob Shields argues

[t]he Internet creates a *crisis of boundaries* between the real and the virtual, between time zones and between spaces, near and distant. Above all, boundaries between bodies and technologies, between our sense of self and our sense of our changing roles: the personae we may play or the 'hats we wear' in different situations are altered. ("Introduction" 7)

Such a "crisis of boundaries" suggests that the demarcation between real and virtual are, to use Hayles' phrase, enabling a "seamless articulation" between the human and the machine; that is, the real and the virtual.

The "crisis of boundaries" is becoming more of a reality as technology develops to enable the construction of virtual worlds that draw in individual experience – social media and online worlds have a physical boundary between the real and the virtual in the form of a screen. With the development of virtual reality technologies such as headgear and gloves, the individual enters the virtual world at a deeper level of experience. According to David Holmes,

[s]imulation in cyberspace occurs either by participation in media which erase the distinction between representation and reality, as with cinema, television and video games, or by technologically renewing connections

between individuals in ways which produce virtual communities based on extended interactivity, as with rapid transport, telecommunications and the Internet. (5)

The notion of “extended interactivity” challenges the boundaries between the real and the virtual worlds, and the individual’s connection with these. Conventional models of selfhood and the development of identity are subverted when young people inhabit virtual worlds. Their behaviours online become something of a performance; selecting aspects of the real world and experimenting with identity in the virtual world demonstrate that subjectivity is an assemblage of the identities experienced in real and virtual worlds. Through experimenting with identities and notions of self in the virtual world, individual subjectivity becomes an assemblage of the multiplicity of identity experienced through accessing and uniting the real and virtual worlds.

In moving towards a posthuman subjectivity, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents identity as fragmented, constructed in both real and virtual worlds, representative of the hybridised body. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston posit that the posthuman “participates in re-distributions of difference and identity . . . The posthuman does not reduce difference-from-others to difference-from-self, but rather emerges in the pattern of resonance and inference between the two” (10). Yet contemporary young adult dystopian fiction also depicts posthuman subjects as unique because of their ability to push the boundary of human/nonhuman, real/virtual. The posthuman subject experiments with notions of the self, constructing fragmented identities that challenge notions of human/nonhuman, real/virtual, and the process of identity-formation when such binaries cease to exist. Both the humanist and posthumanist notions of subjectivity can coexist in these fictions. As a consequence, readers are invited to form their own opinion as to how they wish to define themselves and each other – and in which space this may occur.

When Turkle wrote about “life on the screen” in 1995, cyberspace was accessed in a way that enabled a clear distinction between the physical human body and the virtual world. While

identity could be experimented with and the self could be represented in a multitude of ways, there was a separation between the material body and the virtual world – there was a computer screen that separated the two. The development of technology is working to break down this division by creating more immersive experiences of cyberspace through, for example, virtual reality hardware. As the images become sharper and more realistic, and hardware such as headsets and earphones are designed to block out any trace of the ‘real world’ while one is immersed in the virtual, it is thus becoming more likely for individuals to experience the virtual world as a form of reality.

Technologies such as these enable the transgression of boundaries between the subject and the virtual world. When one is so immersed in the virtual world, how can one believe it to be any less than the real? The transgression of boundaries between the real and virtual is represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, as the advanced technologies depict the possibilities for the subject when such boundaries are blurred or, in some cases, removed altogether. Hayles further suggests that the view of the subject as

an autonomous self independent of the environment . . . authorizes the fear that if the boundaries are breached at all, there will be nothing to stop the self’s complete dissolution. By contrast, when the human is seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to *depend* on the splice rather than being imperiled by it. (*How We Became Posthuman* 290)

The perspective of the human “as part of a distributed system” is emphasised in the representation of virtual worlds in the novels that constitute my primary corpus in this chapter. A dependency on the “splice” to which Hayles refers is a key element of these narratives’ depiction of a posthuman subjectivity. While novels such as M. T. Anderson’s *Feed* are fearful of the breaching of boundaries between the self and the system, there is generally a more positive representation of the self and the system in novels such as *Ready Player One* and *Bluescreen*.

Such representations suggest that, as Hayles articulates, “subjectivity is emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it” (*How We Became Posthuman* 291). An emergent, distributed, integrated subjectivity implies flexibility and adaptability, qualities that are of particular significance in the twenty-first century context of technological changes and advancement.

In Turkle’s later research published in 2011, she has expressed concerns about people’s dependency on technology, particularly in terms of using technology as a substitute for human connection. In *Alone Together* (2011), Turkle focuses on the impact technology has on relationships and human intimacy, leading to her suggestion that “[w]hen part of your life is lived in virtual places . . . a vexed relationship develops between what is true and what is ‘true here,’ true in simulation” (*Alone Together* 153). Virtual worlds challenge the individual’s sense of the real world, blurring the boundaries between what we understand as experience and simulation of experience. boyd has a more optimistic approach to adolescents’ increasing reliance on technology. boyd suggests that online social media is an extension of real life social networks, providing a space in which young people can interact as a result of real spaces becoming increasingly inaccessible. boyd summarises the situation, “teens complained to me that they never had enough time, freedom, or ability to meet up with friends when and where they wanted. To make up for this, they turned to social media to create and inhabit networked publics” (*It’s Complicated* 201). Networked publics allow adolescents to meet up with their friends when and where they want, within the space of the virtual worlds made available by the Internet.

Adolescents are increasingly dependent on technology to provide them with spaces in which they can socialise, be entertained, and even learn. Part of this engagement with virtual worlds is also about experimenting with how to present themselves. In her research, boyd shares an anecdote in which she describes the contradiction between a young man’s college essay and his online MySpace profile (*It’s Complicated* 29). In response to this, boyd suggests

that the young man may not have anticipated the college admissions committee as a potential audience for his online profile, instead selecting content that would appeal to his peers. boyd concludes that “taken out of context, what teens appear to do and say on social media seems peculiar if not outright problematic” (*It’s Complicated* 30). In the endnotes, boyd further explains that this is because “[m]arginalized youth are especially vulnerable to being misinterpreted and judged by adults who have no frame for understanding the context in which these teens operate” (*It’s Complicated* 224). While generational conflict is not new to the twenty-first century, in a time when adolescents’ behaviour, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiments with all of these are public and unfiltered, today’s adolescents are often perceived as peculiar.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explores both the negative and positive ways in technology can affect individual subjectivity and social relations. By representing virtual worlds as preferable to the real world, such fictions suggest that virtual worlds are ideal spaces in which young people may develop a sense of self. Flanagan argues that “cyberspace often functions as a communal, nurturing space that enables young people to achieve subjective agency” (*Technology and Identity* 155). Just as adolescents today use the Internet and its virtual worlds to experiment with identity, it is in the virtual worlds represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction that the young protagonist is permitted to interrogate what it means to be human, to be alive, to connect, to feel. The developing subject can explore and test the concepts and boundaries of their own sense of self in virtual worlds.

Real Life, Only Better

The virtual world is typically considered to be a replication or simulation of the real world. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, there is a tendency to represent it as better and brighter in appearance. Marisa in *Bluescreen* logs out from a virtual reality game and returns to the real world where “[t]he colors were so much duller” (Wells 13), for example. The virtual world is also represented as significant in the role it plays in the lives of young people; Wade in *Ready Player One* considers himself “more or less raised by the OASIS’s interactive educational

programs” (Cline 15). Comparisons are often made between the blurring of boundaries between real and virtual life and identity; Lia in *Frozen* recognises that “life on the network shadowed life off the network, and sometimes it was the opposite. Sometimes it was the network that seemed more real” (Wasserman 48). There is a tendency in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction to represent virtual experience as a paler version of real experience, regardless of how much brighter the virtual world appears.

Wade comes to realise that the connections he has with people in real life are superior to the isolation that comes with living dominantly in the virtual world. Lia is betrayed by the network when she is no longer legally recognised as Lia Kahn, forcing her to reconsider her real identity as well as her virtual representation. Marisa’s experience is an exception, though there are moments in the narrative when she reflects on the possibilities of life without constant connection to the Internet. The virtual world – and experiences within it – is not dismissed as fictional or irrelevant in such narratives. The virtual world provides a space for the developing adolescent subject, in which she or he is comfortable and comforted, safe from the instability of the real world, and free to experiment with the representation of one’s identity. boyd argues “[s]ocial media has become an outlet for many youth, an opportunity to reclaim some sense of agency and have some semblance of social power” (*It’s Complicated* 98). Virtual worlds in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction typically function as an outlet and space for reclaiming agency; virtual worlds serve as places in which the adolescent may create their own sense of place, and it is within that ‘place’ they may develop their subjectivity.

There are conflicting messages when it comes to the representation of virtual worlds in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction; however, there is an increase in representing such worlds as positively influencing identity-formation and the maturation of the adolescent subject. In *Ready Player One*, for example, Wade’s perspective of the virtual world is initially positive and the first person perspective focalises the virtual world as the ideal. By the novel’s conclusion, however, Wade has come to realise the value and importance of real-world relationships and experiences, which cannot be replaced with those in the virtual world. In contrast, *Bluescreen* is

only ever positive about the virtual world; the real-world threat is technology-based, but Marisa experiences no major conflict between her real world and virtual-world experiences. In his topoanalytical approach to place, Edward S. Casey examines the power of place to “direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are *not*)” (xv). The real place that exists in such narratives is represented as unstable. Such a place is incapable of stabilising the individual, and incapable of supporting the developing subject because the adolescent protagonist is not sure where they are, and perhaps only certain of where they are not. Occupying liminal social positions tends to align the subject with being *outside* existing places.

In contrast, the virtual world becomes a stabilising place capable of occupation by and relationships with the developing adolescent subject. The paradox is that we are not anywhere in the virtual world, and yet we can be everywhere – the fragmentation of identity and ability to occupy multiple spaces and places is facilitated by the virtual world. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explicitly explores the virtual world as a stabilising place for identity experimentation and formation.

The virtual world not only facilitates the fragmentation of identity and distribution of these identities across multiple spaces, it also challenges us to redefine notions to space and place. Naming the virtual world ‘cyberspace’ implies it is a *space* – an abstract concept that lacks the specificity of ‘place’. Casey argues that

it is important to separate place from space (construed as a homogenous and isotropic medium) as it is to distinguish such space from true time (grasped as heterogenous anisotropic multiplicity). (9-10)

Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that a familiar space is a place, arguing “[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (*Space and Place* 6). Thus it is perhaps more accurate to consider cyberspace as *cyberplace*. As we progress into the twenty-first century, virtual space is giving way to recognisable virtual places. Cyberspace is

becoming familiar; technology creates spaces that the developing adolescent subject engages with, and it is through such engagement that the individual questions and develops a sense of identity. In this way, technology is creating spaces in which the individual creates *places*.

Casey suggests that “knowledge of place begins with the bodily experience of being-in-place” (46). Contemporary young adult dystopian novels such as *Ready Player One* represent virtual bodies in the form of avatars facilitated by haptic suits that replicate the body’s experience and virtual worlds are experienced through “being-in-place”. Other times, the accessing of the virtual world is achieved through body modifications, as is the case for Marisa in *Bluescreen* who, like others in the novel, relies on the “djinni” implant to connect to the virtual world. However, Casey argues that imaginative projection of the body in spaces is not genuine habitation and that places cannot exist without bodies (103). Such an argument emphasises the significance of the interrelationships between place and the body. I contest this and question the significance of the interrelationships between place and the subject – a subject who may, as a result of technology, occupy spaces beyond the limitations of a physical body. Doreen Massey, in contrast, argues that places “are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations” (121). Massey’s definition expands notions of place beyond the concrete and offers possibilities for its application to abstract ‘spaces’ that have been redefined as places as a result of the social relations that exist within it. Massey’s demand for “a global sense of the local, a global sense of place” (156) can perhaps be ideally met by the virtual world, which offers such a global sense of place.

Cyberspace and virtual worlds are often depicted in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction with similar language and descriptive detail as real worlds. In *Ready Player One*, Wade describes “Everything inside the OASIS was beautifully rendered in three dimensions . . . it was easy to forget that everything you were seeing was computer-generated” (Cline 27). While Wade’s description compares the real world to the virtual, the ease of forgetting there is a difference emphasises the blurred boundary between the real and virtual. The halls in the virtual school are described as “marble” (32), a descriptor that gives a textural aesthetic to the virtual

world. In such narratives, the ‘reality’ of a virtual world is often considered to be equal to the experience of the real world. In *Ready Player One*, travel between virtual locations takes real time, and that time depends on how much one is prepared to pay for varying modes of transport, from flying to teleportation (49). In *Bluescreen*, Marisa’s perception of her virtual persona as a hero affirms her actions in the real world and encourages her to be equally heroic in reality.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, virtual worlds are often represented as a preferred existence. Compared to the real world, the virtual world is often more aesthetically pleasing, safer for the individual, and provides a more fulfilled existence. Wade’s description of the OASIS as “much more than a game or an entertainment platform” (34) emphasises the extent to which the OASIS has been integrated into the real lives of its users. The juxtaposition of the “ugly” real world with the “happy refuge” of the virtual world in the description “We’d been born into an ugly world, and the OASIS was our one happy refuge” (34) further highlights the role that the virtual world has in compensating for and supplementing the inadequacies of the real world. Wade also draws upon natural imagery to describe the significance of the OASIS not only to him, but to his generation, using simile to describe the threat of IOI’s plans for the OASIS as “like someone threatening to take away the sun, or charge a fee to look up at the sky” (34). The natural imagery in this simile suggests that the OASIS is as natural to the adolescents that use it as looking at the sky is as natural to the reader. The very name “OASIS” is also telling of the significance this place has to individuals, implying it is a sanctuary or haven away from the rest of the world – or reality itself.

Existing in both the real world and the virtual world, the developing subject in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction occupies multiple spaces and develops multiple states of self. Marisa in *Bluescreen* is constantly connected to the virtual world, and descriptions of the real world are impacted by her connection to the virtual. Marisa describes pop-ups and virtual enhancements to her experience of the real world: “The Synestheme turned [Anja’s] voice into a pale pink cloud the same color as her tea, and she winked with an audible *ding*” (Wells 85). Such enhancements blur the boundaries between the virtual and real world spaces,

as the virtual insinuates itself into the real. Lia in *Frozen* is able to remain constantly connected to the virtual world because she inhabits a body that allows this connection to remain consistent, whereas her organic 'human' body did not permit such seamless access. Nunes argues that

in its current configuration, the Internet does more than network the globe:
it creates a metaphorical world in which we conduct our lives. And the more
ecstatic the promises of new possible worlds, the more problematic the
concept of 'the world' becomes. ("Jean Baudrillard in Cyberspace" 314)

The ability to create 'worlds' is leading to a reconceptualisation of the world itself. In fact, as Nunes acknowledges, this has already occurred. Shields summarises, "[c]yberspaces such as the Internet are closely linked to the spaces and activities of everyday life" ("Introduction" 6). Such notions are expanded upon in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, which depicts virtual worlds as not only linked to "spaces and activities of everyday life", but *being* the space in which activities of everyday life take place. Novels such as *Ready Player One*, *Frozen*, and *Bluescreen* query the demarcation between the real world and the virtual world, and, consequently, the blurring of boundaries between the human and the posthuman subject.

While cyberspace is synonymous with virtual reality, the two are not necessarily interchangeable. Cyberspace, as Gibson used the term, identifies networked computer systems. The virtual, however, is a word initially used to describe the intangible and is used to describe something that is real, but not concrete; Shields suggests that virtual reality is "only the latest incarnation of the virtual" (*The Virtual* xvi). In a twenty-first century context, the virtual is used to identify technologies and landscapes associated with and accessed through cyberspace. A mandatory component of the NSW Australian History syllabus, for example, is for students to conduct a site study whereby students visit a site of historical significance as it relates to their studies. For students unable to physically visit such a site, there is an option for a virtual site study, enabling students and teachers to use the Internet to access images and online 'tours' of historical sites. Given such an experience is mandatory, and thus recognises the importance of

site studies to understanding events and people in history, many teachers incorporate a combination of real and virtual site studies throughout each topic. The virtual site study functions as a supplement to the real experience, suggesting that the real experience of a site is equal to a virtual experience. Indeed, it is possible a virtual site study can be superior to a real site study. In a virtual visit, for example, it is possible for students to see images that might otherwise be too far to see from the footpath, or to view an aerial image of a site that would not be possible unless the school budget extended to helicopter rides or a drone! I draw upon this example to emphasise the role the virtual – accessed through the Internet and existing in cyberspace – already has in the way adolescents access and interpret information. The Internet is not merely a tool for accessing information; the Internet enables *experience*.

Virtual reality has a sensorial aspect to experiencing what might otherwise be considered cyberspace. Cyberspace is the networked community, virtual reality is immersion *in* cyberplaces. Bukatman considers the role of virtual reality in constructing a “cybersubject”, proposing

[v]irtual reality significantly extends the sensory address of existent media to provide an alternate and manipulable space. Multiple users can enter the same virtual reality and play virtual catch or otherwise interact on this virtual plane. They can appear to each other in different forms, or as different species or genders – a simulated, but powerful, polymorphism is at work here. To be installed into such an apparatus would be to exist on two places at once: while one’s objective body would remain in the real world, one’s *phenomenal body* would be projected into the terminal reality . . . world and body comprise a continually modifying feedback loop, producing a terminal identity without the terminal – a *cybersubject*. (149)

Virtual reality facilitates an experience beyond the interface; no longer is the individual separated from cyberspace by the computer screen, as the individual is able to step into cyberspace and experience a sense of place – a virtual reality in which the individual may

experience the space as a place. The virtual world thus functions as a place in which the individual may engage with online spaces for the purpose of, for example, communication, entertainment, education, and experience. Perhaps of most significance to adolescents in the twenty-first century, it is through the spaces accessed via the Internet that an individual can experiment with and experience differing identities, particularly if an individual engages in those spaces in such a way that they become perceived as *places*. Turkle writes “[w]hen we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass. This reconstruction is our cultural work in progress” (*Life on the Screen* 177).

The suggestion that the reconstruction of identities in virtual spaces establishes identity as a “work in progress” implies that identity is fluid. Furthermore, the role virtual spaces play in enabling identity to be fluid highlights the significance of cyberspace and the virtual world in the development of subjectivity for the twenty-first century adolescent. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction typically emphasises experiences in the virtual world as equally if not more important than experiences in the real world. Turkle writes: “Virtual reality is not ‘real’, but it has a relationship to the real. By being betwixt and between, it becomes a play space for thinking about the real world” (“Constructions and Reconstructions of Self” 165). The virtual world as relating to and offering a space for the consideration of the real world is demonstrated in *Ready Player One* with the depiction of Wade’s experiences in the virtual and real worlds. The virtual world of the OASIS is represented as being of more importance to individuals than the real world. In an unstable political and economic environment, the currency in the OASIS is considered “one of the world’s most stable currencies, valued higher than the dollar, pound, euro, or yen” (Cline 28). Working in virtual offices allow individuals to make a living, often re-investing their income into virtual homes that exceed the comfort of their real homes. Wade can make money by using his avatar to endorse products following his success in the OASIS is spent on a high security apartment and state-of-the-art hardware that serves purely as a place where his real body accesses the virtual world. In this virtual world, Wade owns a small planet

on which he has built a fortress, reminiscent of the high security with which he surrounds himself in reality.

Wade articulates his awareness that his real life and his virtual life are not the same. He describes:

The hour or so after I woke up was my least favourite part of each day, because I spent it in the real world . . . I hated this part of the day because everything about it contradicted my other life. My real life, inside the OASIS . . . The sight of my tiny one-room apartment, my immersion rig, or my reflection in the mirror – they all served as a harsh reminder that the world I spent my days in was not, in fact, the real one. (195)

Wade identifies his virtual life as his “real life”, an existence that is preferable to the “real world”. The narrative perspective is specific in selecting three aspects of Wade’s reality that he dislikes. The first is his “tiny one-room apartment”, a physical place that is required for him to inhabit, but certainly not a home space identified as part of the sanctuary topos. The second is the “immersion rig”, the hardware that Wade uses to access the virtual world. Significantly, the hardware that facilitates Wade’s ability to inhabit the OASIS is considered a negative aspect of his real life until the conclusion of the sentence, noting that the OASIS is not, as much as he may wish it to be, Wade’s real world. Wade’s real life is not in the real world, emphasising the notion that the individual can experience a ‘life’ in a virtual world. The third “harsh reminder” is Wade’s reflection in the bathroom mirror. Wade’s lack of desire to see himself physically present in the real world blurs the boundary between the body and place. Wade’s body does not inhabit the virtual world, thus he perceives his body to be something that ties him to the real world.

In chapter five I will explore representations of the body in depth, particularly as they relate to individual subjectivity; however, in understanding the relationship between virtual worlds and subjectivity, it is important to consider how the individual experiences, at a corporeal level, the virtual world. Wade’s immersion rig is designed to give him as real an experience of

the virtual world as possible. Yet Wade comes to realise that the virtual world cannot supplant the experiences and relationships of the real world. Wade is aware and resentful towards the virtual world because “[i]n real life, I was nothing but an antisocial hermit . . . I was just another sad, lost, lonely soul, wasting his life on a glorified videogame” (198). In the virtual world, however, Wade describes himself as, “a pop-culture icon, a VR rock star. And, in gunter circles, I was a legend. Nay, a god” (198). The contrasting descriptions portray a bleak perspective of replacing the real world with the virtual. Wade has been able to experience both ends of the spectrum in terms of fame, wealth, popularity, and success. Such a range of experiences is a consequence of being able to engage with both the real and virtual worlds, and construct contrasting identities in each. Wade goes to great lengths to conceal his real-world identity from being associated with his virtual identity. The two identities are separated, in part because Wade seeks privacy and security in the real world, and also because Wade understands and articulates clearly to the reader that the real world is *not* the virtual world.

One of the paradoxes of young adult literature is that characters and plots often demonstrate the conflicting messages young people receive regarding the contentious relationships between people, nature, and technology. *Ready Player One* ultimately privileges the real world over the virtual world, which I have explored explicitly in chapter one. The paradox is that Wade would not feel positively about the real world if not for his virtual-world experiences. Gaining control of the OASIS gives Wade a choice that he previously did not have – with the financial gains that have come with finding Halliday’s Easter egg, Wade has the power to change the real world rather than rely on the virtual world to escape from it.

Wade’s resentment of the real world and preference for the virtual world is a trend in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, where the real world is considered ‘less’ than the virtual. Wade’s desire to be in the OASIS only ceases once he has secured money, security, and love in the real world. The narrative concludes with the sentence: “It occurred to me then that for the first time in as long as I could remember, I had absolutely no desire to log back into the OASIS” (Cline 372). As a virtual world, the OASIS serves a distinct purpose for Wade’s maturation

and identity-formation in that it is a place in which Wade is able to thrive and live a life that is not possible in the oppressive, economically unstable real world.

The virtual world functions as a heterotopic space in which Wade's maturation and identity-formation is supported. Bradford et al. acknowledge that "in the disembodied world of cyber-space identity can be ambiguous" (172), a concept that Wade – and other characters in the novel – use to their advantage. In virtual worlds, identity is not bound to the body – indeed, the body can be recreated to adopt any features the individual may desire. Sandra L. Calvert argues that people have physical features that "affect how people perceive themselves and how others perceive and treat them" (57), drawing upon examples such as biological sex, age, race, and even the names given to them at birth:

virtual bodies, made possible on the Internet, allow adolescents to create any kind of body that they want to present to others. The fat can be thin, the short can be tall, the weak can be strong. The anonymity provided by the Internet even allows gender changes, ethnic changes, and experiments in sexual orientation without ever leaving the safety of one's home. (58)

Wade takes advantage of such an opportunity, using the OASIS to present an avatar physically different to himself. Such an opportunity is, however, especially used by the character Aech. Megan Condis argues "[t]he pop culture 'syllabus' embedded within *Ready Player One* imagines the gaming subculture as almost exclusively white and male because it reflects and reproduces the historical and material conditions that led to the creation of its featured texts" (9). The use of Wade as focaliser is problematic when it comes to considering the potential for virtual worlds to empower youth – as a white male, Wade already has advantages. Condis is critical of this perspective as being the assumed perspective of readers of the novel, which privileges the white male gamer, and is also an identity adopted by Wade's best friend in the novel, Aech. Aech identifies the OASIS as the only safe place for her, not for the same reasons as Wade, but because it offers a space in which she can conceal herself from the judgements of others. Wade

believes Aech to be a white male, similar in age and with shared interests. In reality, Aech is an African American female. Wade initially describes her as

A heavyset African American girl . . . She was about my age, with short, kinky hair and chocolate-colored skin . . . A wave of emotion washed over me. Shock gave way to a sense of betrayal. How could he – *she* – deceive me all these years? (Cline 318)

The descriptor “heavyset African American girl” contrasts with the assumed image of a white male. Wade’s “sense of betrayal” is highlighted in the change of pronouns when describing Aech, from “he” to the emphasised “*she*”. Wade is, however, quick to forgive Aech’s dishonesty, establishing that Aech is still the same person, albeit different in appearance to what Wade expected. Aech describes herself as “[a] fat black chick” (319) while Wade adopts a more politically correct description in their conversation of ““young African American woman”” (319). The dialogue between the two characters is fast to affirm their friendship, void of any accusations or apologies.

Wade’s acceptance of Aech suggests the ease with which young people can accept identity as fluid. As Sadie Plant writes, “virtuality brings a fluidity to identities which once had to be fixed” (325). Aech represents the importance virtual worlds play in an adolescent’s experiments and experiences of identity formation. Michael Ostwald argues that “[t]he artificial environments created through virtual technologies, like televised space, are not only perfect simulations of ‘other’ space, they are also dynamic environments wherein cultural and social values become fluid” (660). Just as identity can be fluid in virtual worlds, so, too, can cultural and social values that might otherwise oppress an individual. Above all, Wade’s acceptance of Aech – and Aech’s nervousness as she anticipates possible rejection – constructs a notion of identity that is flexible and unbound to gender or race. Aech is Aech, whether represented in a virtual world as a white male or embodied in the real world as an African American female. In

this representation, however, the power is given to the white male to pass judgement – to accept or reject.

Aech represents the possibilities for a posthuman subject, undefined by binarisms and able to transcend boundaries through utilisation of technology and virtual worlds. Wade's response to Aech's identity offers a powerful metaphor for the acceptance of the posthuman subject by the humanist subject – the white male has the final say, after all. Fortunately for the posthuman subject, the possibilities of acceptance are increasing as such representations indicate a growing acceptance of the 'other' as one and the same. Childs argues that embodiment involves a connection between the physical body and the virtual body, which he refers to as the phenomenal body. As Childs explains,

[t]he relationship a person has with their avatar can go beyond that of creating an avatar and using that avatar to explore and communicate aspects of their identity. After a degree of time interacting within the virtual world, the sense of connection with that avatar becomes very strong, to the extent that what happens to the avatar, and the space within which it moves, can have an emotional or physical reaction on the person whose avatar it is. This level of connection is referred to as embodiment. (25)

Such an idea of embodiment unites the physical and virtual bodies, which is represented in *Ready Player One* through Wade's perception of Aech as being both the physical female body and the virtual male body. Wade's connection to Aech online and offline allows him to connect and accept both.

As a heterotopic space, the virtual world has – for Aech – functioned as a site in which Aech can be accepted for who she is beyond race, gender and sexuality. Technology is thus represented as creating a 'safe place' for an otherwise marginalised individual. The relationship between the virtual world as a safe place for the marginalised is also emphasised in research regarding the role of cyberspace and virtual communities in relation to identity-formation. Jon

Cabiria posits that “virtual world communities are near-perfect venues of identity exploration for marginalised people” (304). In contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, the adolescent characters are marginalised in many ways, from existing in the liminal space of adolescence between childhood and adulthood, to physically being different because of technology’s impact on their bodies. Turkle suggests that MUDs are “privileged spaces for thinking through and working through issues of personal identity” (“Constructions and Reconstructions of Self” 164). Similarly, Calvert argues

[a]s children and adolescents construct their identities in the information age, it is becoming clear that part of that construction is occurring and will continue to occur online. As a society, our challenge is to help young people navigate their real life and their online ‘selves’ to forge a constructive, unified personal identity. (68)

These arguments further establish the significance of virtual worlds in the interrogation and development of subjectivity. However, while Calvert perceives that young people are constructing a “unified personal identity”, there is a tendency in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction to represent identity as fluid with the possibility of multiple identities adopted depending on the individual’s circumstance. Aech, for example, is not seeking to construct a “unified personal identity”, she is consciously choosing to represent herself as an identity that is less likely to encounter prejudice (Cline 320). Bradford et al. argue:

The absence of geographical borders and restrictions characterising the Internet enables the construction of virtual identities at least less dependent on conventional markers of class, gender, and sexuality; hence, online identity can be shifting, fragmentary, a construction and, potentially, a deception. (172)

The decreased dependence on “conventional markers” suggests that virtual worlds provide a space where the adolescent subject is able to breach the boundaries of the binaries that might

otherwise inhibit them. In this way, virtual worlds provide heterotopic spaces where the developing adolescent may challenge the very hierarchies that might otherwise restrict identity-formation in the real world. Nayar argues

[l]ate twentieth-century critical humanism . . . has demolished the myth of the unified, coherent, autonomous, self-identical human subject. It has posited the subject, and biology, as a construct of discourses, of enmeshed and co-evolved species and technologies. (29)

These enmeshed, co-evolved species and technologies are increasingly finding representation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

Virtual worlds primarily function as desirable places that offer sanctuary and respite from reality in young adult fictions. The function of the virtual world as a place of sanctuary for Wade is represented in the name of the virtual world “OASIS”. While the acronym stands for “Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation”, the typical association of the acronym with the restorative and relieving effects of an actual oasis suggest that the OASIS is similarly important in a reality of a world that is economically, politically and, for Wade, socially unstable. To Wade, the OASIS is better than reality because it is in the OASIS that Wade can escape from the dystopic real world. In the novel, technology enables the construction of and access to a virtual world that is represented as the ideal, a desirable place in which all things are possible (for a price) and no one has to know who you really are. Wade’s perception of the OASIS as a utopic space is usurped as he matures and realises there is no substitute for reality, specifically, human relationships and connections. The narrative is told from the perspective of a white adolescent male, a typically humanist subject as defined by Nayar where “Humanism centres the white male as the universal human, and all other genders, differently formed bodies and ethnic types are treated as variants of this ‘standard’ model, and also forms/models that *lack something*” (12). Consequently, the humanist conclusion to the novel is appropriate for the novel’s context, which follows the development of the initially unattractive and selfish white

adolescent male as he transforms into an attractive altruistic white adolescent male with a girlfriend.

The representation of the virtual world as preferred over the real world is significant at the beginning of the novel; however, by the novel's conclusion Wade indicates a preference for reality and his friends in the real world. Nevertheless, Wade initially met all of these friends in the virtual world; thus, the significance of the virtual world in Wade's real life cannot be denied. Moving forward, the narrative suggests Wade will re-evaluate the role that the OASIS plays in his life, and perhaps – given he now has control over the fate of OASIS itself – the role it plays in the lives of others.

Real Me, Only Better

Just as the virtual world is conceptualised as 'better' than the real world by the adolescent characters, one's virtual identity is often perceived as a 'better' version of the real self – at least initially. Adolescent protagonists in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults tend to perceive their virtual self as a 'better' version of the real self because they can shape their physical appearance and change aspects of their personality – Wade, for example, is more confident online:

I was a painfully shy, awkward kid, with low self-esteem and almost no social skills – a side effect of spending most of my childhood inside the OASIS. Online, I didn't have a problem talking to people or making friends. But in the real world, interacting with other people – especially kids my own age – made me a nervous wreck. (Cline 30)

Wade is more confident in the virtual world; however, the irony is that the source of his confidence – the virtual world of the OASIS – is also the reason for Wade's lack of social skills that exacerbates his awkward real-life social situations. Ultimately, the adolescent protagonist comes to realise that the 'better' virtual self *is* the real self. The virtual world and the virtual self

function to empower the individual. The empowerment of the individual through the virtual world and the virtual self is represented in *Ready Player One*, where Wade's sense of his own self-worth is attained through experiences in the OASIS.

The novel *Frozen*, in which the protagonist's sense of self-worth and her own identity is tied to the virtual space she has created for herself, is a further example of the relationship between the virtual world and real world when it comes to identity-formation and empowerment. The novel begins with the protagonist, Lia, waking in a new body, following a fatal car accident that has destroyed her organic body. Now in a manufactured body, Lia navigates the experience of adolescence with the added complication of being considered 'other' and, by many in the novel, unnatural and nonhuman. After the procedure, called "the Download", Lia initially resists accessing the virtual world. The virtual world in *Frozen* is referred to as the network, in which individuals have their own 'zone' and often begin accessing the network from an early age.

Similarly to Wade, accessing a virtual world began as a childhood experience that becomes a significant part of the adolescent experience. When Lia finally relents, she describes the experience in this manner: "There is a six-week dead hole in my zone. I have never been off the network for that long, not since I was three and got my first account" (Wasserman 48). The terminology of "dead hole" refers to a gap in Lia accessing her zone, yet it also draws attention to the fact that Lia experienced a physical death. The "dead hole" is made significant because of the reader's awareness that Lia considers herself to be both dead and not dead – the first person narrative focalises Lia's internal conflict over this concept from the beginning of the novel:

Lia Kahn is dead.

I am Lia Kahn.

Therefore – because this is a logic problem even a dim-witted child could solve – I am dead.

Except here's the thing: I'm not. (1)

The opening sentence suggests a third person narrative perspective, referring to “Lia Kahn” as a different identity to the narrator. However, the shift in the second sentence clearly identifies that the story is told in the first person, and the narrator is the person who was initially declared “dead”. The conflict between being dead and not dead drives the plot of the narrative, particularly as Lia struggles to reconcile the death of her organic body with the continuation of her ‘identity’ as Lia Kahn in a manufactured body. Lia describes the zone as an integral part of her life, a place where Lia’s experiences – on and off the network – are documented and remembered. Returning to the zone for the first time since her accident, Lia notes that “[m]y zone is a shrine” (48), a description that further emphasises the ‘death’ of Lia Kahn.

The zone is a space to which some, but not all, have access, and where priv-walls create a boundary between what is public and what is privately accessible. The reader understands that this is the space where Lia most connects with her friends, and she considers it to be her own ‘place’ within the virtual space of the network. Inhabiting this place is through an avatar. Lia describes her own avatar as “the virtual Lia, the better Lia, the Lia that would exist in a world without limits” (50). Lia’s perception of the “better Lia” represents the virtual self as the ideal self, a projection of one’s desired identity.

In *Alone Together*, Turkle uses the case study of a sixteen year old girl, Audrey, to explore the role of the Internet, particularly social media, in a modern adolescent’s construction and representation of identity (*Alone Together* 189-98). Turkle summarises her observations:

Identity involves negotiating all of these [virtual personae] and the physical Audrey. When identity is multiple in this way, people feel “whole” not because they are *one* but because the relationships among aspects of self are fluid and undefensive. We feel ‘ourselves’ if we can move easily among our many aspects of self. (*Alone Together* 194)

The notion of multiple identities leading to a feeling of wholeness is represented in contemporary young adult narratives, particularly as such fictions depict characters comfortable

moving between their “many aspects of self”. While Lia struggles to understand and control the new body she has in the real world, her avatar in the virtual world resembles the body she wishes to have. Lia’s experience and perspective of her new artificial body and her virtual body forces Lia to consider and question who she is, reflecting “I wonder whether I am the virtual Lia, while my av is real. There is nothing left of what I used to be . . . But she is exactly the same” (Wasserman 51). The conflict in identity is, for Lia, represented in the three conflicting ‘selves’ – the organic body destroyed in the accident, the avatar on the network, and the Lia derived from brain scans uploaded into a manufactured body. Lia identifies the avatar as an extension of herself, yet now questions if she is, in a replaceable body, still that self.

The zone represented in *Frozen* is recognisable as a version of a social media platform. At the time of writing it would have been recognised by adolescent readers as akin to the popular platform of the time, Myspace. Social media platforms offer a virtual where an individual may post and share pictures, videos, and ideas with control over what is public, friends-only, and private between chosen individuals. In exploring the representation of cyberspace and virtual reality in young adult fiction, Flanagan writes:

virtual reality is presented as a very ‘real’ space for the acting out of identity development and peer relationships. Such fictions both depict cyberspace as collective, heterogenous and empowering for adolescent subjects and demonstrate that many of the rites of passage associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood are now being played out in virtual reality.

(*Technology and Identity* 156)

Similarly, the zone functions as a space for identity development, and peer relationships impact the individual’s experience of the zone. Lia’s first kiss – an experience that may be considered a rite of passage for adolescents – took place in her zone. Lia’s friends – and peers who wish to be friends with her – mourn Lia via the zone.

Lia's relationships are also defined by her ability to access the zones of her friends, which is denied after attempts to assimilate into her old life in her new body fail. Lia is refused "priv-access" to her friends' zones, and observes that, in terms of her social status, "I was untouchable, on and off the network" (Wasserman 155). The tangible nature of being 'touchable' brings to mind the difficulty Lia has in coming to terms with how things feel now that her senses are artificial. Lia's attempts to physically interact with her boyfriend fail, as touch and other sensorial experiences are different for her artificial, wired body. While a virtual self cannot, by definition, be touched, the concept of Lia being "untouchable" because of her body and "untouchable" because of her social status is highlighted in this statement.

As a heterotopic space, the network and, specifically, Lia's zone, functions as a space in which the adolescent interrogates and constructs their subjectivity. From Lia's childhood avatar "Bear Bear", to the construction of a "better Lia", Lia is able to inhabit the zone through creating a virtual self that reflects her real-world sense of identity. Just as Lia retains the virtual Lia, she attempts to retain who she was before the accident – her peer relationships, family relationships, and personal identity. When Lia's account is terminated, Lia is forced to reconsider her relationships and her identity. The message that the account holder, Lia Kahn, is deceased and thus the account is terminated further adds to the debate around death and embodiment that is represented in the narrative. Lia's sense of identity is directly impacted by the removal of her zone and termination of her account, which is devastating to her. Lia describes it as having her life deleted (Wasserman 212). Lia acknowledges that she could have had her father use his connections to have her zone reinstated, yet instead creates a new account. Lia affirms this decision with the statement: "New zone. New av. New everything" (Wasserman 219). Lia's reconstruction of her virtual identity represents a turning point in Lia's acceptance of her artificial body, as she comes to relinquish the identity of the Lia she was and replace it with the identity she develops as a result of the social and physical changes following the accident.

The new zone and new avatar represent Lia's desire to redefine herself within her new body – she becomes more open to new experiences and develops relationships with other

“mech-heads” who are accepting of her ‘otherness’. The virtual world functions as a heterotopic space that impacts the development of subjectivity in the real world. Through ‘reinventing’ herself in the virtual world, Lia is able to reconsider who she is in the real world, and consequently redefine her relationships and experiences.

In contrast to Wade’s almost constant habitation of the virtual world, Lia accesses the virtual world primarily for its social functions. Wade considers the virtual world to be the location of his ‘real life’ where he can be his ‘best self’, and Lia considers the virtual world to be the location of her ‘real self’. Functioning as a heterotopic space, the virtual world facilitates both characters’ development and maturation, to differing extent. Massey suggests

we are living through a period . . . of immense spatial upheaval . . . an era of a new and powerful globalization of instantaneous worldwide communication, of the break-up of what were once local coherencies, of a new and violent phase of ‘time-space compression’. (157)

Frozen was originally published in 2008⁶, when social media platforms such as Facebook were growing and developing in response to increasing use, and MySpace still dominated the Internet in terms of social media reminiscent of personal ‘zones’ (Raphael). *Frozen* thus represents the virtual identity as a reflection and extension of one’s real identity. In contrast, the publication of *Ready Player One* in 2011 reflects a world impacted by the 2007-2008 global financial crisis alongside the burgeoning developments in technology such as 3D television, motion control in gaming, and the release of the iPad in 2010 (McKeegan). *Ready Player One* represents the virtual world as a desirable and very possible replacement for the real world.

The more recently published *Bluescreen* in 2016 represents a futuristic Los Angeles in 2050, where flying nulis (robots), autocabs, and maglev trains dominate the urban environment. In the novel’s acknowledgements, Dan Wells writes:

⁶ Originally published as *Skinned* in 2008, the novel was re-published in 2011 as *Frozen*.

We live in a world where cars can talk to refrigerators, and a robot on Mars sends messages to a supercomputer I keep in my pocket, and yet despite all of this I never fully realized how much technology had changed the world until I read a story about a professional video-game player getting an athletic visa to travel to a tournament. Video games are sports now. I don't know why, but that's what finally did it for me. The online world has subsumed the physical one. We live in the future. (337)

Wells' representation of an adolescent protagonist who plays video games and hacks her way to saving the world reflects the world he has observed in the twenty-first century. ESPN's website lists esports alongside NFL and Cricket (ESPN), for example. *Bluescreen's* protagonist Marisa also plays a virtual reality game, *Overworld*, at a competitive level. While she identifies herself as close to being professional in skill and achievement, Marisa's true talent is in hacking.

Other characters in the novel have similar skillsets around technology and its manipulation; Marisa's brother can rewire cybernetic limbs, one of her best friends chooses to live her life publicly as "a twenty-four-hour vidcast" (Wells 21), and another friend is skilled in *avoiding* technology. Such skills distributed across the characters in the novel construct a world in which young people are empowered because of their knowledge and capabilities when it comes to accessing, using, and manipulating the technology available to them. In writing about "hero hackers" in young adult fiction, Debra Dudek and Nicola F. Johnson argue that narratives with computer hackers represented as heroes "[acknowledge] a measure of the degree to which young people are now experts in information and communication technologies" (186). Marisa's skill with technology is a contributing factor to the ease with which Marisa accesses information and communication technologies.

The virtual world may be experienced differently depending on an individual's skill and confidence in such a space. Similarly, identity-formation may be influenced by one's perception of and relationship to the virtual world. Anja and Marisa, for example, are condescending of

Omar's lack of technological prowess, laughing at his ignorance regarding matters in which they are well-versed. There are also alterations to Marisa's physical body that enable what is represented as a seamless transition between the real and virtual worlds. Such a seamless transition represents the breach of boundaries between human and machine. While Wade wears a haptic suit and visor to access the virtual world, Marisa has "Ganika-brand corneas" on which information is projected from her connected brain (Wells 14), and a head jack into which she plugs the cable for accessing virtual reality. All of this is controlled by a djinni, a system that connects directly with the brain and sensory system.

The OASIS in *Ready Player One* and the virtual worlds of Overworld and Nevermind in *Bluescreen* are environments that could be considered "epic environments". Epic environments are spaces that inspire awe, from the natural to the built (McGonigal 104). Jane McGonigal describes natural epic environments as spaces that "humble us; they remind us of the power and grandeur of nature, and make us feel small by comparison" (104). McGonigal identifies built epic environment as a human accomplishment that is "both humbling and empowering at the same time. It makes us feel smaller as individuals, but it also makes us feel capable of much bigger things, together" (104). McGonigal draws on these descriptors to define the virtual world of video game *Halo 3*⁷ as an epic environment, positioning virtual worlds alongside places such as Mount Everest (natural) and Machu Picchu (built). McGonigal's comparison promotes virtual spaces to the same status as real places, suggesting that the spaces constructed in virtual worlds are equally significant to the places that exist in the real world.

The virtual world provides an opportunity for the individual to enter a space and construct a place, and the real body experiences this through the virtual avatar. *Bluescreen* begins with a dialogue between a group of females discussing battle strategies and assessing their losses, specifically the death of a teammate, Anja. The narrative then details the protagonist, Marisa,

⁷ Halo 3 is a video game released in 2007 – the third game in a franchise of five (to date) first person shooter titles.

launching a dramatic attack against a drone. Marisa laments, however, that such an attack may not be able to occur a second time as “[t]hey always patch the good toys as soon as we exploit them” (Wells 6), terminology associated with video games. Anja then “respawns” (6), and the reader realises that the Agents are playing a game; none of this is actually real. The narrative is told in the third-person; however, it is focalised primarily from Marisa’s perspective. The third-person narrative could have been describing a real situation, but the gradual introduction of gaming terminology reveals that the characters are adolescent girls, and they have a real world to which they must return. In beginning the novel with a description of a virtual reality game, *Overworld*, the narrative highlights the importance of the game to the protagonist, Marisa.

Overworld represents a place in which Marisa is confident and capable, contrasting with the reality of her life as a teenager tricking her way around technology to avoid consequences from her parents and school for truancy and breaking the rules. There is little delineation between Marisa’s online and offline identities. Similarly, there is little emphasis placed on the transition between the virtual and real worlds. While Wade perceives stark differences between who he is in the virtual world and who he is in the real world, and Lia makes a conscious effort to access the network and her zone, there is less of a boundary between Marisa/Heartbeat, *Overworld* and the real world. The real world is enhanced by her djinni’s connection, and Marisa is instead constantly traversing both the virtual and real.

The word ‘djinn’ refers to an archetypal character of fairy tales, the genie. The ‘magical’ nature of the connection to the virtual is implied by the etymological significance of the word ‘djinn’. The word ‘djinn’ provides a linguistic link to the fantastic, which suggests that the relationship between Marisa and Heartbeat is a fantasy, and such an unbounded experience of the virtual and real is, only ever, a fantasy. The idea that technology is ‘magical’ is reductive, as the use of the word ‘djinn’ implies such technology is lacking realism. However, the word choice also encourages a positive perception of technology as the fantastical elements are – to embrace the genie comparison – wished for. Current research is wishing for – and working towards – a seamless integration between human and machine.

The possibilities of the boundary-less interface between human-machine are represented in the characters of Lia and Marisa. Such a seamlessness is made possible for Lia, whose cybernetic body incorporates technology that did not connect as well with the organic body. Lia recognises that the ability to 'link in' whenever she wishes to access the network is a benefit of the body, contrasting with the description of the 'net-lens' she previously attempted to use, which "made you nauseated and made your head burn" (Wasserman 55). Such representation suggests that there is a growing acceptance of the possibilities for the human becoming a part of a networked system, maintaining individuality while also being a part of a networked whole. Nayar writes:

Science fiction and film have contributed much to our cultural imaginary regarding the nature of bodies. Cyborg bodies and clones have been the stuff of popular culture long enough for these bodies to become recognizable as variants of the normal human body. Posthumanist thought, which argues a strong case for the human as a constructed category built on exclusions even as its very identity is constituted through a close *assemblage* and *interface* with animals, machines and environments, in its most popular articulation often focuses on the body as a site for the new interpretations of the human.

(56)

I examine representations of the cyborg and the body in chapter five; however, it is within the context of understanding virtual worlds and cyberspace that I emphasise the role of the body in accessing these virtual places.

The ease with which Marisa accesses cyberspace and the virtual world is as a result of the technology incorporated in her body. Marisa is a cyborg – one of her arms is described as "mechanical, but slender and elegant" (Wells 15). Marisa's cybernetic arm (94) is not, however, a point of contention for Marisa and her sense of self. While Lia struggles to come to terms with her cybernetic body and discrimination as a result of 'the Download', Marisa's body is

represented as accepted by society and by Marisa herself. In writing about themes of identity in young adult dystopian literature, Ferne Merrylees acknowledges the tendency for such fiction to “[suggest] that adolescents need to cultivate a form of hybridity to negotiate our increasingly technological world” (76). Marisa’s body enables her access to virtual worlds; while this can be achieved through tablets and computers, the direct connection alters Marisa’s experience of both the virtual and real worlds. The characters visit a club where Marisa plugs a cord into her head-jack and the experience is described in the narrative:

the music seemed to come to life around her, pulsing visibly in the air as the Synestheme interfaced with her djinni to blend all five senses together. She blinked up a few enhancements, feeling almost as if her body itself was merging with the music . . . Marisa took a long, slow sip from her bubble tea; the mango was delicious, and the Synestheme interpreted the taste visually with a burst of subtle sparkles . . .

Marisa frowned and unplugged herself, suppressing a shudder as the real world seemed to solidify around her. The music dulled in the background . . .
 . (84-86)

The contrast between the music coming to life and the music dulling in the background demonstrates the dependency on the djinni and its ‘enhancing’ features when it comes to experiencing the real world. As is the trend in such narratives, technology offers a better version of reality. The djinni allows a simultaneous experience of the real and virtual worlds; seated in a club, Marisa is part of the real world while her djinni enhances the experience with virtual effects. Analogous with drugs, Marisa’s preference for experiencing the world with such enhancements is demonstrated in the “shudder” when she unplugs. McGonigal argues that “in today’s society, computer and video games are fulfilling *genuine human needs* that the real world is currently unable to satisfy. Games are providing rewards that reality is not” (4).

In contrast, Turkle examines the difference between online and offline experiences, particularly in relationships and the ways in which people connect with one another. While McGonigal perceives games as more rewarding than reality, Turkle argues that the pace of online relationships and experiences creates an adrenaline rush that cannot be met in reality: “In online games, the action often reduces to a pattern of moving from scary to safe and back again . . . The adrenaline rush is continual” (*Alone Together* 288). *Bluescreen* begins with Marisa’s avatar, Heartbeat, mid-action as her team wins a battle in the online game, Overworld. Marisa’s preference for the virtual world could reflect the adrenaline she experiences in Overworld, just as it could reflect the amplification of the sensory experience. In a world where all five senses can be blended together, *Bluescreen* depicts a world in which the real world is no longer lacking, because technology can supplement and satisfy “genuine human needs”. More significantly, technology can amplify human experience. McGonigal argues that gaming concepts can be used to reinvent real life experience (347), and promotes the use of games to reinvent experiences of reality (348). The use of technology to amplify human experience is represented in *Bluescreen* and, overall, the novel presents this idea with a positive perspective. In the novel, society’s dependence on technology also leads to a dependency on anti-virus software and vigilance when it comes to protecting oneself against hacking and malware. For example, Marisa refuses to give a boy her number because “his djinni had been so filled with adware she hadn’t accepted his ID link; instead she’d written it down, like in the old days” (Wells 15). Marisa’s acceptance of the boy’s number “like in the old days” also suggests a preference for embodied experiences as more real and reliable, a concept which I will explore further in chapter five.

The simultaneous experience of real/virtual is represented throughout the novel. The narrative is interspersed with real-world dialogue and virtual dialogue (and experiences), using font and format features to visually denote the differences for the reader. The reader follows what is happening in the real world and the numerous virtual conversations occurring at the same time. As Marisa, Omar and Anja seek to remove files from Anja’s djinni, they speak to each other while also including Sahara in the conversation via an audio link in Marisa’s djinni (Wells

122). While Sahara is at school covering for Marisa's absence, she is also participating in the removal of the files. The sending and receiving of online messages are visually represented on the page in bold text, with speech tags "wrote" and "sent" instead of 'said'.

Marisa participates in multiple conversations simultaneously, and the visual representation of virtual and real conversations enable the reader to gain a sense of the multiple events taking place. Marisa's attention is across all of these things, and this experience is made accessible to the reader with the font and format changes. The dangers of technology are represented in a similar manner to current fears about technology: loss of identity, risk of exploitation. The plot is driven by the existence of a drug called Bluescreen that relies on sensory overload to effectively shut down the body. While this is considered safe, being "[f]ully digital, so there's no medical side effects and no risk of addiction" (52), a hidden side effect is the transference of a file that enables the body to be used as a puppet. Anja, victim to this possibility, disconnects her djinni until the problem can be resolved. Marisa disconnects when she realises her djinni can be used to track her. Through disconnecting her djinni, Marisa philosophises about a world without humans, ruled by technology:

Marisa tried the front door, but found it locked . . . without her djinni, the house didn't recognize her. It gave her a moment of sickening unease, imagining that all her devices were really only communicating with each other, and she was incidental; the house didn't let *her* in, it let her djinni in. If all the humans disappeared one day, would the city still go about its daily business, busy little nulis running around building and cleaning and repairing, without ever noticing that the people were gone? (193-194)

Marisa's consideration of technology continuing in the absence of humans presents "a moment of sickening unease", suggesting a fear of a world dominated by technology in which humans go unnoticed. The emphasis on devices communicating with each other independently endows

them with a degree of control and power over the humans; it is not Marisa who is permitted entry to her home, but her djinni.

Marisa does not have control over her entrance to the house, it is the djinni and the house's computer system that control such access. In chapter one I explored the representation of the home space in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, and how the adolescent perceives and relates to the home space in terms of negotiating subjectivity. While *Bluescreen* is the first novel in a series and thus Marisa remains a developing subject at the novel's conclusion, the home space is, unlike other characters in such narratives, not denied or refused to Marisa. Marisa has a somewhat contentious relationship with her parents yet is never cast out from the home. As a place of sanctuary, Overworld is represented as Marisa's 'comfort zone', a place where she feels confident, in control, and safe. Overworld is the space Marisa chooses to enter when it comes to confronting Saif about his role in the distribution of Bluescreen, and it is in this space she is able to fully represent herself as a powerful, capable individual. Marisa embraces the world and the person she is within it, the narrative describing her increased confidence once she enters the virtual world of Overworld, where "all the confidence she hadn't felt in real life [flooded] into her now that they were safe in the virtual realm" (Wells 157). While in reality she was anxious to meet Saif, entering the virtual world improves her confidence, leading to her statement: "I'm awesome in every version of reality" (157). Marisa is empowered through the virtual world, representing that that youth agency enacted in virtual worlds can give a voice to the individual in the real world. As a virtual world, Overworld is the place in which Marisa feels confident and able to confront Saif. Overworld is the virtual world that is depicted at the beginning of the novel, reiterating its significance to Marisa's identity and perception of herself. Marisa's feelings of empowerment in Overworld later results in confidence in the real world. Marisa's confidence in Overworld contrasts with the representation of NeverMind, a different virtual environment depicted in the novel.

The environment of NeverMind depicted in *Bluescreen* contrasts with the environment of Overworld, particularly in representing Marisa's experience of each virtual world. Marisa's

confidence in using and manipulating technology to her advantage falters in a virtual world to which she is unaccustomed and in which she lacks control. Marisa is accustomed to the stability of Overworld, while NeverMind is a dystopian-esque virtual world. In NeverMind, Marisa experiences an environment in flux. She is able to contribute to its construction, though her lack of control and inexperience leads to Grendel having more influence over the environment. He is able to manipulate the environment to represent his mood and intimidate Marisa, for example, “as his voice grew angry the room grew dark, the red walls seeming to fester into the dark purple color of a bruise” (Wells 138). Marisa’s initial panic only subsides as she learns to control and construct the environment with her mind, contrasting with the confidence she experiences in Overworld:

[Overworld] was similar to NeverMind, but more stable – more solid, though she knew it was just as illusory. Everything she saw and touched was a construct put into her mind by the virtual reality program, but at least she could rely on it staying the same from moment to moment. (157)

Being able to rely on the stability of Overworld contrasts with the “limitless” (135) environment of NeverMind.

The preference for the stability of Overworld over the instability of NeverMind may be symbolic of the developing subject’s need to have a place that is reliable and dependable – a safe place in which identity-formation may occur. Places that are unstable and in which the individual is deprived of agency are detrimental to the developing subject. While Overworld functions as a place of sanctuary for Marisa, NeverMind is the metaphorical wilderness to the home as explored by Carroll in the green topos (49). As an unbounded space, NeverMind as wilderness contrasts with Overworld as sanctuary. The distinct lack of discernible green spaces and representations of the natural environment in *Bluescreen* suggests that such environments can be supplemented with virtual worlds.

Conclusion

Virtual worlds are places that are increasingly present and popular in the twenty-first century. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explores both the negative and positive ways in which technology can affect individual subjectivity and social relations. The representation of virtual worlds in such fictions suggest that virtual worlds are ideal spaces in which young people may develop a sense of self. Flanagan argues that “cyberspace often functions as a communal, nurturing space that enables young people to achieve subjective agency” (*Technology and Identity* 155). The “nurturing” space of the virtual worlds accessible through the internet is represented in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults with an emphasis on providing a safe space in which the adolescent protagonist is permitted negotiate and achieve subjectivity. Megan L. Musgrave argues

[c]oming-of-age in a time when boundaries between real life and digital life are increasingly irrelevant – when real life is digital life – young people integrate digital technology into their activities and relationships with an array of consequences spanning from self-destruction to self-actualization.
(205)

The “array of consequences” is explored in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly as there is a tendency of such narratives to represent contrasting real/virtual identities.

As a relatively recent publication, *Bluescreen* and other similar narratives are focusing on virtual worlds and the individual’s ability to construct and define their own place within such worlds, rather than attending to the environments – natural or built – of the real world. Hayles argues that “the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (*How We Became Posthuman* 2-3). The virtual world in *Bluescreen* is readily available to the developing adolescent, functioning as a space in which the developing subject may explore aspects of the self and choose to represent themselves however

they may choose. While Wade's relationship to the OASIS and Lia's relationship to her zone and the network clearly demonstrate the function of virtual places as heterotopic spaces enabling identity-formation and maturation in the real world, the virtual world in *Bluescreen* reconceptualises virtual places. Turkle posits "[i]n simulation culture we become cyborg, and it can be hard to return to anything less" (*Alone Together* 209). The implication that being cyborg is *more* than human emphasises the possibilities for technology to enhance our lives and the experiences we have of the world – real or virtual.

The lack of distinction between the real and virtual in *Bluescreen* suggests that technology is integrating the individual and virtual space, creating a seamless, boundary-less interaction between human and machine. Embracing the posthuman body requires re-defining the human through interrogation of the nonhuman. Hayles argues that "[t]he posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). Just as the posthuman subject is an amalgam, so is the posthuman body.

Through challenging ideas of the body we may reconsider ideas of subjectivity. Representing the possibilities of co-evolution has, in young adult dystopian fiction, led to challenges to the concept of the human as a species and, consequently, challenges to notions of subjectivity. Anita Tarr and Donna R. White emphasise the significance of interconnections than transcend boundaries when it comes to a key difference between humanism and posthumanism, focusing on the interconnectedness between the body, other species and the environment (xi). The boundaries of what it means to be human are challenged and redefined in texts that depict humans transformed into something so unrecognisable as 'human' that they are considered a different species altogether. Those who retain human qualities identify as human despite their mechanical or animal parts, yet the assemblage of human/nonhuman qualities and parts ultimately calls for an interrogation of subjectivity. In a dystopian landscape, the natural world is not the only environment affected by an apocalyptic event. The human body

is also altered as a result of the catalyst for the dystopian landscape, or altered in response to this.

Part of understanding subjectivity in the twenty-first century is understanding not only the impact of technology on the human subject, but – and perhaps most significantly – the impact of technology on the human body. The consequences of technology for the human body leads to a re-conceptualisation of the human, creating a posthuman figure and thus, the posthuman subject. I addressed aspects of virtual worlds and youth agency in chapter one, particularly in relation to Wade's relationship to the sanctuary space. In this chapter, I have focused on analysing the representation of virtual worlds and their significance to the developing subject in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. As heterotopic spaces in which the developing adolescent subject may engage in identity-experimentation leading to identity-forming, virtual worlds have the potential to be empowering spaces that give adolescents a voice and opportunities to enact youth agency. However, there is a contradictory nature to the notion of subjectivity as fragmented, which is becoming increasingly evident in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. While the posthuman subject is an amalgam or congeries, the continued reinforcement of a humanist perspective in contemporary young adult fiction, as I have previously discussed, problematises notions of identity in the twenty-first century. In the next chapter, I examine the login sequence as a metaphor for identity in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four: Login Sequences and Identity

The boundary between the real world and the virtual world is becoming increasingly blurred in modern life; most people in the Western world today carry virtual worlds in their pockets. Mobile devices have made it easy for people to access the Internet, play games with others from around the world, and connect with people through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. J. Macgregor Wise suggests that “[s]ense of presence is fractured, we are neither here nor there, but in multiple heres and theres as our bodies and screens wander our everyday” (3). The implication of this multiplicity of presence is that modern identity is both fluid and fractured, inciting the questions: Who am I in the real world? Do I remain the same person when I log into the virtual world, or does my subjectivity imperceptibly – or perceptibly – shift? In this chapter, I examine the login sequence used to access the virtual world and propose the login sequence is a metaphor for identity in the twenty-first century; it is in the space created by the login sequence that subjectivity exists as an assemblage. In the previous chapter, I examined the representation of the virtual world and the spaces and places created by technology that empower the adolescent and promote the development of subjectivity as a consequence of youth agency enacted in virtual worlds. This chapter focuses on the login sequence itself, which enables and thus is symbolic of both the fracturing and unification of identity.

The login sequence is a liminal space, one that exists between the real and the virtual, yet it is also a space that is increasingly challenging the demarcation between the real and virtual. Representative of the “multiple heres and theres”, the login sequence provides access to virtual worlds and, in doing so, functions as a roadway that connects the real world and the virtual world. In exploring what Jane Suzanne Carroll terms the roadway topos, Carroll argues:

The function of the roadway is, then, to cover ground, avoiding or routing around obstacles and facilitating movement between one fixed site and another. Accordingly, the roadway is seldom treated as a topos in its own

right; it is not a destination but a means of travelling from one place to another. The roadway facilitates movement while at the same time remaining immobile. (92)

In facilitating movement between the real and virtual worlds, the login sequence is not only a modern roadway, it is the roadway of the twenty-first century. Technology has enabled us to progress from traversing between destinations via dirt tracks to railroads, from flights between cities to logging in to a virtual space. Like the roadway, the login sequence exists as a liminal space between the real and virtual worlds; as Carroll explains, “[t]he roadway is always the approach, never the destination. It is always in a state of lack, of incompleteness. Because the roadway is not a destination within its own right, but a threat that links two otherwise disconnected places, it may be described as a liminal space” (92). The login sequence can be perceived as a roadway that connects the real and virtual worlds. Disruption to the login sequence disrupts one’s ability to move between the worlds.

The login sequence is a space in which multiple spaces and multiple identities are both simultaneously real and unreal. As Pramod K. Nayar contends, “[i]dentities . . . are fluid, forms are open to change and modulate, often seamlessly . . . into each other. The age of the integral/integrated, bounded body and identity is over: all are multiples, fluid, networked and capable of morphing into, or connecting with, some other body/ies as never before” (55). While the fragmenting of identity is an aspect of the posthuman subject, the login sequence merges these numerous identities and connects the real and virtual in simultaneous moment. The login sequence unites the multiple identities and reinforces identity as fluid. Furthermore, it is the login sequence that unbinds identity from the body and allows it to become a part of the networked whole.

Carroll suggests that it is the roadway that provides “interstitial space between fixed places, the roadway opens up a degree of fluidity within the landscape and, as a result, brings about fluidity with personal identity” (94). Thus, in serving as a roadway between real and virtual

words, the login/logout sequences are metaphors for the fluidity of identity. The login sequence is where the self is transformed, and each fragmented identity is made absolutely real, and absolutely unreal; it is where identity is multiplicity and the posthuman subject exists. In this way, the login sequence reinforces that, in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, rather than having to choose one or the other – human or nonhuman – the posthuman adolescent protagonist is an amalgamation of their numerous ‘identities’.

In *Ready Player One* (2011) by Ernest Cline, Wade experiences fame and fortune in the virtual world, yet lives a clandestine existence in the real world for fear of his safety – a fear which results from his virtual celebrity. *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad* (2009) by Reki Kawahara depicts a protagonist whose identity in the virtual world is his preferred identity, to the extent that his real name is not revealed until the final chapter when the characters return to reality. While this may suggest that Kirito does not acquire agency until he enters the real world, it also emphasises Kirito’s preference for adopting and maintaining his virtual representation of himself as his sole identity, perceiving it to be a better version of himself. Furthermore, it highlights the role Kirito’s virtual experiences have in informing his subjectivity in the real world. Both novels depict male protagonists navigating a virtual world, which acts as a place for both adolescent characters’ maturation and identity-formation. In *Unplugged* (2016) by Donna Freitas, Skye’s experience of disconnecting from the virtual world is represented as terrifying, an act that is depicted as unsafe and potentially irreversible. Yet it is also necessary for Skye’s physical well-being; to remain connected to the virtual world is to forsake the physical world altogether.

Ready Player One, *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad*, and *Unplugged* represent tendencies in contemporary young adult dystopian fictions to represent virtual worlds as favourable until the real world is able to be understood by the protagonist as irreplaceable. While the novels ultimately reiterate a preference for the real world, it is through accessing and inhabiting the virtual world that the adolescent protagonist interrogates and develops subjectivity. Representations of the virtual and real worlds rely on dividing and separating the virtual and real

identities of the individual; however, the login sequence serves as a pertinent reminder that they are one and the same.

While it is in the virtual world that the individual may cycle through many selves, the login sequence is a space in which all of these selves co-exist. In chapter three, I explored the significance of the virtual world to an individual's real-world identity-formation which is represented in novels such as *Ready Player One* and *Unplugged*. In depicting the login sequence to gain access to the virtual world, there is a tendency to represent a discarding of the real identity and adoption of the virtual identity. I examine this more closely through my analysis of the login sequences depicted in *Ready Player One*, *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad* and *Unplugged*. Carroll emphasises the significance of the roadway to identity (95-96) because it provides "a means of displacement" (95). Carroll surveys the symbolism of the roadway as well as the journey itself as represented in children's literature; considering the login sequence as a connection between one place and another emphasises the overall significance of transport in literature for children and young adults. Harry in the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series takes the train from ordinary London to extraordinary Hogwarts, and the four children in the first book of the series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) – Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy – walk through a wardrobe to be transported from the English countryside to a magical land. Portal fantasies are a familiar trope in children's literature, whereby characters move from one place to another. The login sequence functions as such a portal, facilitating the transition from the real place to the virtual place.

Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults that do not feature a virtual world as a part of the setting also adopt characteristics of the portal fantasy. Katniss in *The Hunger Games* takes a train to the Capitol and on the journey receives advice from Haymitch to support her preparation for the Games. Michel Foucault observes that "a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is something that goes by" ("Of Other Spaces" 23), which Alice Jenkins elaborates on in her analysis of railways and heterotopias in children's

literature. In relation to children's fantasy literature, Jenkins posits that the train "provides a sealed space that insulates characters from the landscapes they traverse and which temporarily extracts them from the laws of cause and effect that determine the rest of the fantasy world" (26).

In considering the login sequence as a railway (a variation of the roadway), the adolescent protagonist is similarly insulated against the complexities of a life lived online and offline, split between the virtual and the real. In the collection of essays *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), there are three essays that focus on transit (of which Jenkins' is one); modes of transit and points of transition are significant not only in dystopian fiction, but in children's and young adult literature overall. Monica A. Grandy and Steven Tuber refer to "transit metaphors" (274) and their use in facilitating entry into imaginative space, as represented in children's literature. While their analysis serves to consider the relationship between therapist and child patient, coming from a psychology context, Grandy and Tuber argue that "these different transitions speak to qualitatively different and important aspects of the need and threats to the process of creating and maintaining continuity of being" (289); it is the "continuity of being" that is also facilitated by the login sequence in that it enables the adolescent protagonist to continue to *be*, online and offline.

Zoe Jaques argues that posthumanism "both exposes and ironically establishes boundaries between the human and the non-human, to facilitate a dialogue as to how those very borders might become more fluid" (*Children's Literature and the Posthuman* 2-3). The login sequence is a space, however briefly occupied, in which identity is fluid because the login sequence functions primarily to cross borders and allow transition across the boundaries of real/virtual. The login sequence signifies fluidity; it incites a transformation of space, and it encourages flexibility in the demarcation of the border between the real and virtual worlds. Above all, it is in the login sequence that the posthuman subject comes to exist.

The login sequence is a recognisable and, to most, an automatic behaviour when it comes to using technology. In using the term 'login sequence', I refer to any act of connecting to a virtual world, from manoeuvring the mouse to click on a link and entering a username and password to wearing headsets or visors and connecting the body in order to transport lived experience into a virtual world. As Sandy Baldwin acknowledges, "We all do it. It is, at the least, a shared experience, more or less habitual, our fingers finding the way automatically" (143). As I outlined in chapter one, Foucault suggests that one of the principles of heterotopic sites is that they are "not freely accessible like a public place . . . To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" ("Of Other Spaces" 26). The login sequence – the entering of usernames, passwords, clicking on the correct links, positioning a visor, moving one's arms and hands in a certain way – links the real world to the virtual world. Baldwin opines: "You can . . . be logged on but not there. You can log in and go away for coffee or go to sleep. You may also log on with several accounts, split yourself across the net" (143). In this way, we are always logged in, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The notion of being logged in to several sites simultaneously, of "split[ting] yourself across the net", reflects the multiplicity of identity enabled by the existence of such technology. In Western culture, for example, it is common practice to have a phone that is logged in to various social media accounts while the user is having a face-to-face conversation with another person. One does not have to be looking at the phone to be 'logged in' to the virtual world; however, there is still a separation between the real and virtual in the form of a screen. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, this physical boundary is traversed through a login sequence that involves the utilisation of hardware to provide a fully immersive experience of the virtual world.

In previous chapters I have drawn upon Foucault's concept of heterotopias to explore the representation of places that function as heterotopic spaces made available to the developing adolescent subject. In this chapter, I focus on the notion of the mirror that represents "a sort of mixed, joint experience" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 24). Foucault posits the mirror is a utopia and therefore a "placeless place" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Foucault defines utopia as presenting

“society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down” (“Of Other Spaces” 24), but argues the mirror functions as a heterotopia because

it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (“Of Other Spaces” 24).

Foucault establishes the mirror as the site between utopia and heterotopia. In my examination of the login sequence as a roadway and as a site that exists between the place and spaces represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, I consider the “mixed, joint experience” of the mirror.

Existing in both the real world and the virtual world, the developing subject in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults occupies multiple spaces and embodies the fragmentation and fluidity of identity. The login sequence facilitates the transition between the real and virtual worlds and is a heterotopic space in which multiple spaces and multiple identities are simultaneously real and unreal. Sherry Turkle uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe the computer, suggesting that “the computer has become even more than tool and mirror: We are able to step through the looking glass. We are learning to live in virtual worlds” (*Life on the Screen* 9). As a mirror, the computer might display a reflection of the real world, but it may also give access to a utopian space, a virtual world so perfect that it is more desirable than the real world. As Turkle explains, stepping through the looking glass makes the virtual world real to the user.

In chapter four, I described the opening sequence of the first episode of *Video Game High School* (“Shot”) which blurred the demarcation between the real world and the virtual world. Through the juxtaposition of the real and virtual worlds, the audience is relied upon to decide which scenes are representative of the characters’ real world and which are taking place in the virtual world. The virtual world is made to appear real not only to the user, but to the

audience of the series itself. The login sequence may, therefore, be more accurately described as the mirror, a place that unites the experience of the real and the unreal. Jean Baudrillard asserts that “the real is produced” (2), and because the real is actually a simulation, “it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere” (2). Such a notion suggests that virtual worlds have the potential to be more real than reality itself; the virtual world is hyperreal, preceding and producing the real world.

Logging In

The login sequence may be perceived as the looking glass that we step through in order to access virtual worlds. Even when stepping through the mirror, there is a moment in which we inhabit the mirror itself. In *Ready Player One*, Wade is provided with refuge from the real world through playing old videogames on his laptop. Wade reflects: “If I was feeling depressed or frustrated, all I had to do was tap the Player One button, and my worries would instantly slip away as my mind focused itself on the relentless pixelated onslaught on the screen in front of me” (Cline 14). The simplicity of this login sequence may be familiar to readers; click on a link and a new world is revealed. In this instance, it is Wade’s worries that “slip away” as he plays video games, and the pixelated images imply his awareness that what is happening on the screen is not real, but a welcome distraction from the real.

In contrast is the login sequence that transports Wade from the world to the virtual world of the OASIS. Accessing the OASIS requires a console, a visor, and a pair of haptic gloves. In this politically and economically unstable society, accessing the OASIS is necessary for education and, later, work. Doing so requires equipment and a one-off subscription fee. The latter costs a mere 25 cents, ensuring its affordability and accessibility to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. As a result of education taking place on the OASIS, schools issue an OASIS console, haptic gloves, and visor. Thus logging in to the OASIS is made possible to any person who desires to do so. The virtual world of the OASIS is affordable and preferable to the real

world depicted in the novel. In order to access the OASIS, Wade first goes to his hideout, a van refurbished as a place in which he can access the OASIS “in peace” (25). He describes the login sequence after he has positioned the visor and pulled on the haptic gloves:

I powered on the console and initiated the log-in sequence. I saw a brief flash of red as the visor scanned my retinas. Then I cleared my throat and said my log-in pass phrase, being careful to enunciate: “You have been recruited by the Star League to defend the Frontier against Xur and the Ko-Dan Armada.”

My pass phrase was also verified, along with my voice pattern, and then I was logged in. (26)

The login sequence itself is a familiar format requiring a password to validate the user’s access; however, it is defamiliarised with the replacement of a username for a retina scan, and a spoken pass phrase rather than a typed password. The careful enunciation of the pass phrase is verified not only as a phrase, but also the voice pattern itself. The phrase is a quote from the film *The Last Starfighter* (1984) directed by Nick Castle, which was released more than sixty years before the time in which the novel is set. The use of intertextuality is an integral feature of the novel’s plot and character development, which includes recognisable references to 1980s pop-culture, reflecting the influences this had on Halliday, creator of the OASIS. In the login sequence, the pass phrase Wade uses is a phrase delivered early in the film *The Last Starfighter* when the protagonist, Alex, stands before an arcade game called “Starfighter”. The phrase is part of the arcade game’s login sequence, inviting Alex to defend “the Frontier” from aliens. The phrase is repeated later in the film, when Alex finds himself recruited by the Star League for the very purpose identified by the arcade game. The parallels between Alex and Wade are obvious: both are teenage boys living in trailer parks with little prospects for their futures, but they find solace in video games. The arcade game, for Alex, becomes a reality – for Wade, his virtual existence in the OASIS is a supplementary reality.

As the plot progresses, Wade's pass phrase changes to reflect his advancement in finding Halliday's Easter egg, as well as his experiences and position in both the OASIS and the real world. The second pass phrase disclosed to the reader is: "No one in the world ever gets what they want and that is beautiful" (Cline 199), a line from the 1987 They Might Be Giants song 'Don't Let's Start'. The lyric is a fitting choice given the preceding description of Wade's life and self-perception, identifying himself as a reclusive hermit in the real world, and a god in the OASIS (198). In contrast is the pass phrase Wade uses when logging in to the OASIS from Og's house to complete the final Gate: "Reindeer Flotilla Setec Astronomy" (326). The seemingly random collection of words refers to the 1982 film *Tron*, in which a hacker is transported into the virtual world, and the 1992 film *Sneakers*, in which a former hacker is asked to recover a box disguised as an answering machine.

The login sequence is made significant because the changing pass phrases represent changes in Wade's experiences and expectations. The use of intertextuality defamiliarises contemporary gaming culture and its roots in popular culture from the 1980s, constructing a schema for engaging with virtual worlds. The use of intertextuality in *Ready Player One* constructs a virtual world that challenges visions of the future: possibilities for technology and virtual worlds may be hindered or liberated by nostalgia for the past. Readers of young adult dystopian fiction are accustomed to entering a strange world once they open the pages of the book – the world in *Ready Player One* is made stranger because of the frequent references to a time period that is unfamiliar to the adolescent reader. The emphasis on a different time period also provides an opportunity for the reader to question the impact past practices and ideas about technology have on current and future notions of the human.

The use of first person narrative positions the reader to experience what Wade experiences; however, there are regular direct addresses to the reader. Direct address is used to enhance reader alignment with Wade's perspective and experiences. As the focalising perspective, Wade's direct address to the reader assumes the reader is complicit in Wade's point of view. Through this direct address, Wade often explains some of the references he makes in

the narrative, suggesting that it is not expected the reader understands every reference. Direct address also positions the reader as part of the narrative, implying that the reader exists in the setting and Wade's experiences are being shared with an audience with at least some knowledge of the world that exists in the novel.

The origins of the pass phrases are not explained in the narrative, thus the reader is invited to explore the layers of meaning created by the numerous references to texts that exist in both the reader's world and the world constructed by Cline in *Ready Player One*. Wade does, however, explain the next part of the login sequence. After logging in to OASIS, he receives a welcome message that is displayed in the novel as visually different to the font and style of the narrative, positioned at the centre of the page:

Identity verification successful.

Welcome to the OASIS, Parzival!

Login Completed: 07:53:21 OST-2.10.2045

(Cline 26)

The welcome message reveals much about the login sequence that connects Wade's real world to the virtual world of the OASIS. The first line "Identity verification successful" suggests that Wade has been identified, yet this contrasts with the welcome message addressed to "Parzival". Wade and Parzival simultaneously exist and do not exist; one identity replaces the other via the login sequence. At some stage during the login sequence, the subject is no longer identified as Wade, but as Parzival. Yet Wade still exists, a body in a van connected to a virtual world.

The message states the login is completed, detailing a time and date, yet there is one final stage to the login sequence, a message that is again positioned at the centre of the page in the same font as the previous message.

These three words were always the last thing an OASIS user saw before
leaving the real world and entering the virtual one:

ready player one

(Cline 26)

The explicit description of “leaving the real world and entering the virtual one” clarifies that Wade can discern between reality and the virtual experience, and he is conscious of crossing the boundary between these worlds. Unlike the reference to *The Last Starfighter* made in his pass phrase, the words “Ready Player One” are explained to the reader as a message “embedded in the log-in sequence . . . as an homage to the simulation’s direct ancestors, the coin-operated video-games of his [Halliday’s] youth” (26). The explanation suggests that Cline does not expect the reader to understand the reference, particularly as coin-operated video-games are not commonplace today, as they have been replaced with game consoles and screens. The phrase may also be explained by Wade because of his admiration for Halliday and the influences that led to the development of the OASIS. That the message is “embedded in the log-in sequence” suggests that the login sequence itself is made significant because of the consideration and thought put into the process by the creator of the OASIS.

During the login sequence, the reader is aware only of Wade’s identity. There is no overt statement explaining that Wade is Parzival, relying on the reader’s ability to draw this understanding from the welcome message. Wade explains that “[p]eople rarely used their real names online” (Cline 28); however, the OASIS public school system enrolment requires students to give identifying information accessible only to the principal. Despite this, “[n]one of my teachers or fellow students knew who I really was, and vice versa” (28). Not being known as either Wade or Parzival, therefore, necessitates the adoption of another identity. Known at school as Wade3, he is the third Wade to enrol at his school, thus the name is his identifier for the duration of his education. As no one else knows who Wade3 really is, there is the suggestion that this is a third identity that exists in addition to Wade and Parzival. Despite Wade3 sharing “Wade” as a name common to the identity of Wade and Wade3, there is a sense that Wade3 is less Wade than Parzival. Somewhere between being welcomed to the OASIS and appearing in

the virtual school, Parzival has disappeared and Wade3 has appeared in his place. Wade logs in to the OASIS; the OASIS welcomes Parzival; Wade3 attends school in OASIS.

Each of these names identifies different aspects of Wade's identity, yet they are all the same person. All three identities exist and do not exist, simultaneously enabled and disabled by the login sequence. The login sequence serves as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity that occurs as individuals navigate the real and virtual worlds, and, consequently, notions of self. Wade's comfort with navigating all three identities normalises identity as fluid. While today's Western adolescents may perceive virtual worlds as an extension of the real world, and therefore represent themselves in virtual worlds as they do in the real world, Wade's experiences demonstrate the possibility for experimentation with identities. The narrative explores the potential for the login sequence to mark entry from one world to another, and the ability for the posthuman subject to extend his or her identity depending on context, need, and personal preference.

When it comes to logging out from OASIS, the sequence is anticlimactic and lacks the detailed description of the login sequence. The absence of detailed description of the logout sequence implies that accessing the virtual world is more thrilling and significant to the individual than departure from it. The login sequence is represented as a significant experience for Wade, as it is described in detail and Wade's thoughts and feelings regarding the process and how much he enjoys being in the OASIS are made clear to the reader. In contrast, the log out sequence is given little attention, in part because of the life-changing experience Wade has just had in the OASIS, and perhaps also because returning to the real world is not something Wade anticipates or enjoys.

The simplicity of the logout sequence may also suggest that regardless of the identities Wade adopts in the virtual world, it is in returning to the real world that Wade also returns to being Wade – a single individual with a single identity (and this is also a marginalised identity – in socioeconomic terms). The return to a distinctly humanist perspective of identity reflects the

dominant discourse that privileges the white male subject in humanism. However, Wade's changing sense of self cannot occur without the role of the virtual world and his virtual identity. The contradiction between the humanist perspective of identity and the significance of multiple identities experienced through the virtual world presents a paradox for the development of identity, encouraging the reader to question their own interactions with the real and virtual worlds they inhabit, and the identities with which they experiment.

As a heterotopic space, the login sequence functions as a space in which the multiple concepts of identity can co-exist – simultaneously. In contrast, the logout sequence disperses these multiple identities. In exploring the symbolic function of the roadway topos, Carroll suggests

[t]he placelessness of the roadway topos undoubtedly generates questions about identity. In providing a means of displacement, by removing the traveller from home and, by extension, from a fixed sense of place and identity, the roadway enforces a kind of defamiliarisation. By alienating the traveller from home, the roadway topos supports a new attitude towards home and causes the traveller to consider, and perhaps even to revise, a sense of self. (95-96)

The login/logout sequence serves as a roadway between the real and virtual worlds, and it is in the brief experience of this space that the individual is connected to both the real world and the virtual world. Displaced and alienated as a singular identity, the login/logout sequence enables the subject to pass between the worlds and experience identity as multiplicity.

The perception of identity as multiplicity is a significant motif in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, reflecting the real ways in which adolescents (and the assumed adolescent reader) access and use virtual worlds in order to act out different identities. More than twenty years ago, Sherry Turkle explored identity and the online communities of MUDs. Turkle argued "[t]he Internet is another element of the computer culture that has contributed

to thinking about identity as multiplicity. On it, people are able to build a self by cycling through many selves" (*Life on the Screen* 178). The virtual world facilitates the individual's experiments with notions of self. The ability to deactivate, delete, or simply abandon a 'self' that is no longer pleasing or enjoyable illustrates the fluidity of individual subjectivity in the digital age and interrogates the traditional humanist assumption that identity is fixed and stable.

In chapter one, I explored the notion of networked publics in order to understand the relationship between the virtual world and Wade's agency, and in chapter three I examined in detail the significance of the virtual world in relation to the development of subjectivity. The concept of "many selves" reinforces my arguments in these chapters in relation to the representation of virtual and real worlds; the login/logout sequence is the mode of transit between these "many selves". Like the roadway identified by Carroll in the roadway topos, the login sequence is a liminal space that impacts the individual's identity-formation.

In the novel *Unplugged*, the login sequence is not described because the novel begins in the App World, a virtual world in which inhabitants are "plugged in", often from an early age. The virtual world is the only world Skye has experienced since "plugging in" at the age of five, though she has memories of her mother and sister left behind in the real world. Skye's best friend, Inara, is grateful for being plugged in as a baby, stating: "I'm glad I was a baby when these two weirdos [her parents] plugged me in . . . Saved me the whole Two Worlds Complex and all that" (Freitas 8). The term "Two Worlds Complex" implies that binaristic thinking is passé. Having been deprived of the experience of the real world, Inara is not given the opportunity that Wade has been given; Wade experiences and understands the real world, and his preference for the OASIS is informed by this experience and understanding. The first person narrative and the occasional question and statement directed to the reader encourages the reader to understand Wade's preference for the virtual world over the real world. Inara perceives that the virtual world is the only world that matters, and she has little desire to return to the real world. Inara's excitement when "unplugging" becomes prohibited is understandable as she has no connection

to the real world. In contrast, Skye – like Wade – has experienced the real world and has reasons for wanting to leave the virtual world.

The narrative is told from the perspective of Skye, and it is with this perspective that the reader is likely to relate and sympathise. Skye's experience of the real world is limited as she was five when she plugged in to the App World. Inara's reference to the "Two Worlds Complex" suggests that inhabitants' experience of conflict between their virtual lives and the real world they left behind is common and familiar enough to have a term. That it is a "Complex" suggests that there is something wrong with the people who experience this, however, as the word has psychoanalytical connotations. For most of the population, there is an obvious preference for a virtual existence in the App World, with frequent references to the virtual world allowing for a 'better' life. Unlike other inhabitants of the App World, Skye desires to unplug and return to her family. Others, however, express their disdain for still being connected to the real world through their bodies which is relayed to the reader through an initially unexplained reference to researchers searching for 'the Cure'. Capitalisation of this term elevates it to the status of proper noun, signifying to the reader that there could be significant disease or illness in the real world; therefore, the virtual world is the safest place to be. The narrative later reveals that the Cure refers to the desire to "overcome our reliance on the body" (Freitas 86-87).

In the virtual world, it is the real world that is perceived to be inadequate, and the body that tethers the individual to the real world is the disease that requires a cure. Timothy W. Luke suggests "[t]he body as an organic site for defining subjectivity now can be contested in cyberspace as its substance and presence are digitized" (38). In contrast to this concept, Skye's determination to maintain her connection to her body, and the need to have this body in order to inhabit the real world, suggest that she needs an organic site for defining her subjectivity.

In contrast, the virtual world is integral to Wade's definition and development of subjectivity. Wade's increasing success in the virtual world results in his taking better care of his

body, just as his experiences in the virtual world help him better appreciate the real world.

Sherryl Vint proposes

if we model our ideals of the posthuman on moving beyond liberal humanism, then there exists the more positive model of an embodied posthuman subjectivity. This model . . . can see posthuman subjectivity in terms of its possibilities for multiple forms of embodiment, an embodiment that is continually changing and open to new ways of engaging with the world as we experience it from multiple subject positions. (*Bodies of Tomorrow* 25)

Wade is able to experience the world from multiple subject positions because he is able to log in and out of the virtual world. Skye, however, is restricted to the virtual world; thus, she is unable to experiment and engage with all aspects of the real and virtual worlds because her subject position is limited.

While the login sequence is significant in *Ready Player One*, it is the absence of a login sequence in *Unplugged* that places the reader's focus on the App World itself. In doing this, the virtual world is presented as utopic, a perfected world that draws inspiration from the real world without the parts that are considered detrimental to the individual. Once a person "plugs in" to the App World, her or his identity in the real world are no longer of importance. The search for a "cure" to disconnect permanently from the real world represents the desire to continue inhabiting the virtual world – it is this hyperreal space that is preferable, as it is this replication of the real world that is perceived as superior to the original. Umberto Eco examines the use of animatronics at Disneyland, explaining that it is through Disneyland's use of fake alligators (and other animals) that "don't have to be coaxed" (44) that we come to understand how "technology can give us more reality than nature can" (44). When the simulation becomes more real than real, and more enjoyable and entertaining than the real, it may be unsurprising that the individual comes to prefer the spaces offered by the virtual world.

In *Unplugged*, most of the citizens of the App World are excited by and desire the ability to remain in the virtual world and be rid of their bodies – and therefore connection to the real world – forever. Skye, however, does not share this desire, suggesting that the reader, too, should challenge the posthuman possibilities of a body disconnected from the Self. Skye's hesitance and scepticism reflects N. Katherine Hayles' observation that "[a]s we rush to explore the new vistas that cyberspace has made available for colonization, let us remember the fragility of a material world that cannot be replaced" (*How We Became Posthuman* 49). Skye's concerns about permanent disconnection from the real world reflect the fears of an increasing dependency on technology and virtual worlds in the twenty-first century. Being positioned to share Skye's perspective, the reader is able to interrogate their own connections to both the real and virtual worlds. Skye is determined to unplug so that she may reunite with her family. In addition, Skye believes that she cannot truly know who she is as an individual until she experiences the real world and inhabits her real body: "... I was just another virtual girl, looking forward to unplugging on her seventeenth birthday. I couldn't wait to see my real family again, and decide if maybe, just maybe, the real me was worth hanging on to" (Freitas 3). Skye's preoccupation with experiencing the "real me" and association of this with the body is one of the first internal thoughts to which the reader is privy in the narrative. That Skye perceives there is a "real me" suggests that she needs to experiment with different subject positions – and thus a different world – in order to develop a sense of self.

Skye's perspective of identity as being intrinsic to the body is reflective of the concerns expressed in most contemporary dystopian novels for young adults. Separation of being "another virtual girl" compared to being "the real me" establishes a conflict in relation to identity-formation, suggesting to the reader that the two identities are distinct and do not coexist in either the virtual world or the real world. The separation of identities is further reiterated with the description of the features of Skye's and Inara's virtual bodies, which include the differences, but ultimately emphasise the similarities; the lengths of their fingers are "eerily similar" and their skin colour is "identical, the same shade of Caucasian 4.0 as every other citizen

of the City” (4). The uniformity in skin colour is to prevent discrimination and afford all citizens equal opportunities, the choice of ‘Caucasian 4.0’ reinforces a hierarchy of race, suggesting that, in a perfect world, everyone should have the same skin colour, and that skin colour is white.

One’s true appearance is a preoccupation for Skye, who reflects: “I was always wondering what I looked like, and what Inara looked like, too – what we *really* looked like . . . A lot of sixteens worried they’d wake up in their bodies and discover they were ugly” (5). Skye’s reflection on her appearance and the concern shared by others regarding this preoccupation draws attention to the separation of the virtual and the real, and highlights the ignorance citizens have not only of the real world, but of the real body and, as Skye laments, of her “real” self. The emphasis on Skye’s desire to unplug drives the plot of the narrative. As it is Skye’s perspective from which the narrative is told, the reader is positioned to sympathise with Skye’s desire to logout and return to the real world – which acts to privilege identity as it exists there.

As a heterotopic space, the login sequence is a space in which multiple subjectivities are made simultaneously real and unreal. Yet, as Jenkins suggests, such a space can become a threat. If we consider the login sequence as the train that transports the individual from one destination to another, then Jenkins’ argument that “[t]he heterotopic space of the train can indeed become dystopian, a space of threat and vulnerability” (29) is applicable to the login/logout sequence experienced by Kirito in the Japanese light novel *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad*. Most of the texts explored in this thesis are from British, American, and Australian publishers. The Sword Art Online franchise has extended into Western culture because of the popular anime series made accessible to Western audiences through both online and television sources.

The novel, published in Japan in 2009, was translated into English and published in the USA in 2014, in response to the popularity of the anime adaptation released in 2012. The novel follows the experiences of gamers who are the first to use NerveGear “a streamlined piece of headgear that entirely covers the head and face” (Kawahara 10), capable of accessing all five senses to create a fully immersive experience in the virtual world of Aincrad. The gamers soon

discover, however, that there is no log out sequence. Once logged into the game, they are trapped, and what happens to them in the virtual world happens to their bodies in the real world, including death. Kirito describes Klein's attempts to log out as "the instant that Aincrad, the world of Sword Art Online, stopped simply being a fun game, a pleasant diversion" (15). The absence of a logout sequence causes the perception of the virtual world to shift from utopian to dystopian. Furthermore, the absence of the logout sequence makes the space itself a threat – a forced logout through having someone manually remove the NerveGear will result in death. While this may be a frightening prospect, Kirito embraces the opportunity, perceiving it to be a challenge – as someone who identifies the virtual world as superior to the real world, the challenge to 'beat the game' is readily embraced.

Referring to experiences on MUDs and MOOs, Mark Nunes suggests that "the 'naturalness' and comfort of players in this virtual space emphasises just how 'real' cyberspace has become" ("Jean Baudrillard in Cyberspace" 322). The virtual world of Aincrad has, for Kirito and the other players logged into the game, become their only 'reality'. The novel begins with Kirito already in the game, reflecting on the eagerness he and others have had in accessing the newest game with the latest hardware; it is through Kirito's narrative perspective that the login sequence is recollected and relayed to the reader. Kirito's eagerness to log in suggests that his most 'natural' sense of comfort and self comes from being in the virtual world. Kirito describes logging in to the virtual world after putting on the NerveGear as a simple process:

With the headgear on and the chin-arm locked in place, a simple 'link start' spoken command instantly causes all external noise to fade out and plunges your vision into darkness. Pass through a floating rainbow ring materializing out of the emptiness, and you're in a different world composed entirely of digital data. (Kawahara 10)

There is no username or password required to access the virtual world; however, the NerveGear equipment is a requirement to enter and fully immerse oneself in the virtual world. The lack of

a familiar login sequence for the reader, such as that depicted in *Ready Player One* (requiring a username and password), suggests that the transition between the real and virtual is somewhat seamless. The temporary loss of external noise and sight marks the transition from the real world to the virtual world. Yet once the player is logged into the game, the body is vulnerable. NerveGear intercepts the messages sent from the brain to the body, thus the body in the real world remains motionless while the body in the virtual world moves as commanded.

The NerveGear can also recreate the user's physical appearance, a feature that is represented, from Kirito's perspective, as somewhat traumatic. After discovering that no one can logout from the game, Kirito is forced to consider a life lived in the virtual world he has craved to be a part of since being part of the beta testing. Along with the revelation that no one can leave the game comes a challenge to the traditionally accepted division of real and virtual identities; a person's real appearance replaces the virtual avatar's appearance, forcing a confrontation between the real and virtual selves. The process is not an explicit part of the login sequence, but it usurps the login sequence which traditionally bridges the two worlds. As part of the login sequence, the NerveGear embeds identity into the login sequence itself by connecting and transmitting between the real world and virtual world.

Kirito describes his virtual avatar as having "a look befitting the hero of a fantasy anime, almost embarrassing in its shameless elegance" (Kawahara 11). There is little detail as to what Kirito looks like in the virtual world, though audiences of fantasy anime are likely to draw conclusions based on the brief description offered in the narrative. The brevity of the description is also perhaps due to Kawahara expecting his audience to be familiar with anime, thus details are deemed unnecessary. Kirito's appearance changes, however, with a 'gift' from the Game Master. After revealing that the virtual world is now a replacement for the real world, and that anything that happens to the body in the virtual world will also happen to the body in the real world, all players receive an item in their inventory list labelled 'HAND MIRROR' (31). Once players have looked in the mirror, their real physical appearances replace their virtual bodies. Kirito

initially looks into the mirror and sees the “painstakingly crafted face of my virtual avatar” (31).

When he looks again, Kirito sees:

Black hair in an inoffensive style. Gentle eyes set beneath long bangs. A soft, rounded face that still got me confused for a sister instead of a brother when strangers saw me side by side with my sister.

There was none of Kirito’s previous heroic look. The face I saw in the mirror

... was the real-life face I’d been trying to escape. (32)

The detailed description of Kirito’s real life appearance contrasts with the summative description of the virtual avatar. Ironically, heroes in fantasy anime are often depicted as somewhat feminine in appearance, yet this is an appearance that Kirito has “been trying to escape”, and the transference of his real appearance to his virtual identity blurs the boundary between the real and virtual worlds. As Clare Bradford et al. summarise,

in the disembodied world of cyberspace identity can be ambiguous. The absence of geographical borders and restrictions characterising the Internet enables the construction of virtual identities at least less dependent on conventional markers of class, gender, and sexuality; hence, online identity can be shifting, fragmentary, a construction, and, potentially, a deception.

(172)

Yet it is this very breaching of borders and restrictions that make cyberspace so appealing. Aech in *Ready Player One*, for example, uses the virtual world to construct an identity that is reflective of who she is beyond the restrictions she has experienced as a result of her race, gender, and sexuality. I will explore this further in the next chapter; however, it is pertinent to point out the importance of the ambiguity offered by virtual worlds. The developing subject strives towards comfort with this ambiguity. It is the ability to represent a “heroic” persona that makes the virtual world so appealing to Kirito. Yet despite being stripped of the physical appearance he has

created to identify himself as a heroic figure, Kirito maintains his hero status within the virtual world.

While the login sequence is a space – however briefly occupied – in which both Kazuto and Kirito exist and do not exist, it is after looking in the mirror that these two identities exist simultaneously outside of the space created by the login sequence. Unable to logout, the mirror forces the players to unite their traditionally accepted fragmented identities, to force them back into the space initially associated with the liminality of the login sequence. By the end of the novel, Kirito *is* reminiscent of a fantasy anime hero, despite his virtual body replicating the real life body of a young, “inoffensive”, “gentle” boy. While he perceives Kirito and Kazuto to be separate identities – one his real life identity, the other the identity he chooses to represent in the virtual world – both exist in the real world and the virtual world. Whether he calls himself Kirito or Kazuto, he is an assemblage of both identities.

As a beta tester, Kirito has more experience in the game than Klein, and is able to reflect on the simplicity of the log out sequence during beta testing:

To leave the game and return to my room back in the real world was simply a matter of opening the menu window, hitting the log-out button, then confirming the action when a safety prompt appeared. It was quite easy – but I didn’t actually know of any other way to leave. (17-18)

The inability to initiate the log out sequence exposes the vulnerability of Klein and Kirito as they occupy the liminal space between the real and virtual worlds. Ready to leave the virtual world and return to the real world, the log out sequence that enables this movement between worlds is missing. Initially perceived as an exciting and revolutionary experience, the virtual world, from this point, becomes a dystopian world from which there is no escape.

Logging Out

The login and logout sequences are typically processes in which the subject may choose to engage. Stepping back and forth through the looking glass permits the individual to experiment with many states and notions of self. One may choose to log in to a certain virtual world, and log out from that world to then log in to another, or even to log in to multiple virtual worlds simultaneously. Turkle writes:

I once described the computer as a second self, a mirror of mind. Now the metaphor no longer goes far enough. Our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology. (*Alone Together* 16)

The idea that technology permits “the emergence of a new state of the self” that is split between the virtual and the real worlds suggests that a single identity is divided between the two worlds. Wade and Skye, however, experience multiple identities across both worlds. Wade, as an individual, experiences multiple identities throughout *Ready Player One*, shifting and changing identities and identifiers to meet various purposes. Skye, in contrast, perceives her state of self in the real world as potentially different to the state of self in the virtual world. Through the log in sequence and the log out sequence each of these identities is experienced and, it could be argued, the individual can choose in which state of self they will exist today.

While *Ready Player One* highlights Wade’s enjoyment of the virtual world through emphasis on the login sequence, *Unplugged* highlights Skye’s desire to develop a sense of self through experiencing the real world. Logging in to the virtual world was not a choice made by Skye, but by her family; thus, the novel emphasises that the logout sequence is Skye’s choice – and the first real choice she makes in the App World, independent of the influence of Inara and her virtual foster family. Carroll’s argument that the roadway topos supports a reconsideration of identity as a consequence of displacement from “a fixed sense of place and identity” (95-96) is made evident in this representation of the login/logout sequences as roadway. The idea of the

roadway facilitating a changed perspective of identity is reflected in Skye's decision to logout from the App World. Such a decision is equated with subjective agency, and could be viewed as displacing Skye from what she knows as 'home' (the familiarity of the App World) and thus supporting her maturation and identity-formation.

Despite the idea that the virtual world is utopic and aesthetically perfect, the logout sequence takes place in a house in Loner Town, a part of the App World where residents live out criminal fantasies. The description of Loner Town conforms to what the reader might expect of 'the bad side of town', a place where derelict buildings and signs warning people to keep away are common. Skye observes: "This didn't seem like a place where a person could unplug. I'd expected sleek chambers and shiny, elaborate machines, not rotting floorboards and the smell of ruin" (Freitas 160). The juxtaposed images of sleek technology and a decaying house emphasise the risk that Skye is taking in unplugging, not only because it is prohibited, but also because she is returning to the real world and her own real body, neither of which are considered desirable. The juxtaposition of sleek technology and decaying house may also represent the expectation that Skye has of the real world compared to the virtual world, the latter of which is sleek and shiny, the former in a state of rot and ruin. Unplugging takes place in the form of an App:

They weren't at all typical, though. They didn't shimmer or glitter or even have an enticing image to tempt us. They were dark. Like small lumps of coal. Even though they floated like normal Apps, they seemed heavier, like they would seep into us slowly, instead of racing through our code. Like they might contain poison. (168)

Such comparison between the unplugging App and typical Apps further emphasises the risk Skye is taking, and suggests to the reader that this is an illicit, seedy experience. While the process of plugging in is not described in the narrative, the process of unplugging is described in great detail.

The emphasis on unplugging may reflect the anticipation Skye has for returning to the real world. The anticipation is enhanced with the addition of a timer set to count down from 60. As the download takes effect, Skye watches the virtual bodies of the others also unplugging slowly disappear, and her own virtual body becomes immobile as it, too, fades from the App World. Returning to the real world follows in the next chapter, entitled “Resurrection”, suggesting a return from the dead. Skye’s return is violent and abrupt, beginning with a corporeal experience describing hands:

So many of them at my feet, my legs, my middle, my shoulders, my neck, my head. Hands pushing and prodding and shifting me like I was a sack of bones, an inert object, like I was not even human. (177)

Skye’s experience of unplugging from the virtual world begins with the feeling of immobility and awareness that her virtual body is disappearing from the virtual world, but then it is her real body that is emphasised in the description of her return to the real world. Unable to speak or even scream, Skye’s thoughts are frantic and confused, and the reader shares in Skye’s confusion as to what is happening to her.

The logout sequence depicted in the novel is represented as unpleasant, suggesting that “plugging in” may seem appealing until one seeks to “unplug”; this has the potential to serve as a warning for the reader against the fragmentation of identity through using the virtual world to experiment with one’s sense of self. Such a warning would serve as further example of the tensions between the negative representation of virtual worlds by adult writers, and the potential for positive experiences of virtual worlds in terms of offering empowerment, encouraging the enacting of youth agency, and facilitating identity experimentation for the developing adolescent. The logout sequence is represented as something to be feared: fear of not knowing if the process will work; fear of returning to the fragility of the real world; fear of inhabiting a body over which the individual has no control; and fear of not being able to

communicate as an individual inhabiting the body. Unlike Wade, Skye cannot freely move between the real world and the virtual world, regardless of preference for one over the other.

There is no option to log out for Kirito in *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad*; therefore, it is the absence of a log out sequence that deprives the characters of agency. Once the game has been won the players are able to return to the real world, and the virtual world begins to disappear. When Kirito is finally able to leave Aincrad, it is represented as a virtual death, complete with a heart wrenching farewell between Kirito and virtual wife, Asuna. As they wait to 'disappear' from the virtual world, Asuna asks Kirito for his real name. Initially stunned, Kirito takes a moment to recall his name before speaking it aloud. He then reflects: "In that instant, I felt like the life that had paused so long ago started ticking once again. Kazuto slowly began to surface from deep within Kirito the swordsman" (Kawahara 237-238). Kirito has existed as a virtual identity in a virtual world for two years. Within this virtual world, the logout sequence has been initiated as a disintegration of the virtual world, taking with it the virtual bodies and the virtual identities that have inhabited it. After speaking his real-world name, Kirito's virtual body begins to disappear, as does Asuna's. The chapter ends with the description of Kirito and Asuna embracing, Kirito repeatedly calling out her name until:

The boundary that made Asuna and me separate beings vanished, and we
crossed into each other.

Our souls mingled, became one, scattered.

Disappeared. (239)

The evocative description of the log out experience explicitly addresses the notion of separate identities being able to "cross into each other". Not only is it a romantic end to the virtual romance, but it also brings together the virtual and real states of self that may coexist. While in the virtual world of Aincrad, the protagonist (and narrator) has existed as a virtual identity: Kirito. With the disintegration of the virtual world, the protagonist must return to the real world along with his real identity: Kazuto. Initially, Kirito suggests he has forgotten that Kazuto has

ever existed, yet when he finally speaks his real name, he realises that Kazuto existed all along, deep within the virtual self. As he is logged out of the virtual world, the boundary between his virtual and real selves is crossed, mingled, scattered. The boundary between the real and the virtual disappears.

Kazuto/Kirito is known to the reader as Kirito throughout the narrative. The first person narrative positions the reader to adopt Kirito's perspective; however, it also limits the reader's knowledge of the player Kazuto. The narrative instead focuses on Kirito as narrator, and the name "Kazuto" is only revealed as the virtual world disappears and the protagonist is returned to the real world.

There is only one entrance to and exit from the virtual world for Skye and Kirito. The virtual world acts as a prison, the login/logout sequences experienced once each. In contrast, the ability to regularly pass back and forth between the worlds presents Wade with a multitude of opportunities to interrogate subjectivity. Skye and Kirito are not afforded choices when it comes to remaining in the virtual world, though both are ultimately returned to the real world. This is a prohibited and potentially dangerous act for Skye, yet her desire to get to know "the real me" is a significant factor in her determination to unplug from the virtual world. Kirito perceives the inability to return to the real world as a challenge: win the game and liberate the players trapped in the virtual world. Ultimately, Wade comes to see that experiences in the real world do not equate to those in the virtual world; however, his success in the virtual world gives him the financial freedom to change the real world.

Conclusion

The notion of identity being fluid and multiple, of inhabiting networked publics, of split states of the self, is ingrained in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In considering Foucault's notion of the mirror as a "sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent" ("Of Other Spaces" 24), the login sequence functions to give the protagonist visibility to the self. Similarly, as a roadway that connects the

real and virtual worlds, the login sequence facilitates the presence and absence of multiple identities.

The consideration that Wade puts into constructing login phrases that demonstrate his reality in order to then access a virtual world demonstrates a strong connection between Wade's real and virtual experiences. The login sequence is described in detail because of its significance to Wade's development of subjectivity in the narrative. As a roadway, it is a clear transition point for Wade and as a version of the mirror, the login sequence enables Wade to simultaneously connect and disconnect with his sense of self. The login sequence is similarly important for Kirito; however, the absence of a detailed and chronologically described login sequence suggests that Kirito is initially unaware of its significance as a process. Only after realising he cannot readily return to the real world does Kirito reflect on the login process. The login sequence in *Sword Art Online: Aincrad I* reiterates the here/there nature of Foucault's mirror, of existing and not existing. The inability to log out from the game further emphasises the blurred boundary between here/there, existence/nonexistence, and the real consequences of in-game decisions. Kirito's difficulty in discerning which is his real identity – Kirito in the virtual world or Kazuto in the real world – is addressed in the representation of the logout sequence. The focus on the merging and scattering of identities in the logout sequence emphasises the metaphorical role the login/logout sequence might have for identity in the twenty-first century. Skye's experience of being unplugged and the inherent sense of disruption and disturbance that is associated with the very word is another example of the login/logout sequence as a metaphor for identity. Skye's choice to 'log out' from the App World offers the login/logout sequence as a symbol of choice and action when it comes to the use of virtual worlds as heterotopic spaces for the development of subjectivity.

In this chapter I have focused on the login sequence as a placeless place that connects the developing subject with heterotopias that encourage and reward the development of subjectivity. Foucault suggests that one principle of heterotopias is their in/accessibility, more specifically, "[h]eterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both

isolates them and makes them penetrable" ("Of Other Spaces" 26). As a roadway, the login sequence serves to open and close the heterotopic space of the virtual world. As I explore in the next chapter, this serves to address notions of embodiment which is a primary concern for the posthuman subject in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

Chapter Five: Embodying the Posthuman Subject

The notion of humanity and the boundary between the natural and artificial are questioned in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through characters that challenge the distinction between the two. Such characters engage directly with notions of being human and it is through these characters that the reader may interrogate the boundaries between human and nonhuman, natural and unnatural. The interrogation of boundaries between natural/artificial and human/nonhuman is typically represented through the body – a physical representation of the boundaries that such characters challenge and redefine. In her examination of digital citizenship in contemporary young adult fiction, Megan L. Musgrave positions the body as significant for considering the relationship between technology and young adults, and summarises:

Perhaps the most frequently articulated anxiety concerning human interventions with technology is the fear that technology will invade, and eventually overwhelm, the human body. The posthuman alteration and merging of biological bodies with machines is a frequent theme in speculative fiction, which often reflects a deep cultural anxiety that the merging of organic and mechanical matter leads to a loss of humanity. (1)

While Musgrave's focus is on realistic fiction for young adults, her arguments also draw on speculative fiction given its current popularity. The thematic function of the posthuman body in contemporary fiction for young adults and its associated representation of the "loss of humanity" is challenged in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction through discourses that explicitly address and interrogate the human/nonhuman aspects of the posthuman protagonist's identity-formation. The body is thus positioned as an integral space in which subjectivity is negotiated and (re)constructed. Kim Toffoletti argues that boundaries of the bodies are contested as a consequence of biotechnology.

In this climate of biotechnologies, virtual worlds and digital manipulation, a relationship between the organism and the machine emerges that contests organic bodily boundaries, the locus of identity and the status of the human. Clear distinctions between what is real and what is virtual, where the body ends and technology begins, what is nature and what is machine, fracture and implode. (Toffoletti 2)

Bodies impacted or altered by biotechnologies are represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, providing characters and experiences that address the greater debate regarding the interrelationships between people, nature, and technology. Such representations challenge perceptions of the relationship between the body and self.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, it is often the body that facilitates identity-formation in relation to place. Places are experienced through the body, from walking through a natural environment to connecting the senses to a virtual experience. Sherryl Vint argues that “[t]he body occupies the liminal space between self and not-self, between nature and culture, between the inner ‘authentic’ person and social persona” (*Bodies of Tomorrow* 16). The body’s occupation of liminal space, and its capacity as a site of action and reaction, suggests the body is a significant site for identity-formation. In this chapter I argue that the body – in its various forms – is an environment to which the developing subject relates in order to develop subjectivity.

In previous chapters I examined the relationship between subjectivity and places that function as heterotopias for the developing subject. In these examinations I discussed the reconceptualisation of the home space and youth agency, the relationship between the female adolescent protagonist and the natural world, and the role of virtual worlds in empowering adolescents in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. My analysis has considered the representation of identity-formation and maturation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction with an emphasis on the development of a posthuman subjectivity. A key consideration

for the posthuman subject is that of the body and notions of embodiment. The body – in its organic and artificial forms – serves as an environment for the developing subject to engage with and relate to when it comes to interrogating notions of subjectivity. The representation of the body and the subject's relationship to the body in Robin Wasserman's *Frozen* (2011), Mark Alpert's *The Six* (2015) and Donna Freitas' *Unplugged* (2016) demonstrate the trend in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction in depicting that the body plays an integral role in identity-formation and maturation; however, what constitutes 'the body' is not fixed.

When it comes to developing an understanding of the posthuman subject, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explores the body as a changeable environment. As the body is reconceptualised so, too, are notions of subjectivity. As Vint argues, "[a]lthough what is popularly compelling about the notion of the posthuman is the idea of a new physical way of being, what is more important and what underlies most science fiction engagements with the future of the human is a changed understanding of human identity" (*Bodies of Tomorrow* 7-8). Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction typically uses reconceptualised bodies as modes through which to explore a reconceptualisation of human identity. Such narratives interrogate subjectivity through challenging traditional notions of embodiment which lends towards discourses that can be critiqued through posthuman feminist theory. Rosi Braidotti argues: "Feminist theories of non- and posthuman subjectivity embrace nonanthropomorphic animal or technological Others, prompting a posthuman ethical turn" ("Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" 29). Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents these "technological Others". Toffoletti proposes "the posthuman operates as a site of ambiguity, as a transitional space where old ways of thinking about the self and the Other, the body and technology, reality and illusion, can't be sustained" (14). The posthuman subject in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction challenges the reader's understanding of the body and identity, and a future in which the reimagined body facilitates a different way of experiencing place and identity-formation.

The body may be changed by biotechnologies, merging the human and nonhuman to create a physical form that is *both* human and nonhuman. The body may, with the increasing use of technology, become intangible. From cyborgs to avatars, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction encourages the exploration of new bodies for the new world. René Descartes' argument that the mind and the body are separate from one another has led to what is now referred to as the mind-body problem, and the idea that the mind can exist without the body is apparent in Hans Moravec's suggestion that human consciousness might be downloaded into a computer⁸. Moravec's proposition that the mind can be converted into data and transferred into a new body (5) is made a reality for characters who experience just that, which typically leads to questions of their humanity because of the contrast between their human minds and nonhuman bodies.

Descartes' focus on the separation of the mind and body has been a significant concept in humanist ideology, which contrasts with the reconceptualisation of the human body in posthumanist thought. Luna Dolezal considers this to be at the core of posthumanism, arguing "under the posthuman paradigm, the body is necessarily relational, fluid, and multiple" (60). Dolezal examines the figure of Aimee Mullins, an American personality Dolezal perceives to be "a mainstream exemplar of the posthuman body" (61). In writing about the realities of a posthuman body, Dolezal considers the increasing prominence of such figures in Western culture, no longer confined to the pages of science fiction novels.

The presence of such bodies in the twenty-first century signifies a shift not only in perspectives of the human body and its limits, but also of the subject. Dolezal writes not in the context of exploring fictional narratives, but in the context of examining current social and political shifts that have long been represented in such texts. According to Dolezal,

⁸ Descartes' "Meditations on First Philosophy" and Moravec's *Mind Children* both offer insight into these ideas, and are explored together by Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman*.

[p]osthuman bodies are variable and infused with multiple possibilities. They rupture the coherent and stable narratives of the liberal humanist subject through playful experimentation with identity and form made possible through the recent proliferation and accessibility of biotechnologies. Through plasticity and body malleability, the posthuman position offers a further unsettling and reconfiguration of the traditional subject of liberal humanism that was begun by the theoretical projects of feminist theory, disability theory, critical race theory, and queer theory. (62)

Perceiving the posthuman body as a challenge to the liberal humanist subject suggests that the hierarchical dualisms that have informed humanist notions of subjectivity to date are no longer relevant. While it is tempting to perceive posthuman identity as existing as a mind to be uploaded, transferred, and downloaded as required, the posthuman body plays a significant role – perhaps more than the humanist body ever did.

Conversely, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder refer to Aimee Mullins as representative of ablenationalism (55-58); that is, positioning disabled people as being of service to the nation-state, as opposed to “parasitic upon its resources” (17). While Dolezal considers the “multiple possibilities” of the posthuman, Mitchell and Snyder are instead critical of the “hyperprotheticized bodies” (56). Their criticism is especially directed towards images that put Mullins’ body on full display, arguing

the engineering feat of machinic supplementation becomes the primary object of fascination, and the viewer is left with a fetishization of technological compensation itself – not bodies extraordinary in their rescue from a disability abject, but rather a surfeit degree of compensation that suggest a wealth of supports available only to a select few: ‘the able-disabled.’ (Mitchell and Snyder 57) These contrasting perceptions of Aimee Mullins and what the ‘able-disabled’ body might signify are pertinent to considering the relationship between the body and identity.

Protagonists in contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults are often negotiating notions of identity in relation to perceiving – and experiencing - their own bodies.

Characters in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction follow humans perceiving themselves to be nonhuman and then realising they are human – or, perhaps more accurately, *posthuman*. The mechanical aspects of their bodies do not define their humanity; however, these bodies do function as significant sites of identity-formation. One of N. Katherine Hayles' principle concerns is of the "erasure of embodiment" (*How We Became Posthuman* 4), arguing that the body affects human behaviours "at every level of thought and action" (*How We Became Posthuman* 284). Hayles writes:

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognises and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (*How We Became Posthuman* 5)

Such a concept of the posthuman encourages a perception of the body as integral to identity and the posthuman subject, whereby the body and experiences that can only be had through finitude of such a form situates the subject not only in the "material world", but also the places within it.

Regardless of how the body may develop due to the influences of biotechnologies, the body is considered integral to posthuman subjectivity because it is through the body that the subject may inhabit and experience space and place. Notions of embodiment are significant to discussions of and approaches to the posthuman subject, and are especially pertinent to posthuman feminist theory. Braidotti contends that posthuman feminist theory offers "an

expanded relational vision of the self, and it recasts a posthuman theory of the subject as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, biotechnologically mediated bodies are capable of doing” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 687). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the blurring of boundaries between what kind of body the subject may inhabit suggests the body itself is an environment – a landscape inhabited by a subject. Just as a house, garden, or virtual world may be a place with which the subject engages, so, too, is the subject’s body.

Assembled Bodies

When we consider the concept of the cyborg, images of Terminator-style bodies may spring to mind. Void of human emotions and a slave to his programming, this is certainly not a positive vision of the cyborg body. And it is not – the Terminator is an android, not a cyborg, regardless of his human features and ability to learn and deliver colloquial catch phrases. There is a clear distinction between androids and cyborgs. Androids may look like humans, but they are robots. Cyborgs, on the other hand, are a fusion of the human with non-organic or mechanoid elements. The term was first used by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960, as a shortened form of the phrase “cybernetic organism”. They argue that modifying the human body for extra-terrestrial environments would be more logical than providing earthly environments in space (26). They explain that one of the first cyborgs was a rat that had an osmotic pressure pump capsule under its skin to enable continuous injections of chemicals without the rat being aware it was happening.

The cyborg is an integration of organism and machine, identified by Donna Haraway as “a hybrid of machine and organism” (*How We Became Posthuman* 291). However, in her more recent work, Haraway claims the cyborg is not a hybrid, but instead

imploded entities, dense material semiotic “things” – articulated string figures of ontologically heterogeneous, historically situated, materially rich, virally proliferating relatings of particular sorts, not all the time everywhere,

but here, there, and in between, with consequences. (*Staying with the Trouble* 104)

I define the cyborg as both natural and unnatural – a merging of the organic and the manufactured or artificial, an image that blurs the boundary between nature and technology.

In *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008), Jenna's body is a reconstruction of her original, organic body, but with an improved immune system, the capacity for knowledge to be 'uploaded', and physical endurance that is suggested to be more-than-human. Allys, in contrast, has received transplants yet is represented in the narrative as more 'natural' than Jenna because Allys' body conforms to the standards set by the Federal Science Ethics Board (FSEB). The discourse addresses notions of what constitutes human and nonhuman, natural and unnatural, as I have discussed in chapter two. Marisa in *Bluescreen* (2016) is represented as having a prosthetic arm, but hardware for accessing virtual and enhanced realities is also embedded in her body, suggesting that the 'cyborg' nature of her body is not restricted to the prosthetic or the djinni. The characters in *Pure* (2012) represent variations of the 'nonhuman', their bodies all examples – to varying degrees – of the amalgamation of the organic and artificial. The physical features of the cyborg, considered in these examples, does not exclude characters such as Wade from *Ready Player One* (2011) or Kirito from *Sword Art Online I: Aincrad* (2009) as being considered cyborgs. While the cyborg figure has been aligned with the female in feminist discourse, it is also evident in the external tools used by Wade and Kirito to access virtual worlds, which merge the organic (human) body and the artificial (nonhuman) technology. In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the cyborg is both a figurative and literal figure that enables the construction of a posthuman subjectivity.

None of the novels outlined here explicitly use the term 'cyborg' to refer to the protagonists. Marisa's cybernetic arm is advantageous to the plot's development, and it is not addressed as a disability as one might expect compared to how such an amputation might be

discussed in the adolescent reader's context. Tobin Siebers examines the medical definition of disability to contextualise disability theory,

The medical model defines disability as an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being. (3)

The focus in this definition of disability is on the goal of achieving “full capacity as a human being”. The cybernetic arm offers Marisa an opportunity to be ‘complete’ in body, yet it is also a pertinent part of who she is; indeed, the SuperYu arm stops a bullet that would have otherwise killed Marisa (Wells 89). It is also without her arm that Marisa triumphs, informing her friends, “I’m literally going to beat them with one hand tied behind my back” (291). Disability studies, according to Siebers, “studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas attached to disability identity and asks how they relate to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression, attacking the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being” (3-4). Marisa, and characters like her, challenge notions of the body and identity. However, Siebers examines Haraway’s description of cyborgs and severe disability before concluding “The cyborg is always more than human – and never risks to be seen as subhuman. To put it simply, the cyborg is not disabled” (63). While Marisa is dependent on the cybernetic arm, it is significant to note that she is without this ‘more-than-human’ prosthesis as the conclusion of the novel.

Cyborgs were initially proposed as the ‘logical’ answer to changing environments – adapt the human body to the environment, rather than adapt the environment itself. While Clynes and Kline were concerned about the body in space, cyborgs are now a very real possibility for the body here on Earth. Consider the cochlear implant, “an electronic medical device that replaces the function of the damaged inner ear” (“Cochlear Implants”), whereby technology performs a function that the human body cannot. Researchers are exploring ways to manufacture tissue and organs with 3D printing for human transplant (Lewis), and bionic limbs

are a current reality (Smith). Technology is changing the human body, and with these changes comes a driving question: What does it mean to be human?

An answer to this question is complicated when the human body is no longer an entirely organic, natural organism. The cyborg body heralds change in how we perceive the human, and brings with it questions of mortality, humanity, and identity. Cyborgs are a powerful metaphor for the transgression of boundaries, bringing together the organic body and the machine in a world that continues to question the relationships between people, nature, and technology. In "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), Haraway uses the image of the cyborg, a recognisable figure of posthumanism for its fusion of technology to the organic body, to encourage feminists to transcend boundaries, just as the cyborg transcends boundaries. Haraway's identification of three boundaries – human/animal, animal-human/machine, and physical/non-physical (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 293-295) – that have been transgressed in the late twentieth century are significant in considering the destabilisation of hierarchy. Hayles argues that "the cyborg becomes the stage on which are performed contestations about the body boundaries that have marked class, ethnic, and cultural differences" (*How We Became Posthuman* 85). The cyborg body represents the possibilities not only for the human body, but also urges us to interrogate constructions of identity and notions of subjectivity. Haraway argues that "bodies are maps of power and identity" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 180) and includes cyborgs in this statement, urging acceptance of the machine as "an aspect of our embodiment" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 180). She proposes that "cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 316). The hybrid form of the cyborg has traditionally been perceived as a figure of fear, yet it is through the occupation of liminal space that the cyborg is perfectly positioned as an effective motif in literature for interrogating conventional modes of subject-formation. It is also through the cyborg that the pessimistic representation of the future as a dystopia in contemporary narratives for young adults is made optimistic.

In analysing representations of the cyborg in cinema, Sue Short suggests that “far from threatening humanity’s uniqueness, technological life-forms may be incorporated within our ranks by upholding specific values. This development bridges the divide between the human and the machine, while also lessening fears about the future by demonstrating that a humanistic worldview is not at odds with a technological one” (192). The shifting perception of the cyborg from threat to the human to possibility of human potential is also acknowledged by Pramod K. Nayar, who writes that “[c]yborg bodies and clones have been the stuff of popular culture long enough for these bodies to become recognizable as variants of the normal human body” (56). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, many protagonists are recognisable as cyborg-like figures; just as the environment is not untouched in these imagined futures, the human body is also altered. The impact of technology on the human body requires, then, a reconceptualisation of the human subject; it is at this point that the posthuman is realised.

Reconceptualising the human is a key concern for the developing subject in young adult dystopian fiction, particularly when the world around them has been transformed into one that the traditionally conceptualised human would not survive. Clare Bradford et al. write: “The potential for robot, android, and cyborg figures to express cultural anxieties and beliefs about technology and to disrupt and blur traditional binarisms, such as human and machine, animate and inanimate, has been remarked upon by many writers about mainstream popular and adult science fiction literature and film” (162). These figures are prominent in young adult dystopian fiction and are well-positioned for interrogating notions of ‘human’ and, as a result, explore the relationships between people, technology and nature.

Part of reconceptualising the human, however, requires an understanding that the human subject is not the same as the posthuman subject. Hayles argues

the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power,

and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. (*How We Became Posthuman* 186)

The posthuman in children's literature is a significant reflection of contemporary culture and the changed perspective of technology in shaping the human experience *and* human existence. Bradford et al. acknowledge that "during the last few years a new range of concepts has begun increasingly to enter children's literature - the cyborg, virtual reality, technoculture, cloning, and genetic engineering. In short, children's books and films have begun responding to the posthuman" (154-155). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the posthuman is the protagonist, and their engagement with subjectivity is, in part, an engagement with notions of what it means to be human.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the cyborg character is used as a trope for the exploration of subjectivity. In using the cyborg character to explore subjectivity, there is a tendency to represent the development of subjectivity as being connected to place. The cyborg character as protagonist and focaliser in dystopian fiction for young adults enables the adolescent reader to interrogate subjectivity in relation to place. The cyborg character tends to be represented as explicitly experiencing different places in these fictions. The resulting discourses around subjectivity and place lead to redefining these very notions. The impact of technology on the human body demands a reconceptualisation of the human subject. Far from the terrifying image of the Terminator, the cyborg is not a slave to programming because the cyborg is capable of human emotion; the cyborg *is* human.

Young adult fiction is a literary genre that is pre-occupied with the processes of subject-formation. In representing cyborgs, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction explicitly addresses current concerns and ideas about the interrelationships between people, nature, and technology. Naarah Sawers examines the role children's fiction plays in representing biotechnologies and the subsequent messages that are passed on to young readers. She argues:

It is not enough . . . to say that novels for children are addressing bioethical concerns. More importantly, there needs to be stringent analysis of what they are saying: how they construct subjectivity and agency in a biotechnical milieu. Fiction for children is particularly significant in this instance because the formation of subjectivity is its focus. (170)

The cyborg protagonist in young adult fiction is a figure that represents such bioethical concerns and, in doing so, deconstructs the human subject in order to construct a posthuman subject. Reconceptualising conventional ideas of what it means to be human is a key concern in young adult dystopian fiction, and the cyborg figure functions to interrogate notions of 'human' and, as a result, explores the relationships between people, nature, and technology.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction tends to represent the cyborg body as a natural evolutionary destination. Characters in such fiction struggle with, but ultimately accept, the machine or animal parts that contribute to the formation of the cyborg body. In doing so, they are accepting that being human involves embracing the nonhuman and, therefore, becoming posthuman. The posthuman figure is one that both challenges and reconceptualises traditional modes of humanity. In young adult dystopian fiction, subjectivity is negotiated after interrogating identity in relation to place. In chapter three I drew upon Nayar's explanation of the cyborg body as framed by posthumanist thought, "which argues a strong case for the human as a constructed category built on exclusions even as its very identity is constituted through a close *assemblage* and *interface* with animals, machines and environments, in its most popular articulation often focuses on the body as a site for the new interpretations of the human" (Nayar 56). In young adult dystopian fiction the body can be the site of dystopia until the developing subject comes to understand and accept the nonhuman aspects of the body as part of their posthuman identity.

Contemporary young adult dystopian novels often feature protagonists who are struggling to develop a sense of identity as a result of their cyborg bodies. Like any adolescent,

they are seeking the acceptance of their families and peers, attempting to find a place for themselves in society, and struggling with questions such as ‘who am I?’. The cyborg adolescent also poses the question of ‘*what* am I?’, and seeking acceptance is made challenging when they are different to their peers, and society perceives them as ‘less’ because they are ‘other’.

The question of ‘*what* am I?’ and the perception of otherness is significant to and represented by the character of Lia in *Frozen*. Lia’s relationship with her body is contentious because she perceives her body as ‘other’ until she learns to embrace her manufactured form. Lia is identifiable as a cyborg; following a fatal car accident, Lia’s body is severely injured and cannot be saved. Lia’s brain is dissected and her mind is transferred into a manufactured body – a process called The Download (Wasserman 31). Lia becomes what is known as a “skinner” (32), a derogatory term for “[c]omputers – *machines* – that hijacked human identities, clothing themselves in human skin” (32). The novel adopts a first person narrative and it is Lia’s prejudice against skimmers that impacts her perception of her new body. The language choice in having a human identity “hijacked” emphasises the lack of choice Lia has had in the procedure. The very word “hijacked” suggests deceit and theft, a loss of control and ownership over the identity that has been taken from Lia. Lia’s distrust and dislike of skimmers establishes that the procedure is contentious, and is predictive of the negative reactions she experiences when she returns to school. Lia quickly discovers that who she was before the accident is not the same as who she is after the accident, not because Lia is different, but because her body – and perceptions of it – has changed.

In *Frozen*, the idea of subjectivity is represented as changeable; Lia’s body not only changes her experiences and perspective, but it also impacts her agency. The relationship between subjectivity and the body is represented through Lia’s experience at school. An integral function of young adult fiction is to teach adolescents to accept institutions that define their existence (Trites 19). One such institution is the school, which Michel Foucault argues is a disciplinary institution designed to create “docile bodies” (*Discipline and Punish* 138). In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the cyborg body challenges notions of conformity

and identity. The cyborg adolescent's experience of conformity and power structures is a consequence of the body itself being dissident. Such characters not only have to come to terms with a body that separates them from the 'norm', but they are also bullied because of their otherness. As a result of Lia's experiences at school, and the bullying she endures, Lia questions who – and what – she is, and interrogates how she might exist within the institutions that seek to control her.

The ordeal of bullying and feeling 'other' in the educational setting is one to which many adolescents may relate. School bullying of the posthuman subject serves as a pertinent metaphor for the modern adolescent experience, as the educational setting struggles to accommodate young people who challenge traditional social expectations. The deployment of social power is identified by Roberta Seelinger Trites as a distinguishing characteristic of adolescent literature (2), as is "investigating how the individual exists within society" (19). Further to this, Trites argues that the young adult novel "teaches adolescents how to exist within the (capitalistically bound) institutions that necessarily define teenagers' existence . . . [and] allows for postmodern questions about authority, power, repression, and the nature of growth in ways that traditional *Bildungsroman* do not" (19). The school is one such institution, a place that most adolescents spend several hours each day, five days a week. As an institution in a young person's life, the school is perhaps the most significant because of the time spent there and its overall function of education. Within this school space the individual engages with their peers, developing relationships of varying degrees. Schools can be sites of learning and play as much as they can be sites of fear and anxiety for young people.

School as a place of 'production' is recognised by Foucault, who emphasises that the development of the education system has led to "the educational space function[ing] like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding" (*Discipline and Punish* 147). The notion of school as "learning machine" is echoed in *Frozen* when Lia summarises her father's view of school:

School was the ‘crucible of socialization.’ School was where we would be molded and learn to mold others. Meet – and impress and influence and conquer – our future colleagues. We were, after all, preparing to take our place behind the reins of society. (Wasserman 86)

There is a droll tone to this summary, implying that Lia herself does not share this view, yet it is a perspective that is regularly espoused by her father. The role of school as a place to “learn to mold others” and to “impress and influence and conquer” emphasises power and the power-play that takes place within the institution. Lia’s father does not intend for his children to be the powerless, but the powerful, and prior to *The Download* Lia was succeeding at just that. She reflects: “I was used to people watching me” (113), implying she is accustomed to being one who is seen as a figure in power. She follows with: “I just wasn’t used to them gawking, then twisting away as soon as I caught them at it” (113). The contrast in how Lia is perceived by her peers establishes her loss of social status and, consequently, power. Lia becomes something of a spectacle to other students, who photograph her and seek details for the purpose of personal fame (114). Lia’s peers attempt to use her to elevate their own social status, which simultaneously diminishes Lia’s social status. Even when seeing her friends for the first time, Lia’s social power has diminished. Lia is aware of her own social power, and that of her peers, and has actively cultivated this prior to *The Download*.

The narrative details three main scenes from Lia’s first day at school: the loss of her social group and status as “ruling the pack”; the refusal by her coach to let her re-join the running team; and the Persuasive Speech class. Lia’s loss of social status is entwined with notions of power. For example, Lia recognises she could use her father’s status to “bully” her way back onto the running team (Wasserman 127), but also realises she is no longer wanted. Lia’s refusal to use another person’s power to advance herself suggests that she recognises the significance of having her own power, rather than the use of another’s, which promotes independence and a desire to regain power for herself. Lia’s desire for independence in regaining power is complicated, however, because of Lia’s changed status; the Persuasive Speech class

contextualises these experiences by explicitly addressing the social and political perspectives of skimmers and their rights (or lack thereof) in society.

Lia acknowledges the importance of engaging with her friends at a specific time and place in order to maintain her status, stating: “When it came to ruling the pack, lunch was key” (Wasserman 112). The cafeteria serves as a site in which social power is established, serving as a metaphor for evolution: “bloody struggle for turf, status, sex equaled survival of the fittest. And we were the fittest” (115). Much of Lia’s first day back at school is dominated by a discourse of power, survival, and ownership. Lia refers to the lunch table as “my table” (115), asserting ownership over a position that is threatened by Zo. As Zo asserts herself more dominantly amongst Lia’s friends, Lia feels increasingly threatened. On this first day Lia acknowledges her status has altered, eventually narrating: “So I ditched the table and the cafeteria” (119). Lia’s social group is left sitting at the table in the cafeteria, and it is this group she is leaving behind, yet this is represented through the table and the cafeteria. Rather than “ditching” her friends, Lia is ditching the place itself, and, with it, the power she once had over the people there.

Similar possessive speech is used when Lia arrives at her Persuasive Speech class and discovers her assigned seat has been given to another student. Such an act not only emphasises Lia’s feelings of displacement, but also further highlights the significance of space to identity. Lia recognises it is “my seat” (Wasserman 128) that has been given away, reflecting Lia’s possessiveness not only over a physical place, but also the social status from which she continues to descend. The significance of having or not having a seat in class reflects Foucault’s argument that “[b]y assigning individual places [to students in classrooms] it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all” (*Discipline and Punish* 147), contributing to the formation of docile bodies.

The significance of “my seat” implies a sense of ownership that could be perceived as minute in the framework of a larger institution designed to control, yet it is significant to the individual. Foucault establishes the body “as object and target of power” (*Discipline and Punish*

136) and emphasises that institutions such as the school adopt regulations and methods “for controlling or correcting the operations of the body” (*Discipline and Punish* 136). Foucault identifies a docile body as one that “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (*Discipline and Punish* 136). As previously discussed, Lia had no choice regarding her body’s transformation. In this way, it is a controlled body; certainly it is a transformed and improved body from a biotechnology perspective, but it is also ‘other’.

In *Frozen*, Lia’s body – perceived by her peers to be nonhuman – impacts her social status, forcing her into a liminal space in which she is powerless and subject to bullying and discrimination. The cyborg body is resisted and protested in the novel. Acts of bullying within the school space represent the discrimination against skimmers in the social and political space. Lia’s Persuasive Speech class, which Lia describes as “a weekly dose of posture, comportment, and projection techniques intended to smooth our eventual rise into the ranks of social and political prominence” (Wasserman 127), explicitly addresses the connection between bullying in the school space and discrimination in the social and political space. The emphasis in this description is on power. However, Lia’s perspective once again implies a sense of cynicism, suggesting that Lia is already questioning the nature of the education system. Lia’s scepticism suggests that she is developing an awareness of the school as a disciplinary institution designed to control and create functioning members of society, an awareness that precedes her change in social status.

The Persuasive Speech class clarifies to the reader why Lia is being discriminated against, and leads to Lia realising that who she is after The Download will never be who she was before. Bliss, a classmate, delivers a speech that begins:

A mechanical copy, no matter how detailed or exact, can never be anything more than an artificial replica of human life . . . It is for this reason that I argue that recipients of the download procedure should not be afforded the same rights and privileges of human citizens of society. (Wasserman 131)

The speech reflects the social and political concerns of the protesters that form a picket-line outside of Lia's home, as well as the underlying ideas behind questions and statements directed at Lia by others. The opening of the speech establishes that Lia, as a skinner, is in a liminal position compared to her peers. Use of the words "artificial" and "replica" imply the Lia is perceived as nonhuman, emphasised with the reference to skimmers as "recipients of the download procedure", a descriptor that declines to acknowledge the "recipients" as people. *Frozen* represents fears for the humanist subject through characters that challenge the notion that the mind might exist separate to the body. Protesters and Lia herself resist such a notion throughout the narrative. In the speech, the comparison to "human citizens" emphasises a division between "humans" and "recipients", implying the latter are not human.

While Bliss was reluctant to give the speech because of Lia's presence in the class, she reads it in its entirety, "her eyes fixed on her clunky speech" (132). While there is a suggestion that Bliss did not intend on causing hurt to Lia with her speech, and her eyes "fixed" on the speech suggest a sense of shame that prevents her from making eye contact with anyone, it is during the speech that Lia realises the extent of her social isolation, as the teacher, her friends, and her classmates are complicit, represented through their inaction. The one student who does attempt to defend Lia is sent out from the class, and Lia is angered by the attention caused by Auden's defence.

Lia attempts to regain a sense of power following the class, preparing to accept the pity of her classmates with grace because "Rudeness was a sign of weakness. Grace stemmed from power, the power to accept anything and move on" (133). When she discovers she is alone, with no pity or acknowledgement from her friends, Lia's powerlessness within the school setting is firmly established. However, the chapter ends with Lia alone at "the usual spot" in the cafeteria where, despite not eating, she concludes: "It was the best meal I'd had all week" (136). Throughout the chapter detailing Lia's first week back at school, Lia has struggled with the power-play and the shift in power that occurred in her absence. Lia's acceptance of the change in social status signifies a shift in her individual empowerment. Lia finds relief in isolation,

providing a point from which she may redefine her identity independent of the influences of her former peer group.

The school as a place functions to control and create “docile bodies”, and the people within the school system endorse this procedure. Eking out a place for oneself extends beyond the individual place allocated within a classroom into the social sphere where one might interrogate and establish their individual and group power. Bradford argues:

In many children’s texts, school settings constitute a liminal space where differences of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race are played out. Schools are, of course, far from neutral zones and are deeply implicated in the political and cultural systems they serve, so that relations of power generally favour majority cultures. (159)

Within the school setting Lia is exposed to the larger social and political debate regarding the status of skimmers, though Lia considers this less significant than her own status. Lia initially does not perceive herself to be a skimmer, informing Auden that Bliss’ speech was not about her until he drew attention to her (Wasserman 134). Within the school context, Lia is the minority, and it is in this position – contrasting with her former role as part of the majority – that Lia experiences power from a different perspective. Lia’s body separates her from her peers as someone who is ‘other’, giving them a target over which they might exert power within the social sphere.

The cyborg body may once have been a view of the human ravaged by technology; stripped of humanity, the cyborg reduces the human to percentages of organic flesh, performances of emotions, and the loss of an individual identity. The technology-ravaged body void of humanity is not, however, the overall vision when it comes to representing the cyborg in young adult dystopian fiction. Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is increasingly offering positive messages regarding the cyborg body and identity-formation, reflecting our increasing dependence on technology and the possibilities it offers for the human body. In a

world of cyborgs, it is no longer necessary to question the 'otherness' of an individual; the world is changing, and it is OK to be a cyborg.

Gendered Bodies

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction has been criticised for its formulaic conventions that reinforce gender normativity. Farah Mendlesohn surmises: "Rather a lot of modern authors seem to feel that they can substitute a romance between the male and female protagonists for a solid sf story" (*The Inter-Galactic Playground* 103), and emphasises such romances as representing firmly heterosexual futures (*The Inter-Galactic Playground* 104). Identity-formation for female characters in such narratives implies that female readers are heteronormative. Exploring the adolescent female body in dystopian fiction, Sara K. Day argues:

the messages that attempt to link women's physical power with the possibility of larger social influence are frequently undermined by implicit assumptions about what constitutes 'normal' bodies and desires; as a result, the paired emphasis on beauty and heteronormativity limit the degree to which these protagonists' sexual awakenings can truly be understood as reflections of and predecessors to social resistance. (76)

A typical young adult dystopian novel features a female protagonist whose 'otherness' equips her with unique skills to rebel against the false utopia that would otherwise suppress individuality and withhold agency from the members of its society. Along the way, a budding romance between a male character – and often a second male to complete the love triangle and create further conflict – is used to progress the plot and ultimately seal her development and maturation with a kiss. To simplify contemporary young adult dystopian fiction to this degree may be considered reductive, but it reveals the significance of gender roles represented in such narratives. The simplification of the narrative structure is also demonstrative of the traditionally conservative nature of children's literature. Miranda A. Green-Barteet and Jill Coste note the contradictory nature of the representation of female protagonists, writing "while the dystopian

protagonists often transgress gendered expectations, most still are white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered girls” (82) and argue that young adult dystopian fiction “overlooks queer girls” (83).

The prominence of female protagonists in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction may, on the one hand, reflect the intended audience of such novels, yet, on the other hand, it also suggests that there is a desire to portray females in a technological space. Mendlesohn perceives that females are increasingly being represented more positively in contemporary science fiction texts, arguing

there are a number of narratives in which female protagonists revolt either against future patriarchies, or against the narrow conditions of society as a whole. As a result, ‘modern’ children’s and teen sf does quite well by girls. Where girls appear as the protagonists they seem to have as much liberty as the context of the story allows. (*The Inter-Galactic Playground* 115)

Female protagonists who revolt or rebel are commonly referred to as ‘kick-ass’ and emphasis is placed on such characters as providing ‘strong female role models’. McKenzie K. Watterson, for example, attributes young adult dystopian fiction for the emergence of “a generation of incredible role models” (1). Day et al. explore the rebellious female protagonist in *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (2014), and the representation of active resistance and acceptance of social frameworks they cannot change (4). They acknowledge the conflicting messages presented to female readers in young adult dystopian fiction in the collection that explores

the ways in which the dystopian mode provides girls – who continue to be constructed as passive and weak within much of contemporary Western culture – with the means to challenge the status quo, even as many of these works remain invested in elements of romance that may be seen as limiting girls’ agency. (4)

The romance metanarrative in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction undermines, to a degree, the concept of a strong female rebel because it is the support and approval of a male figure that validates this status. Day argues:

By positioning their young female protagonists in ways that anticipate their seemingly inevitable futures as wives and mothers, then, novels such as those discussed here ultimately link sexual awakening not only to rebellion but also to eventual acquiescence to conventional women's roles. (91)

The reinforcement of "conventional women's roles" regardless of the rebellious acts performed by the female protagonist is contradictory to the perception of such characters as kick-ass role models. While such a quality is celebrated in such characters, ultimately their conformity reflects a desire to challenge *parts* of society's rules, but not all. Similarly, June Pulliman argues that gender as a disciplinary institution is used in *The Hunger Games* to oppress its female protagonist, Katniss, who is taught to use femininity to garner sympathy from her audience (178). Much of the collection in *Female Rebellion* explores texts such as Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy, whose protagonists and other characters are predominantly human.

Adding to this representation of male/female gender roles is the representation of the cyborg body and its impact on identity-formation. Not only is there a dominance of female protagonists in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, there is a distinct absence of male protagonists experiencing cyborg bodies. Novels such as *Frozen* and *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* represent female characters struggling to come to terms with their cyborg bodies. As a metaphor for body image, such an experience may be one to which the female adolescent reader may relate. Accepting the differences of her body is, for Lia, integral to her maturation and identity-formation.

The lack of representation when it comes to the male experience of such a transition is perhaps reflective of the perception that males and technology are aligned, whereas the female

aligns with nature and the natural. Male bodies tend to be aligned with the machine; a blog post for an American medical group titled 'Men's Health: Time for a Tune-up?' begins with a checklist for a car service, then prompts men to consider their own bodies as machines that also require "screenings and maintenance" (Davison). Elsa Alston and Chris Hall examined the use of the Pit-Stop program to encourage men to take action for their health, and include the statement: "Men in general seem to relate to mechanical concepts and understand the importance of regular maintenance" (2). Such assumptions about the body are represented in *Frozen* and *The Six*, each of which feature an adolescent protagonist with a nonhuman body.

In *The Six*, Adam has muscular dystrophy that has led to him being confined to a wheelchair until he volunteers for his consciousness to be uploaded to a militarised robot as part of an experimental military program. There is a distinction between the representations of bodies depending on the focus of the narrative. *Frozen* focuses on Lia's maturation and identity-formation, while *The Six* focuses on defeating an out-of-control Artificial Intelligence. While there is extensive discourse in the novel regarding the connection between the body, identity, and humanity, it is the conflict between the Artificial Intelligence and humans that drives the plot. There are contrasting messages regarding the hierarchy of nonhuman beings within this narrative; Adam, a cyborg and former human, is represented as a saviour for humanity whereas Sigma, the Artificial Intelligence who has never been considered human, is humanity's nemesis.

Adam comes to enjoy the liberation that comes with having a functional body regardless of its mechanical aspects, while Lia's body functions as a space to which she must become accustomed. Adam's maturation and identity-formation is marginal compared to his experience of the body itself and his contribution to the downfall of Sigma, whereas Lia's maturation and identity-formation is largely dependent on her relationship with her body and coming to terms with immortality.

Lia, for example, experiences the world around her differently once her body changes. Lia's negative perception of The Download and being a skinner contrasts with Quinn's

excitement. Quinn encourages Lia to go outside, and Quinn's dialogue has a sense of excitement and awe of the world, as experienced through her skinner body:

"Why are we here, Quinn?"

She clawed her fingers into the ground and dug up two clumps of grass, letting the dirt sift through her fingers. "So we don't miss any of it."

"What?"

"*This*. Feeling. Seeing. Being. Everything. The dew. The cold. That sound, the wind in the grass. You hear that? It's so ... real." (Wasserman 71)

While both Lia and Quinn have what Lia perceives to be nonhuman bodies, Quinn's perception of the world as being "so real" when experienced through such a body emphasises sensorial experience. Quinn's perception contrasts with Lia's impression that "the dew felt wrong, the cold felt wrong, the sounds sounded wrong, everything was wrong, everything was distant, everything was fake. Or maybe it was the opposite – everything was real except for me" (71-72). The two contrasting perceptions of the world are dominated by Lia's point of view as the first person narrative focalises Lia's experience.

Quinn's desire to immerse herself in the world represents her perception of herself; embracing her body, Quinn is able to experience the world through her senses, as she details in her dialogue. In contrast, Lia struggles to feel anything, perceiving herself to be artificial in a way that makes her fake. The sensorial experience of touch is represented as significant in Lia's relationship with her boyfriend, describing: "His hands on the skin – How would it feel?" (148). Lia relates differently to the world around her through her senses. One of the more significant differences in Lia's body is in her sensory experience; initially she feels numb, which is attributed to the change she has experienced and possible depression. However, Lia is encouraged to engage in risk-taking behaviour that amplifies her sensorial experience and pushes the limits of her new body, igniting a sense of empowerment and, most significantly, an emotional response

that reflects her physical experience. The risk-taking behaviour is considered necessary because of her body's senses, and deemed the only way to truly experience her new body.

Lia's body is a metaphor for the limits of the human subject. Redefining notions of 'human' and moving towards a posthuman subjectivity is represented as more achievable when one has a body that enables such transformation. No longer limited by the 'humanity' that defines the human body, the posthuman body acts as a site for the development of the posthuman subject. Anita Harris argues that "in a time of dramatic social, cultural, and political transition, young women are being constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity" (1). In this way, the relationship between Lia's body and the world in which it exists functions to interrogate subjectivity and challenge conventional notions of the subject.

In contrast, Adam's experience of a nonhuman body is secondary to his primary objective: defeat the Artificial Intelligence that is threatening the world. Such a plot is representative of the quest narrative in which many white male protagonists are found. The novel does, however, explicitly detail the transition from the organic body to the nonorganic. While Lia wakes to find herself in a new body, Adam is given a choice in his transformation. The difference in how the female and male characters experience and are involved in choices around their own body is similar across other contemporary young adult dystopian narratives. Female characters often have the choice made *for* them by well-intentioned parents. Comparatively, male characters play a more active role in deciding what happens to their bodies. Alice Curry argues "[i]n novels that envisage enhanced technology as instantiating an increasingly disembodied world, the body – and particularly the female body and the Posthuman body – becomes a locus of control and a site of potential resistance" (16). The body as "locus of control" is particularly prominent when it is given to someone else, and the female protagonist is not permitted a choice over what happens to her body.

Adam chooses to go through a process similar to *The Download*. Adam's illness keeps him physically restricted in a deteriorating body. After coming to inhabit a militarised robot, the

muscular dystrophy that previously kept him physically restricted contrasts with the subject's liberation from the physical form altogether. Adam is not only capable of movement, but can transfer his consciousness between different machines – he can easily transition between walking and flying. Concerns for his 'humanity' are articulated by Adam's mother, who refuses to acknowledge her son after the procedure is performed. His father, in contrast, is the scientist behind the programming that makes such a procedure possible. Such roles further reinforce the gendered dualism of nature and female, science and male.

The difference in the representation of female and male experience of embodiment implies that, for females, the body is a pertinent site for engaging with questions of subjectivity. The cyborg body enables mutation of the physical form, further marginalising the subject, but ultimately allowing the subject to challenge the limits of human subjectivity and reconceptualise the human. The cyborg positions the female in a further liminal space yet also offers an opportunity to re-conceptualise an identity independent of gender.

The Body as Object

One of the more prominent and recent topics in Western social and political debate is that of the female body within the context of sexuality, and sexual harassment and assault. The media is regularly reporting accusations of assault on women by men in power, and women are coming forward through social media to share their stories of harassment, assault, and fear (Khomami). There is an extensive history of the female body as being objectified and used – much in the same way society might use a docile body. The female body is, within this context, a body as object, subjected and used. What does this discourse mean for adolescent girls still exploring their own sexuality and positions as females within such a society? And how is this represented in fiction written for this readership? While the surge in the media regarding sexual harassment and assault is relatively recent, the acts themselves are not. Taking into consideration the volume of #metoo experiences shared on social media, such acts are not only numerous, but also timeless.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, themes of sexual harassment and assault vary from being represented overtly to covertly. Curry observes “animalised portrayals of the female protagonists serve to link the treatment of women with the treatment of nonhuman animals, denoting the female body as a contested site subject to discourses of animal consumption” (57). In *Frozen*, there are three overt references to this, suggesting that the female body – regardless of its organic or nonorganic form – will always be perceived as an object in a society that continues to uphold hierarchies. The first occurs when Lia goes for a late-night run and is grabbed by a Faither and pinned against a tree (Wasserman 94). The threat against Lia transitions from physical to sexual, and it is the latter that spurs Lia into action:

“Anything,” that was the word that echoed. He could do anything. I grabbed his hand, the hand that was crawling down my neck, along my spine, grabbed his fingers and bent them back until I heard the joints crunch . . . (94)

The threat sparks in Lia the first experience of emotion since The Download; the fear that Lia felt when threatened by the man is strong enough for Lia to finally feel what she defines as a real emotion. The connection between fear and emotional response is replicated later in the novel when Lia engages in risk-taking behaviour in an attempt to rekindle the ‘real emotion’ she experienced.

The second incident is at a party where an adolescent male, identified as “Cass’s mouth breather” (Wasserman 144), tries to force himself on Lia. Crass language and innuendo such as “You wanna know what’s stiff?” and “I hear you’ve got all your parts under there, just like a real girl” (144) establish the tone of the situation. Lia’s perspective details her thoughts and feelings regarding the threat:

I was thinking about this loser’s grimy hands crawling all over the body – my body – and his breath misting across my face and his puny dick twitching at some fantasy of dragging me off and shoving himself inside me. (145)

Lia takes possession of the body from which she has previously distanced herself as a result of this threat. Where Lia has identified herself as someone merely inhabiting a mechanical form, the threat posed to her body gives her a new sense of ownership over it. Her concept of the body shifts from being a space inhabited by her identity, to being a part of her identity, particularly with the possessive pronoun “*my body*”, emphasised in the text to demonstrate a changed perspective of the body from which Lia has attempted to distance herself. Through imagining the details of what could happen, Lia realises the importance of protecting her physical body from the potential “dragging” and “shoving”. At first Lia feels powerless against him, but it is the ownership over her body that causes her to act.

The third incident occurs after Lia pushes the limits of her body by depriving it of “sleep” and ignoring the body’s reports of fatigue. Her description of this demonstrates Lia is still treating her body as an object separate from herself, despite her previous sense of ownership: “Factory specifications recommended that I stop running when the body reported its fatigue” (Wasserman 183). In referring to “factory specifications”, the narrative emphasises the mechanical nature of the body, reminiscent of the instructions that might come with a new phone or computer. Rather than feeling fatigue, the body “reports” fatigue, highlighting the separation of sensorial experience from the body. Lia’s refusal to acknowledge the body’s reported fatigue implies a refusal to accept the limits of the mechanical body, but above all it is a form of rebellion against the body and the choices made for her.

When Lia’s body shuts down, leaving her mind functioning, but her physical form immobile, it becomes the inanimate object that she has perceived it to be. Lia has attempted to distance her sense of identity as separate to the artificial body her consciousness inhabits, and ignoring its needs results in the body literally becoming an object over which Lia no longer has control. Her body, frozen in the quad, is made central to observation – a reversed panopticon, where the object of observation is at the centre and can be watched from all around. Lia further distances herself from her body, stating: “The body ignored me. The body had gone on strike” (Wasserman 185). Repeated use of the article “the” emphasises Lia’s perception of the body as

object. In this position, Lia refers to herself as “a human statue” (185) and initially perceives it as an experience that “didn’t hurt” (185). Lia is most exposed and vulnerable in this position; fully aware of what is happening to her, Lia is unable to act for herself.

A couple of people poked me. One almost knocked me over before another grabbed my side and steadied me on frozen feet. Laughing, all the time. Several of the guys helped themselves to a peek down my shirt . . . Someone balanced a banana peel on my head. Someone else approached my face with a thick red marker. I couldn’t feel it scrap across my forehead. (185-185)

Lia’s powerlessness is made literal through becoming an object of entertainment. Not only does she lack social status, she is ridiculed, objectified, and even referred to with the pronoun “it” (185). Lia feels completely separated from the body that she resents, reflecting “The absence of body felt absolute. I was pure mind. I was floating” (186). While this is reminiscent of the mind-body dualism and notion of the mind existing without the body, Lia soon realises that her body – regardless of its mechanical aspects – is an aspect of her identity as it once again comes under threat.

The incident is reminiscent of performance artist Marina Abramović’s 1974 *Rhythm 0*, during which she stood passively for six hours while the public could use any of the 72 objects provided as they wished. Abramović recalled:

It was a terrible experience. I was just a thing, elegantly dressed and facing the audience. In the beginning, nothing happened, but then the audience became more and more aggressive, projecting on me three images: the Madonna, the mother and the whore. The weirdest thing is that the women almost didn’t act, but they were telling the men what to do. (16)

Abramović’s experience emphasises the consequences of objectifying the female body and the aggression directed toward it. While the intention of the performance was to test the limits of

the body and vulnerability, it also offers insight into the consequences of vulnerability: aggression from the powerful.

Vulnerable and subject to torment from her peers, Lia attempts to distance herself mentally from the physical experience. Yet in attempting to ignore the body and what is happening to it, Lia's experience affirms the body's significance. When Lia – and her immobile body – is alone with the man sent to take her for repair (later referred to as “the technician”), she is unable to fight against his advances. While she has previously been able to use her body to fight back against the men who have intended harm, Lia's complete loss of control over her body renders her truly vulnerable. Lia thus attempts to further distance herself from the body the technician is touching: *“I can't even feel it, I told myself. So it's not really happening. It's not really my body”* (Wasserman 188); however, despite the lack of sensory input, Lia is acutely aware of what the technician is doing – and could do – to her body. Whatever is done once the body is shut down, however, remains ambiguous. Lia realises the powerlessness she has when her body – and her ability to experience through her body – is literally in the hands of someone else.

There are some moments you'd rather sleep through, pass from point A to point B without awareness of the time passing or the events that carry you from present to future. And it's mostly those moments in which it's smarter – safer – to stay awake. (188)

The scene is emotive, emphasising Lia's vulnerability as a female without control over her own body and what happens to it. Similar to *The Download*, Lia is not given a choice regarding how her body is treated, representing the power given to men over the female body. Lia realises that her body was “[treated] like a bunch of spare parts, because that's all it was. It wasn't me” (190), and decides that whatever happened to the body did not happen to *her*. While this is an attempt to separate the mind from the body, Lia vows never to be in that situation again and resolves to take better care of her body: “I would never be that helpless again” (191). The desire to have

control over her body reflects a desire to have control over her identity. Lia begins to redefine her sense of self with a new understanding of her body and its limitations, and a desire to make the body her own to prevent its use by someone else. Lia refuses to let her body become a docile body and instead actively seeks ways to use her body to her advantage. Furthermore, the body facilitates Lia's development of subjectivity, functioning as an environment that supports subjectivity rather than suppressing it. Drawing on Foucault's concept of docile bodies, Day argues:

Though women in general are subjected to messages regarding the body and embodiment, adolescent women have found themselves particularly vulnerable to cultural claims and expectations about their bodies. To a frightening degree, external efforts at control have resulted in young women's experiencing a disconnect between their own bodies and the expectations projected onto them. (78)

Experiencing disconnect from the body is made literal for Lia, and such an experience is represented as negative because it leads to powerlessness and becoming subjected to use by others.

Lia's ownership of her body emphasises the importance for adolescent females to embrace their own bodies – treating it as an object, or refusing to accept it as part of one's identity, diminishes the power of the individual. Toffoletti argues:

As the limits of the body are refigured, the modes by which women conceptualise the body and identity also undergo transformation. The body as interface disturbs established notions of what constitutes the material body, undermining the fixity of meaning attributed to an embodied identity. (131)

The reconceptualisation and transformation of the body and identity is reflected in the representation of Lia's identity-formation in relation to her changed body, particularly as the

previous limitations of her human body restricted her growth and awareness. Trites argues: “Growth is possible in a postmodern world, especially if growth is defined as an increasing awareness of the institutions constructing the individual” (19). Such awareness is, for Lia, developed as a result of her mechanical body. Through inhabiting a mechanical body, Lia becomes aware of the institutions that seek to control her, and it is with this body that she is able to challenge them.

Perceptions of the female body as an object – particularly a sexualised object – have long been criticised. More recently, such criticism extends to perceptions of the cyborg body as object. Perceiving the female body as object has reduced female power over their own bodies, and there is a risk that such a perception of the cyborg body will diminish the rights and privileges of such individuals. Hayles’ concern regarding the “erasure of embodiment” urges for a consideration and celebration of the material world (5). Experiencing the world is preferred over “disembodied immortality”, a concept that is explored in *Frozen* as well as *The Six*. In *The Six*, disembodiment is a temporary state for the characters as they move between ‘bodies’. These bodies, however, have been reduced to practical, useable objects designed not only to contain the consciousness, but to also function practically as vehicles or weapons.

The contrast between the representation of the body in *Frozen* and *The Six* may be explained by the gender of the protagonists, as I previously outlined, where Lia experiences the vulnerability of being a female with no control over her body while Adam comes to enjoy the control he has over what type of ‘body’ he inhabits. Lia’s experience in *Frozen* is dominantly around accepting her body, whereas Adam’s in *The Six* explores ways of using the body for practical purposes. Haraway encourages the cyborg to be used by women to overcome the hierarchies that would otherwise restrain them (180), and Toffoletti warns that, for men, technology “assists man in his endeavours to transcend bodily limitations and reach a pure state of selfhood . . . By becoming like the machine, man may control and contain the body, and accordingly, nature and the feminine” (25). These perspectives offer contrasting views of the

potential relationships between people and machines/technology based on gender. Technology may be used to gain equality for women; in contrast, it may be used to elevate power for men.

Sensorial experience is an aspect of having a body – it is through the body we touch, smell, hear, taste, and see. Representing this sensorial experience in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction tends to be done in such a way that the experiences themselves either validate or negate the body's definition as 'human'. Lia justifies her disconnect from her body because she cannot feel anything, therefore nothing is happening *to her*. Lia's inability to smell and taste prevent her from perceiving the mechanical body as her own, because it cannot facilitate a sensorial experience of the world. Similarly, Lia's experience of emotions is initially dulled; she perceives herself as unable to feel what she terms "real emotion" and her determination to amplify her emotional experience so she can truly *feel* it leads to risk-taking behaviour.

In contrast, Adam's experience of his mechanical body is initially perceived with the same commands as a biological body:

my system freezes. I can't open any files, can't access any data. The revelation of my identity has somehow triggered a new instruction, which is being sent to every one of my circuits: *Breathe!* But I can't carry out this command. It's not included in my list of normal functions. (Alpert 116)

With Adam's developing awareness of who he is comes a conflict between human function and machine function. The transmutation of his consciousness into data has reduced possibly the most natural of human functions to a "brain-cell [pattern] that control[s] breathing" (119). Adam initially struggles to reconcile feelings associated with having an organic body with the experience of being in a mechanical body, which his father proposes is related to brain functions: "The sensations you're feeling might be related to other brain functions that were copied by the scanner. You're still going to feel hunger and thirst, even though you don't need food or water" (120). The sensorial experience has been reduced to data that can be deleted from the system, deemed no longer integral to corporeal experience. Similarly, the expression of human emotion

is limited by the mechanical body: “I feel an urge to laugh, but my speech synthesizer doesn’t recognise this command, so no sound comes out of my speakers” (123). Adam is the first to experience the process of being transferred into a mechanical body, thus his perception of the process is not only a new experience for him, but also a troubleshooting opportunity for the scientists. Not only are they dealing with a human in machine form, they are dealing with an adolescent who still feels fear and anger, and who now has the strength to assert himself as physically more powerful.

Viewing the discarded organic body further emphasises the perception of the body as object, treating it as something ‘other’ to the individual. A person who still considers themselves to be alive is disembodied from the corpse they have left behind. Both Lia and Adam have the opportunity to see the organic bodies they no longer inhabit, from the perspective of a consciousness within a mechanical form. Adam chose to undergo the process that leads to him having a mechanical body and transferrable consciousness, perceiving his organic body as no longer having functional use.

While he knows he is Adam Armstrong, it is “the corpse of Adam Armstrong” (Alpert 125) that he examines. Referring to himself in the third person distances who he is as cyborg from who he is as human. The examination of his body is detailed and emotive, reflecting a nostalgia for a body he resented when he still inhabited it.

Despite my best efforts, I get angry again. They were in such a rush to transfer my mind that they just left my body here! As if it was worthless! I suppose they would’ve eventually come back for the corpse and given it a proper burial, but the abandonment still seems wrong. This body isn’t worthless. Until an hour ago, it was *me* . . . I’ve lost the best part of me. I’ve lost it forever. (125)

Adam’s anger about the treatment and loss of his human body reflects the potential regret individuals would have if they abandon the human body altogether. The treatment of the mind

as more important than the body is reminiscent of Cartesian mind-body dualism. Adam's desire that his body receive a "proper burial" emphasises the significance of the body to identity, particularly as Adam recognises that "it was *me*", a corporeal representation of his identity.

Adam's reaction after the procedure emphasises an almost immediate desire to return to being human, with the chapter concluding: "I've been a machine for less than fifteen minutes, but already I want to be human again" (126). Adam struggles to reconcile his identity with his mechanical form, refusing to transfer his "intelligence" (135) into another robot; Adam's attachment to his human body contrasts with his ability to move between mechanical forms. He is instructed not to get "too attached" to one robot form as the body is temporary: "To fully explore my new abilities . . . I needed to occupy all kinds of machines" (136). Adam's experience of a mechanical body reflects the fears of a disembodied identity. Lacking attachment to a specific form, what is to stop the individual from distributing themselves into multiple forms and existing in more than one place? What is to prevent an individual from immortality, transferring oneself from body to body, discarding the previous form along the way?

Such questions are significant not only in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, but also to the principles of posthumanism, articulated by Hayles in her nightmare and dream versions of the posthuman (*How We Became Posthuman* 5). Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents possibilities for the body, but there is a tendency to emphasise the significance of embodiment – regardless of the organic or mechanical aspects of the body, the notion of an embodied subject continues to be privileged above the disembodied subject. The first descriptor of Adam's body in the novel details what he wishes his body could be:

My avatar . . . is the quarterback, a big, muscled guy with the name ARMSTRONG written across his broad shoulders . . . I see his massive forearms, spectacularly ripped. I chose this avatar because this is the kind of body I should've had. This is what I would've looked like if I'd had a normal, healthy life. (Alpert 6)

The adjectives “big”, “muscled”, and “ripped” describe a hyper-masculine body, which is the body Adam chooses for himself. The modal verbs “should’ve” and “would’ve” express the possibilities of his body and give the reader the first hint that Adam’s body is neither “normal” nor “healthy”. Adam’s suggestion that he “should’ve” had such a body is quickly followed with a paragraph in parenthesis: “(Okay, maybe I’m exaggerating a little. I was a scrawny kid even before I got sick, a pale, undersized boy with mousy-brown hair . . .)” (6). The image of Adam’s “scrawny” body contrasts with Adam’s hyper-masculine ‘ideal’ body that he chooses to represent in the virtual world.

Adam’s actual body has limited movement, though Adam focuses on what he can do in his description: “ . . . I have pretty good control over my right [arm]. I can still hold a fork and feed myself. And I can still surf the Web and write software code” (7). Adam’s physical abilities are reduced to two primary functions: feeding himself and using the computer, implying both are equally important to him. When Adam goes into more detail about his body, he uses words and phrases such as “useless thighs” (7), “trembling” (8), “trapped in a wheelchair” (Alpert 10), “pain” (12), “spasms” (12), and “breathing problems” (Alpert 12). When Adam looks at his body through the camera on his new robotic form, he perceives it with nostalgia, focusing not on the physical limitations it had, but on his loss of humanity. Adam articulates his fear of leaving his body when the procedure is explained, questioning: “Though it’s broken and dying, this is my body. How could I exist without it?” (67). The conflict between leaving a “broken and dying” body for another physical form addresses the ethical debates surrounding advances in medicine: At what point have we gone too far?

Adam perceives his organic body to be part of his identity, just as Lia perceives her organic body to be her real self. Adults – namely scientists and doctors – perceive such bodies as changeable. The original, organic, human body is represented as something ‘other’ once the mind has been separated from it. While both Adam and Lia experience an emotional connection to their bodies, their descriptions are somewhat grotesque. Although they perceive their bodies to be connected to their humanity, there is also something dehumanising about the way in

which the bodies are treated and described in the narratives. Adam is horrified that his organic body has been left on the operating table while the doctors and scientists have been in the room with his mechanical body, perceiving the latter to be the Adam requiring attention, the organic body no longer needing them.

Lia's body is similarly referred to as separate from Lia's identity. The doctor informs her "[t]he body of Lia Kahn is dead" (Wasserman 33) and the body is repeatedly referred to as "it" (34), a pronoun that implies something other than human where he/she might suffice. The narrative details Lia's perspective of her body and uses imagery to emphasise the damage done to the organic form, with words and phrases such as "ruined", "black scabs", and "dried blood and charred flesh" (35). Lia describes:

I wish I could say I didn't recognize it, that it was some monstrous
mound of skin and bones, broken and unidentifiable.

It was. But it was also me. (35)

Lia's connection to her body, despite its "monstrous" appearance as a consequence of the car accident, remains intact. Her reaction to seeing her body is one of anger, and her description of her feelings regarding The Download suggest a sense of violation:

They ripped it out – ripped *me* out – and left me exposed, a naked brain, a mind without a body. Because this *thing* they'd stuck me in, it wasn't a body – a sculpted face, dead eyes, and synthetic flesh couldn't make it anything but a hollow shell. Maybe I hadn't lost the essential thing that made me Lia Kahn, but I'd lost everything else, everything that made me human.

I wasn't a skinner.

I was the one who'd been skinned. (37)

The verb "ripped" implies violence and force, and the words "exposed" and "naked" emphasise the vulnerability of Lia's sense of self; it is not her body that Lia considers "exposed", but her

“mind without a body”, and this exposure is what she still feels because she does not recognise the nonorganic body as her own.

Lia perceives her body as “everything that made me human”, and this is reiterated with the lack of physical response to seeing “*My dead body*” (37). Lia reflects:

My brain – or whatever was up there – told me I was horrified. And furious.

And terrified. And disgusted. I *knew* I was all of those things. But I couldn’t

feel it. They were just words. Adjectives pertaining to emotional affect that

modified nouns pertaining to organic life-forms.

I no longer qualified. (38)

Lia’s inability to experience physical feelings that reflect her emotional response is perceived as a disqualifying factor in being considered an “organic life-form”. Lia does not perceive herself to be human because her body no longer facilitates a sensorial experience of the world. Readers may have shared Lia’s horror and disgust at seeing the body – the description is detailed enough that such an emotional response could be evoked – the readers may have also experienced a physical response to such grotesque details, the same response of which Lia is deprived. The representation of the human body versus the nonhuman body, as perceived by the adolescent focalisers in the narratives, demonstrates a struggle to reconcile the cyborg figure with notions of the human. Yet it is with the cyborg body that the adolescent protagonist develops their subjectivity.

While Lia struggles with accepting her body and debates whether or not she is still human, it is through engagement with the world through sensorial experience that she comes to reconceptualise her sense of identity. Lia is able to begin her journey of maturation and identity-formation through taking responsibility for and embracing her body. After initial apprehension, Adam comes to enjoy the freedom that comes with being able to inhabit different forms, and move between these as he desires. While he can experience the flow of data as his consciousness is liberated from the body, Adam is also vulnerable to having files – memories –

erased. It is this vulnerability that concludes the novel, which is part of a series. Adam's vulnerability represented in the novel emphasises the risks of converting the human mind into computational data, representing not only the loss of a file, but the loss of what makes us *us*.

(un)Bodies

Conventional models of selfhood and the development of identity are subverted when young people inhabit virtual worlds. Their behaviours online become something of a performance; selecting aspects of the real world and experimenting with identity in the virtual world demonstrate that subjectivity is an assemblage of the identities experienced in real and virtual worlds. Through experimenting with identities and notions of self in the virtual world, individual subjectivity becomes an assemblage of the multiplicity of identity experienced through accessing and uniting the real and virtual worlds. Anita Harris argues:

Developing a virtual identity can create a psychological freedom for young women whose bodies are closely regulated. Even whimsical and personal uses of the Internet can be meaningful in this context. The construction or use of a weblog, online diary, discussion group, or webpage for self-expression can create virtual freedoms for those under surveillance. (156)

The creation of a new avatar and space in the virtual world for Lia in *Frozen* signifies a step towards accepting her mechanical body, and offers an opportunity for her to extend her changing identity into a new environment. A virtual identity assists the developing subject in exploring aspects of themselves, and in expressing themselves without concern for judgement or censorship. In moving towards a posthuman subjectivity, contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents identity as fragmented, constructed in both real and virtual worlds, representative of the hybridised body. Lia's cyborg body enables both of these identities to exist, just as the cyborg body enables a seamless transition between virtual and real identities. Lia's mechanical body connects her to virtual environments more easily than her organic body.

The contrast between the mechanical and organic body connecting to virtual environments is shown in the description of the “net-lens” and the difference in its use by each body. The process of using a net-lens in the organic body is described as “jamming a finger in my eye” (Wasserman 55), suggesting the integration of the machine with the human can only be done with force, and implies it is an uncomfortable experience. The net-lens “made you nauseated and made your head burn” (55), further emphasising the disparity between human and machine. With a “built-in net-lens” that is featured in her mechanical body, in contrast, “migraines weren’t an issue” (56). The mechanical body makes it easier to access the network, one of few benefits Lia can list regarding the form. Lia’s expression of herself in a virtual body represents her process of identity-formation; however, her identity is still grounded in a physical form. In writing about protagonists in young adult post-apocalyptic fiction, Curry argues

[c]oncerns over human embodiment, or *disembodiment*, underpin the protagonists’ struggles to negotiate their embedded sense of self within the degraded post-natural landscapes. In a formulation that resembles the disengagement engendered by a planetary consciousness, the rhetoric of Posthumanism produces bodies that are dislocated from natural constraints.

(46)

Concerns regarding human embodiment are addressed in the representation of virtual bodies in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

Unplugged features a protagonist, Skye, who exists solely as a virtual identity, alongside a population of people who inhabit the App world in preference over the real world. The physical body is considered to be a disease for which they are seeking “the Cure”, and is perceived to be “holding back” people’s complete immersion in the virtual world. Skye’s foster father articulates such a perception: “Our tech specialists need to hurry up with the Cure. Without our bodies to hold us back, the Keepers will have nothing on us” (Freitas 10). The dinner table conversation between Skye and her foster family reveals a trend in the App world for people to dismiss the

human body and the real world. Mr Sachs and Mrs Sachs lament the loss of specific sensorial experiences, such as “the crunch of real apple when you bite into it. How the juice of a just-ripe peach makes your fingers all sticky and sweet” (8) and the difference between the taste of pizza in the real world compared to the virtual world. What is missed is represented with a sense of nostalgia; however, there is an overall preference expressed for the safety and apparent liberty of the App World. While people may choose to “unplug” and move between the virtual and real worlds, this is considered an act only performed when necessary; few actually desire to experience the real world. However, it is compulsory to unplug at seventeen for Service (caring for the bodies that remain plugged in), a procedure Skye looks forward to, though her perspective is not shared by others. A peer is relieved when this is made no longer possible: “I was dreading Service . . . Can you imagine – an entire year without Apps and the virtual comforts of home?” (27). While her foster mother claims “bodies are dangerous” (41), Skye struggles to reconcile who she is as a person without the experience of having a physical body.

The fear of *disembodiment* dominates much of posthuman discourse, a fear that is often represented in dystopian settings. Naomi Jacobs argues that

[t]he possibility of free agency seems to disappear if the embodied self becomes endlessly variable or if it is reduced to a particular configuration of genetic code, accessible to surveillance and manipulation by those in positions of social and financial power. Even the erasure of the physical limitations of the human body can seem to entail the erasure of humanity itself, or at least of some fantasized essence for which despite ourselves we feel a desperate nostalgia. The posthuman body, like the posthuman subjectivity it concretizes, seems to bode a self so vulnerable, so permeable and unstable, that it will be incapable of agency. (94)

The experiences of Lia, Adam, and Skye reinforce the importance of the body and agency, contrasting with this perspective of the posthuman body. The posthuman body, in

contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, is only vulnerable when the subject perceives it as 'other'. In recognising the self as a part of – and not independent of – the body, the posthuman subject is not vulnerable or incapable of agency, but rather empowered by the agency that comes with maturation and identity-formation. The connection between the human body and humanity is a significant aspect of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction and is often the cause of contention in identity-formation for adolescent protagonists.

Lia and Adam perceive their humanity as no longer existing because their human bodies are dead. Similarly, Skye perceives that it is through inhabiting her human body that she will come to understand "the real me" (Freitas 3). The desire to unplug and return to her body offers Skye a chance to see what she 'really' looks like, and to see the family she left behind when she entered the App world. However, Skye's perception of the body is, to the reader, recognisably flawed. In chapter two I explored the use of the dome space as a metaphor for control and oppression of the individual. The dome or controlled space seeks to prevent the adolescent from accessing spaces in which their development of subjectivity might be rewarded; specifically, the natural environment. Just as the natural environment exists outside of the controlled environment of the dome, in *Unplugged* the real world exists outside of the controlled App world. Similarly to the characters and settings explored in chapter two, young people in *Unplugged* are indoctrinated to fear the outside (real) world. While novels such as *Pure* (2012) and *Glitch* (2012) achieve this through focusing on the dangers of the natural environment, *Unplugged* emphasises the fragility of the human body.

Discourses about the human body in *Unplugged* construct the human body as weak and prone to breakage and disease:

"But isn't it a miracle how living virtually saves us from nearly all of the body's horrors?" she asked. Mrs. Worthington went on to talk about the way skin withers and dies from exposure to the sun and how the sheer presence of the body among real nature and other people makes it prone

to disease; how humans pass viruses from one to another by the mere touch of a hand and sometimes just by breathing the air.

Death was around every corner, in other words.

The best we could do was stay plugged in, she explained, our bodies isolated from others. (89)

The reader recognises this information to be false. The focus on the “weakness” of the human body may encourage the reader to recognise the ways in which the human body is strong and capable. The narrative encourages a conscious consideration of the body and its abilities, and of its significance to identity-formation. The mind-body problem is prominently represented in the narrative, emphasising the importance of the brain and the desire to liberate the mind from the body: “while we regard the real human body as an impediment to leading a fulfilled and happy life, we also depend on that fragile body to maintain the brain, that miraculous organ that connects us to the plugs and allows our virtual selves to exist” (122). The older generation has indoctrinated young people against the ‘dangers’ of a human body.

The idealisation of a virtual existence, and of the immortality that may be achieved if the mind may exist separately from a body, contrasts with the representation of the mind existing in a mechanical body, as is the case for Lia and Adam. In *Unplugged*, the emphasis is on a virtual existence, untethered to a physical form of any kind. In *Frozen*, however, the body continues to play a significant role in terms of being a physical form inhabited by the individual. Lia develops and matures as she learns to accept her mechanical body; conversely, Skye fears never experiencing a corporeal form and being restricted to a virtual existence forever. Hayles suggests that “the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to *both* the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman. Identified with the rational mind, the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body” (*How We Became Posthuman* 4). The *possession* of a body is initially represented in *Frozen* and *The Six* as each character perceives themselves as inhabiting a physical form, but not *being* that physical form. As Lia and Adam each negotiate subjectivity in relation to the physical form, they come to

represent “*being* a body”. Both Lia and Adam come to embrace the connection between identity and the body as it is their experiences with the body that results in identity-formation.

Lia comes to accept her body and identifies as a “mech”, contrasting with her resistance to being a skinner. Mech is the term adopted by others like Lia, and they encourage her to experience *being* in her body. The possession of a body is also represented in *Unplugged*, initially as something society perceives to be necessary, but unfavourable. Only after Skye unplugs and experiences what it is like to have a physical body and experience the world through this embodiment does Skye experience *being* a body. Nayar identifies that “[c]ritical posthumanism sees embodiment as essential to the construction of the environment (the world is what we perceive it through our senses) in which any organic system (the human body is such a system) exists” (9). Through embodiment, Lia, Adam, and Skye move towards a posthuman subjectivity, where the world is experienced through the body, and leads to identity-formation.

Conclusion

One of the more central themes in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is of the connection between the body and identity. The absence of the human, organic body challenges the developing subject to redefine notions of human and re-negotiate subjectivity. Lia distances herself from her body, naming it as the body of Lia Khan to imply that the discarding of the body is also the discarding of who she was, suggesting that identity is tied to embodiment. Adam, similarly, laments the loss of his body despite its deterioration that would have, ultimately, led to his death. The concept of the body and the possibilities for embodiment for Skye are represented as exciting; despite her limited experience of her own body, she perceives it as intrinsic to her identity.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction narratives strategically use notions of place to illustrate aspects of identity-formation. Yet the inter-relationship between place and subjectivity is facilitated through embodiment. A tangible form is represented as integral to

identity-formation; virtual bodies and online identities are important, but a physical body is necessary. Hayles summarises:

In a world despoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons, it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as informational patterns in a multidimensional computer space. A *cyberspace* body, like a cyberspace landscape, is immune to blight and corruption. (*How We Became Posthuman* 36)

Such an immunity is one to which humanists and posthumanists may aspire, yet contemporary young adult dystopian fiction urges that the body be considered as integral in defining subjectivity. Terri Field's theorising of embodiment from an ecofeminist perspective suggests

[i]nsofar as the body shares a devalued position with women and nature, recovering the body is part of the ecofeminist project. In its singular, abstract, and generic sense, the body needs to be reclaimed from its devalued position in opposition to the mind (and, thus, released from its exclusion from other terms associated with the mind). (40)

In "recovering the body", contemporary young adult dystopian fiction utilises non-traditional bodies to challenge the body's position in relation to the mind, challenging hierarchical dualisms and humanist notions of subjectivity. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti highlights the posthuman subject's role in transcending such dualisms, arguing that "[l]iving matter – including embodied human flesh – is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life and connects to the animal and the earth" ("Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" 33). The body's connection to the whole – its being as a part of a system, connected and entwined with others – is significant to the representation of subjectivity in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

In the previous chapters I examined the significance of different places on the development of subjectivity, particularly in offering heterotopias for the exploration and cultivation of an individual's subjectivity. The body, too, is a place that rewards the development of subjectivity and facilitates the adolescent subject's identity-formation within the context of a connected world in which the individual is not alone. These characters construct a subjectivity that is fluid, fragmented, and bound to others; a posthuman subjectivity. Toffoletti argues that "the posthuman operates as a site of ambiguity, as a transitional space where old ways of thinking about the self and the Other, the body and technology, reality and illusion, can't be sustained" (14). Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents the body as a place in which the individual may interrogate traditional ideologies and propose new ways to experience the world, and reconceptualise notions of subjectivity.

Conclusion: Unnaturally Natural

The phrase 'unnaturally natural' implies an acceptance of both the natural and unnatural aspects of an individual, seeing neither as a flaw nor a challenge to one's individuality. Visualise the natural and one may think of flora and fauna, expansive landscapes and endless skies. Consider the unnatural and one may imagine urban landscapes – cityscapes and the noise of traffic, machines and industry. A phrase such as 'unnaturally natural' challenges the dualisms of nature/technology. 'Unnaturally natural' highlights the tension within the relationship between the child and nature in a changing world where demarcations between the natural and unnatural are softened, blurred and transgressed. The Romantic and liberal humanist ideologies that have underpinned writing for children (Thiel and Waller 1) and aligned the child with nature have constructed ideologies of childhood and adolescence that imply nature as essential to childhood (Thacker and Webb 19; Dobrin and Kidd 6). Such ideologies are challenged in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction because these narratives represent a world where nature is not the only place with which the adolescent may engage – indeed, the very concept of nature is changed.

The concept of the machine in the garden and notions of the pastoral ideal (Marx 8) offers an image that perceives the unnatural as capable of existing in the natural. The image also maintains a difference between the two – the garden exists, and the unnatural machine is able to enter this natural place. Yet it is the garden in the machine (Wilbur 51) that is a more appropriate image for visualising the changing ideologies of adolescence and the representation of nature in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. The garden in the machine implies the natural can be found within the unnatural, and the boundaries between the two are perhaps not as significant as they once were.

Binarisms in Western culture inform much of the discourse around environmental issues and the role technology plays in our lives; however, young adult dystopian fiction blurs the lines between these binarisms. The nonhuman can identify as human, the natural environment can

be recreated with technology, and the adolescent can negotiate identity and subjectivity while simultaneously interrogating and usurping traditional hierarchies and binary opposites that do not have a place in the imagined future. Significant to this undertaking is the suggestion

[i]n children's literature so far, the prospect of a posthuman future is invariably aligned with notions of dystopia, shaped by a humanistic hesitation about or suspicion of the far-reaching ideological and social implications of those developments within information theory and cybernetics which have been driving 'posthumanism' since the 1940s. Such developments have impacted on how we think about the world, how we make sense of our experience, and, most significantly, perhaps, what it means to be human in a world in which traditional conceptualisations of being 'human' have been increasingly problematized and rendered inadequate. (Bradford et al. 155)

Through adopting an ecocritical approach to the posthuman subject in dystopian fiction for young adults, I have explored the potential for perceiving the posthuman as an ultimately positive figure. The posthuman transgresses boundaries and interrogates binarisms, encouraging readers to challenge how they think about the world and their experiences with nature and technology.

Information theory and cybernetics have impacted conceptualisations of the human, but it is in the twenty-first century that these conceptualisations are fast becoming realities. There is not only a presence of the posthuman in young adult dystopian fiction, but a focus on the posthuman with the popularity of protagonists that can be identified as posthuman figures, such as the cyborg Adam in *The Six* (2015), *Ready Player One's* (2011) Wade and his dependence on technology and virtual reality, and *The Adoration of Jenna Fox's* (2008) Jenna and her gradual realisation her consciousness resides in an constructed body. The narrative perspectives in such novels position readers to relate to the experiences and ontological concerns of the protagonist;

understanding who – and what – you are is not only a posthuman concern, but also a concern for most adolescents.

Currently sitting in many homes around the world is a small device that a person can talk to; its capabilities of talking back are limited, but growing. One can ask this device questions or request specific information. The device may respond with an answer when it can help, and other times it may apologise and explain “I’m still learning” when it cannot be of assistance. In the morning as one prepares for the day, the device reports the weather, news headlines, traffic conditions for the commute to work, and bids “a pleasant day”. The device functions, to an extent, as a personal assistant. While it is a tool, it is typically personified with a gendered pronoun.

Such an experience seems to have leapt from the pages of a science fiction novel. Reminiscent of Ray Bradbury’s short story “There Will Come Soft Rains”, first published in 1950 as part of a collection in *The Martian Chronicles* (Bradbury), the technology that now exists in our lives is what was once imagined by another seventy years ago. Imagining the possibilities for technology and its impact on people is fundamental for writers of science fiction texts. Such visions can serve as warnings, particularly when it comes to questioning the power we give machines and the cost that this may have on our own humanity. As a sequel to the 1982 film *Blade Runner* based on Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, the release of *Blade Runner 2049* in 2017 is a testament to the continued prevalence of such a theme. In the film *Bicentennial Man* (2009), adapted from the novel *The Positronic Man* by Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg, robot Andrew seeks to understand the human condition. Andrew’s desire to be legally recognised as human is overruled based on his immortality, and thus he chooses to undergo a process that will age him and lead to eventual death. He claims, “As a robot, I could have lived forever. But I tell you all today, I would rather die a man, than live for all eternity a machine” (*Bicentennial Man* 01:54:40-01:54:56).

Released mere weeks before we entered the twenty-first century, the film overtly addresses what it means to be human; from being creative and developing a sense of humour to falling in love and being aware of one's mortality, Andrew's transformation from robot to human is met with resistance, fascination, and – ultimately – acceptance. While there are many films and novels that explore such concepts, *Bicentennial Man* has personal significance to me. Raised on a healthy diet of *The Babysitter's Club* and Disney, *Bicentennial Man* was my first experience of engaging with questions surrounding humanity, sentience, and the very notion of being human. As a teenager, I was angry that Andrew had to "prove" himself to be human, frustrated that his marriage to Portia was not recognised, and fascinated by the concept that robots could think, feel, and act for themselves. It is this perspective of which I am reminded when approaching dystopian fiction for young adults – this 'first realisation' of concepts that changed the way I viewed the world. Andrew's determination to be a man and not a machine intrigued me. His humanity was not only defined by his emotions and humour, but by his body and its mortality. What does it mean to be human? Where is the boundary between artificial and natural? ... Is there a boundary?

While films such as *Blade Runner* (1982; 2017) and *Bicentennial Man* (2009) represent humanity as something to be preserved, there is also a warning against a reliance on technology, and a perception that this is a threat to the human. However, contemporary young adult fiction is increasingly representing technology with a more positive perspective, straying from such dark representations of technology and instead recognising the realities of a world in which technology is used and loved by humans. While there remain strong messages urging people to maintain real, physical connections with each other, there is also acknowledgement of the significance technology has in people's lives in the twenty-first century. Technology is not evil; it can be used for evil, but it can also be used to improve, repair, and advance us into a different experience of the world. Perhaps most significantly, technology and nature are increasingly represented in ways that challenge hierarchical dualisms that may have otherwise represented

the concepts in opposition to one another. Instead, the natural adopts elements of the unnatural, challenging the boundary between the two.

The preceding chapters have drawn upon examples of ‘unnatural’ characters represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. These characters seek to perceive themselves not as machines or monsters, but as human – unnaturally natural. In doing so, these characters redefine the human to accommodate their changed bodies and ideas of subjectivity; to be unnaturally natural is to be posthuman. I posit that, in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the garden symbolises control and oppression. The garden in such narratives is no place for an autonomous individual to develop identity. Instead, the idea of the garden within draws upon Jane Suzanne Carroll’s argument that the garden is a bounded space (50), and thus the metaphorical garden, bounded within the confines of the individual’s body, implies the developing subject is in control of their own sense of self. The unnatural and the natural exist simultaneously; the natural is within the unnatural. The unnaturally natural characters in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction facilitate the reader’s interrogation of subjectivity and challenge their perspective of what it means to be human; in doing so, they encourage a discourse that constructs a model of posthuman subjectivity. Victoria Flanagan summarises posthuman subjectivity as defined by its “collective rather than individualistic nature, its fragmentation and plurality, and its emphasis on embodiment” (*Technology and Identity* 187). Perceiving oneself as part of a system is, perhaps, a liberating notion for the human subject.

Maturation and identity-formation are significant aspects of adolescence. Understanding ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What am I?’, and ascertaining a place for oneself in an ever-changing world can be experienced by adolescent readers through fictional texts. Texts such as *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *Pure* (2012), *Frozen* (2011), and *Glitch* (2012) align the adolescent reader with the nonhuman subject using posthuman characters as focalisers and narrators. As each posthuman character matures, the reader is offered intimate access to the maturation process and the development of the character’s identity.

Identity-formation is also represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as dependent on the developing subject's engagement with place. Clare Bradford and Rafaella Baccolini posit, "[w]hen protagonists move across and between places, they also traverse cultural differences, value systems, and interpersonal relations" (55). As my textual analysis has shown, such narratives use dystopian settings and posthuman characters to interrogate the interrelationships between subjectivity and place, and challenge humanist ideas of identity in order to construct ideas of posthuman identity. Dystopian environments are not only metaphorical for the instability of adolescence, they also serve as a setting in which the complex relationships between nature, technology, and people may be explored.

The continued popularity, in Western cultures, of dystopian fiction for young adults suggests that prominent in the minds of adolescents are concerns for the environment, acceptance of the 'other', and a challenging of the hierarchies which urges such readers to dismantle and envision new possibilities for the future. The nature of places and the relationships we have to different places are changing. The changing nature of places and our relationships to places are especially pertinent for young people in a time when climate change threatens natural places. The media warns of pending doom as a consequence of politicians expressing opinions in social media spaces. Technologies are advancing in their capacities to permit abdication from internal, cognitive spaces, facilitating escape from external threats and pressures. But, for adolescents, there is hope and solace in the pages of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. As the texts I have explored in this thesis demonstrate, these narratives represent empowered adolescents who are capable of rising up against oppression and becoming agents of change. These empowered adolescents are able to transcend the boundaries of nonhuman/human, nature/technology and encourage the reader to imagine a societal space in which we are free of such constrained thinking. The posthuman protagonist focalises the subversion and interrogation of the boundaries between nature/technology, human/nonhuman, and the adolescent reader experiences these possibilities through the text.

Both ecocriticism and posthumanism respond to the changing discourses of environment, technology, and the subject as we move into the twenty-first century. Ecocriticism provides an approach for exploring place and landscape, and representations of the environment in a dystopian setting. Posthumanism offers a framework for specifically exploring subjectivity in the dystopian landscape, particularly as technology typically plays a vital role in leading to a dystopian landscape – and surviving it. The combination of the two frameworks in this thesis recognises the prevalence of discourses of both environmentalism and technology in contemporary society, propelling us into a twenty-first century that may well be defined by how its societies have dealt with environmental issues and growing uses of technology and science in communication, education, business, and social networking. In representing the twenty-first century context in young adult dystopian fiction through defamiliarisation, adolescent readers are forced to consider the future of the environment, the human body, and their place in a rapidly changing world.

The posthuman is represented as a positive figure in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Characters such as Jenna, Lia, Adam, and Zoe are not mindless machines who are deprived of agency and individuality; being unnaturally natural and disbanding the human/nonhuman dualism is what ensures the achievement of an agentic subjectivity. Agency is a distinguishing feature of a humanist model of subjectivity. Flanagan notes the nuances in humanist and posthumanist ideas of subjectivity as represented in fiction for young adults, concluding:

Posthumanism does not entail a total rejection of the humanist traditions of the past. Instead . . . it involves a reconceptualisation of selfhood and social relations that fit more readily with human experience in the digital age. The humanist subject is thus reformulated – rather than outright rejected – within posthumanism. (*Technology and Identity* 187)

I have argued that a reconceptualisation of selfhood is achieved through representations of place in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Virtual places, for example, facilitate experimentation with identity and permit characters such as Wade and Kirito to mature and develop a sense of self in the real world. Nature and natural environments still retain their significance in the developing subject's identity-formation.

Natural environments are represented with nostalgia, and such representation encourages a "greening" (Greenway 146-147) of the adolescent reader. The natural environment is often represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as significant to identity-formation. An ecocritical perspective emphasises and validates the representation of nature and encouragement of nature education in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Continued representation of green spaces as significant to constructing subjectivity reinforces the argument that humanist ideas of subjectivity are not altogether discarded. Rather, such ideas continue to inform ideologies of adolescence and the interrogation of subjectivity; as Kerry Mallan argues, "we are now able to consider the posthuman not as a form of compensatory or alien presence for humans to deploy, invent, or overcome, but as a condition of the human" (152).

Green spaces juxtapose the natural and unnatural to highlight their incompatibility, functioning as heterotopic spaces in young adult dystopian fiction. The developing subject usurps the binary of natural/unnatural, and represents that these concepts are not in opposition but, rather, can co-exist – exemplified in the subject themselves. Furthermore, technology offers young people the opportunity to construct their own spaces in which they may negotiate subjectivity, for example, in virtual worlds.

In contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, the significance of virtual worlds and the growing dependency on cyberspace as providing places for the adolescent to inhabit moves the adolescent away from natural place and into constructed place, just as bodies have transitioned from being natural to constructed. *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* emphasises engagement with

green space as integral for the developing subject, just as *Ready Player One* focuses on the role of virtual space in identity-formation. Ultimately, neither green nor virtual places are represented as a sole or prime location for the developing subject. Like the identity the developing subject constructs, concepts of place are fluid.

The ability to literally experiment with identity in virtual places is featured in contemporary young adult fiction. The login sequence is a metaphor for the fluid, fractured, multiplicity of identity in the twenty-first century as represented in these narratives. By facilitating the movement between real and virtual worlds, the login sequence serves as a roadway of the twenty-first century. The login sequence facilitates the “multiple heres and theres” (Wise 3) of identity in a time when identity is changeable and unfixed. The body is a significant place when it comes to embodying the “heres and theres” of identity. Ferne Merrylees notes in her exploration of body image in two texts for young adults that “[t]o be human is no longer dependent on an isolated subject who controls his or her own destiny, but rather it is part of a fluid, dynamic system” (93). Similarly, in the texts examined in this thesis, the body is represented in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction as facilitating identity-formation in relation to place because the body itself is part of the system. Identity-formation as a result of the body may occur through enabling a sensorial experience (which is often, like emotions, perceived by the adolescent protagonist as validating one’s humanity), or allowing movement and transition from one place to another, whether this relocation is real or virtual. Primarily, the body’s assimilation with technology represents a boundary-less interaction between human and machine, just as the posthuman subject represents the possibilities for a boundary-less existence.

Boundaries of beginning and ending are challenged in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Paradoxes influence the development of characters’ identity, such as the significance of the virtual world in *Ready Player One* as a place without which Wade’s sense of self cannot be defined, yet it is the real world he ultimately privileges over the virtual. The paradox of technology in *Glitch* is represented through Zoe’s relationship with nature whereby

technology is the cause of and solution to her separation from nature. Such paradoxes provide further opportunities for the adolescent reader to reflect on and question their own relationships with such places. They also highlight the tension that exists in current relationships and perspectives of people, nature, and technology.

Fears of the posthuman as a figure that rejects humanism and abandons the qualities that make humans unique are overcome through the representation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction of characters who instead demonstrate the posthuman as a figure of possibility. Such a figure transcends the boundaries of human/nonhuman, nature/technology and comes to symbolise the possibilities of a future in which the subject is no longer restrained by hierarchical dualisms. As I have discussed, there is still a lot that could be explored and challenged in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction, particularly its reinforcement of gender normativity. However, the cyborg body offers an opportunity to re-conceptualise an identity independent of gender, which suggests potential for this to be explored more significantly in future fiction for young adults.

Contemporary young adult dystopian fiction represents an optimistic world for the posthuman subject, overcoming the fears that direct current social and political discourse about the relationships between people, nature, and technology. Such narratives align with posthumanism through the representation of possibilities for broadening our understanding of what it means to be human. The reconceptualisation of the human is represented as an ultimately positive experience; there is no need to fear for the future of humanity. The humanist subject is the garden in the posthuman machine – unnaturally natural.

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