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Against humanity: misanthropy in contemporary dystopian literature

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AGAINST HUMANITY: MISANTHROPY IN CONTEMPORARY DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

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A dissertation submitted to the Wits School of Literature, Language, and Media, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the significance of misanthropy in contemporary speculative fiction, using *Walkaway* by Cory Doctorow and *Autonomous* by Annalee Newitz as examples. By analysing the novels' response to the context of the Anthropocene and liquid modernity, it is shown that misanthropy arises from a sense of powerlessness and existential fear in the unseating of anthropocentrism. *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* construct transhuman and posthuman subjectivity, respectively, to investigate the potentials and limitations of the human being. In doing so, they reflect fears and desires for the future, and demonstrate the role of hope in its construction. *Walkaway* shows a transhuman techno-utopia as an escape from the existential fear that drives its misanthropic vision of bodies as disposable and minds as unreliable. *Autonomous* presents a bio-entrapment view of existence, and suggests that artificial intelligence is an ideal unattainable by humans. Both types of misanthropy provide valuable insight into our current context, collective psyche, and the issue of responsibility, and demonstrate the necessity of a more balanced approach to human existence that includes embodiment, affective intelligence, and the entirety of Earth's systems.

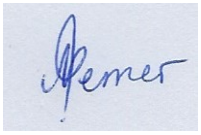
Keywords
Misanthropy; Anthropocene; Anthropocentrism; Posthumanism; Transhumanism; Dystopia; Utopia; Science Fiction; Desire; Fear; Hope

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in English at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University. Where I have consulted secondary sources, I have acknowledged them appropriately. In particular:

- I have referenced arguments that I have summarised or paraphrased from other sources.
- I have referenced all ideas or expressions (words, phrases, etc.) derived from other sources.
- I have provided the relevant bibliographical details of all primary and secondary materials used in preparing this essay.
- I have ensured that the final version of my dissertation is original.

I understand what constitutes plagiarism and I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, I have not committed any plagiarism.



_____ _13/03/2023_____

Signature Date

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INTRODUCTION

Misanthropy, always a taboo and occluded possibility in human cultures, is on the rise. Primarily due to the manifold horrors of the Anthropocene which are forcing us to recognise our culpability, contemporary misanthropy is also because of a growing fear for the future. Misanthropy is particularly apparent in contemporary speculative fiction and via a close reading of two choice examples, *Walkaway* by Cory Doctorow and *Autonomous* by Annalee Newitz, this dissertation seeks to explore the significance of misanthropy today. These two novels exhibit a deep sense of powerlessness that is expressed in a desperate desire to escape not only the precariousness of global modern society, but the insecurity of perceived human limitations. The dystopic threat of the Anthropocene evokes a reactive desire for a utopian saviour, which both novels try to find in the form of technology that transcends the bodily. This dissertation argues that whilst the novels thereby allow readers to explore how we came to construct modernity, the techno-utopian and bio-entrapment misanthropies of the novels cannot transcend our imperfection. Hence misanthropy is a useful tool of self-analysis, but one that may not lead us towards a sustainable future if it does not include bodily and affective intelligence.

Misanthropy in *Walkaway* stems from existential fear in the face of a society that is coming apart, due to a combination of climate change, ennui of the middle to lower socioeconomic classes, and a plutocratic oligarchy. The human body and its needs are declared to be the root cause of humankind's problems in the novel. Without a body, humans would place no physical burden on the environment. Furthermore, the threats of physical pain, illness, and suffering would be largely reduced or eliminated. Psychological threats posed by trauma, mental illnesses, and negative emotions such as anxiety or jealousy are repressed or simply delayed through the use of recreational drugs. For the novel's characters, having a physical form means being eternally and inescapably chained to fear. This deep terror is matched with an idealism in which nostalgia for a

pastoral idyll is recreated through a technological utopia. Nostalgia here is a yearning for safety, which is expressed in the novel through the recreation of a communal, egalitarian, pastoral lifestyle set in a post-scarcity environment that is, apparently, achieved by abolishing exchange economies of any kind. The characters use their technological knowledge to find a way to create simulations of people who have died, based on their recorded "life-data" (Doctorow, *Walkaway* 140). These simulations are housed in computer hardware but uploaded online. In this way, people can be resurrected, and the threat of suffering and death overcome, so that humans can live in selfless harmony. The pastoral is enabled through technology that facilitates a life of ease, free of the necessity for employment and the condition of scarcity required by capitalism, and utopia is achieved by transcending human imperfection. How much of the original human is left thereafter, and how much is an AI-based simulation of what was real (Baudrillard), is not answered.

Similarly, the misanthropy in *Autonomous* is a response to existential fear, but it lingers in fantasies of escape rather than realising utopia as *Walkaway* does. The novel presents an essentialist view of humans that conceptualises them as entrapped by their biology, unable to escape their needy bodies and uncontrollable emotions. This misanthropy condemns humans to exist in perpetual fear and therefore to always be too flawed and too selfish to achieve an ideal society. The humanity of human characters is explored in contrast to anthropomorphised robots, showing how there can be both too much or too little of it, which results in conflict and suffering. However, the novel expresses the belief that humans will never escape the flaws of their humanity, both the psycho-emotional ones such as greed and violence, and physical ones such as illness and death. *Autonomous* portrays a society that has trapped itself in a slave-economy, and which is ruled by capital in a 'pay to play' style. The power of this particular capital rule is inescapable unless the society's social, political, and economic foundation is changed. However, the novel suggests that this foundation can, at best, only be undermined. People can escape existential fear through ignorance or becoming machine-like, but neither are options to take if human society is ever to be reformed. Perhaps, the novel suggests, the world would be better if it were populated by humanoid robots, simulacra of ourselves without all of the accompanying tragedy.

Thus, both novels express a deep desire to transcend the limitations of the human, which they ascribe to emotions and the body's physical instincts and needs. This seems to be because of the apocalyptic context that both novels identify as contemporary reality, as well as use for their backdrop. *Walkaway* imagines a future in which a transcendence of the flesh and its feelings becomes possible; *Autonomous* yearns for that future but despairs at its impossibility, presenting fantasies of escape instead. The novels raise questions about what responsibility humans have towards each other and the Earth, while serving as examples of why treating perfection as achievable is problematic, and at the same time, how ideals motivate us to do better. In *The Perfectibility of Man*, John Passmore unpacks the different ways in which perfection has been conceptualised. Perfection, by its nature, should be objective, yet the number of different conceptualisations show it to be subjective, as Michael Hyde also demonstrates in *Perfection: Coming to Terms With Being Human* (9).

It is far easier, as misanthropy shows, to describe the ways in which something is imperfect. However, it is one thing to consider a single item or being in terms of perfection, and another to consider perfection in groups. The more complex something is, the more difficult it becomes to pin down a definition of its perfection. The phrase 'human perfection' can refer both to the concept of an individual ideal human, and to a species-wide perfection. This absolute perfection encompasses every aspect of human existence, and therefore necessitates a perfect body, mind, and society. I agree with Passmore's conclusion, that what humankind will achieve "will be a consequence of their remaining anxious, passionate, discontented human beings" (512), because this drives improvement. That is perfection's most valuable effect. This is why the expression of misanthropy in novels such as *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* is significant. It signals this anxiety, passion, and discontent, and thereby the need for change. It functions to highlight where change is necessary, and emphasises that the change has to start with human thought and behaviour.

Furthermore, both novels are examples of the increasingly modish and popular apocalyptic speculative fiction that is proliferating today. In her article, 'Artificial

Intelligence and Apocalypticism', Beth Singler refers to the early Christian concept of the 'apocalypse' as an event that would remake the world, citing Geraci: "In his final intervention in history, God will overthrow the oppressors, create a perfect new world and resurrect the righteous in purified and glorified new bodies." Singler thus clarifies that the apocalypse contains utopian hopes (157), although the apocalypse itself may be a dystopian experience. This parallels Margaret Atwood's concept of 'ustopia', referring to the existence of utopia within dystopia and vice versa, which shows that utopia and dystopia are not polar opposites but a mutually informing dynamic. It takes recognising what is wrong in the present to initiate a desire to correct that wrong, but a concept of what is right is also required to initially recognise something as being wrong. The description of the early Christian meaning of 'apocalypse' can broadly be applied to hypothetical technological apocalypses, in which forces such as artificial intelligence (AI), evolution, or technological determinism take on a role analogous to that of deities (Singler 157). Examples of recent apocalyptic speculative fiction include *Severance* by Ling Ma, *Gnomon* by Nick Harkaway, *A Song for a New Day* by Sarah Pinsker, *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam, and *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes. Definitive novels of this genre include Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

I have chosen to discuss *Walkaway* because it provides an excellent example of the dream of transcending perceived human limitations through technology and AI, and captures the ustopian quality of humankind's relationship with technology. *Autonomous* approaches this relationship from a more posthumanist perspective, and delves into the nightmare aspects of the dream presented in *Walkaway*. Additionally, both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* are concerned with social, economic, and political issues that have dominated public thought in recent years. Specifically, the novels address these concerns within the context of hypercapitalism, as well as the pervasion of technology in everyday life, and how this feeds into social inequality and drives technological and scientific innovation. *Walkaway* includes a discussion about climate change, specifically the negative impact of humans on the environment, but this is not explored further in the novel. *Autonomous* acknowledges climate change but treats it as an inevitable constituent of its projected future, and does not concern itself with the issue. Neither novel mentions

the issue of overpopulation. This all allows for insightful comparison in the analysis of the hopes, desires, and fears for the future that I will argue inform the particular misanthropic expressions of each novel. Information about the authors will help to situate each novel in the contemporary context, which I address in the next chapter. I will discuss Cory Doctorow and *Walkaway* first, and provide a summary of the novel. Thereafter I will do the same for Annalee Newitz and *Autonomous*.

Cory Doctorow and *Walkaway*

Cory Doctorow is a Canadian-British science fiction author, journalist, and "technology activist" (Doctorow, 'About Cory Doctorow'). In addition to contributing to a number of newspapers, magazines, and websites, he is a special consultant at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit organisation "defending civil liberties in the digital world" (Electronic Frontier Foundation). He is a Visiting Professor at the Open University (UK), from which he also has an honorary doctorate in computer science, an MIT Media Lab Research Affiliate, and a Visiting Professor of Practice at the University of North Carolina's School of Library and Information Science. Deeply immersed in digital technology, Doctorow has utilised this knowledge to author several fiction and non-fiction books. His science fiction novels include *Walkaway*, *Radicalized*, and *Attack Surface*. Like much of his fiction, Doctorow's non-fiction focuses on the intersections of politics, capitalism, monopoly, and technology, such as in *How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism* and *Chokepoint Capitalism*, co-authored with Rebecca Giblin. He has won the Locus, Prometheus, Copper Cylinder, White Pine, and Sunburst awards, and been nominated for the Hugo, Nebula, and British Science Fiction awards. In 2017, *Walkaway* won the Dragon Award in the 'apocalyptic novel' category.

In a podcast interview, Doctorow argues that rigid social hierarchies take away from people's autonomy and happiness, their ability to work, and to achieve goals. How people might achieve more ambitious things with less hierarchy is something that Doctorow believes everyone should be thinking about ('NPP160'), and he explores this in *Walkaway* by creating a society in which acknowledged social hierarchy is a taboo. In *Walkaway*, set sometime within the next 100 years, society is splitting into two. There is *default* society, a hypercapitalist plutocratic oligarchy posing as a meritocracy, and the

communitarian, semi-nomadic walkaways. Walkaways, who have literally walked away from their lives in *default*, live in post-scarcity, and the concept of ownership is taboo to them. How they created this post-scarcity is never explained, but the walkaways have fabricators and drones to create anything they need, including food, shelter, and clothing.

Non-violence is central to walkaway philosophy. In an article, 'Disasters Don't Have to End in Dystopias', Doctorow writes that *Walkaway* is a utopian novel, and he elsewhere describes it as an "optimistic disaster" novel ('Powell's Q and A'). According to him, a dystopian story depicts mindless violence following a disaster, and that the "belief in the barely restrained predatory nature of the people around you" is a "weaponized narrative" that creates dystopias ('Disasters'). Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge* and Ada Palmer's *Too Like the Lightning* inspired him as some of "science fiction's most daring utopias", and he argues that the great problem in these novels, as in *Walkaway*, is humanity itself ('Disasters'). He states that humanity's "endless, bottomless capacity for rationalization" is the cause of all human misery ('Powell's Q and A'); a belief that the walkaway philosophy tries to counter. Furthermore, according to Doctorow, the argument about meritocracy in *Walkaway* is a microcosm for an ideological discussion in the real world about whether people's choices are motivated extrinsically or intrinsically. Currently, according to Doctorow, the general belief is that people are extrinsically motivated, and so they have to be punished and rewarded "into their best selves" ('NPP160'). This mode of thinking rests on the belief that people act in their own self-interest and have no public spirit, a belief that Doctorow states politics also plays into ('NPP160').

After discussing the development of capitalism and its perversion over time to favour a small elite group while disadvantaging the majority in *Walkaway*'s *default* society, three friends called Seth, Hubert, and Natalie, decide to become walkaways themselves. The trio comes across a walkaway tavern called the Belt and Braces (B&B) and meet Limpopo, a young woman and seasoned walkaway who invites them to stay for a while and become familiar with the walkaway lifestyle. The first thing they do is change their names. Natalie becomes Iceweasel, and Hubert is called Etcetera, but Seth reverts to his name after a short while. This is, symbolically, the beginning of an active restructuring

of human subjectivity that is important for the transhumanist theme of the novel. Although the transition is awkward at first, because Iceweasel, Etcetera, and Seth have to adapt to new ways of thinking about their relationship to material things, they find a home at the B&B. Etcetera and Limpopo soon begin a relationship.

Some years later, Iceweasel travels to the ruins of Walkaway University, which has just been bombed. When she finds a group of survivors, all scientists, they reveal that they have developed a way to simulate a person as an AI, from recordings of that person's life and personality. They believe that they have found a way to become immortal. The survivors of the attack are convinced that they were targeted by the rich elite of *default* because of this. As walkaways, the scientists would have shared their discovery without charging for it. The combination of techno-immortality and a walkaway lifestyle would make money obsolete. The conflict between *default* and walkaway escalates as uploading is fine-tuned and becomes more widespread, but the fighting is one-sided. Walkaways do not fight back, they walk away.

Doctorow repeatedly emphasises that the belief in the capacity for good in people defines whether a disaster results in eventual destruction or rebuilding. *A Paradise Built in Hell* by Rebecca Solnit influenced *Walkaway* the most by identifying "a pervasive mythology about disasters that says that the bestial nature of humans comes out in times of crisis, but it is actually the opposite", Doctorow states in an interview ('On *Walkaway*'). The crisis depicted in *Walkaway* is the result of "automation, economic [sic], wealth concentration, and climate change", and the antagonists are convinced that others will respond purely with self-interest, thereby justifying their own self-interested behaviour as pre-emptive defensiveness ('On *Walkaway*'). In *Walkaway*, Doctorow says, he was trying to show a more nuanced view of people as characterised by either the belief in only good or bad people, or the belief that people are mostly good ('On *Walkaway*').

During a particular attack on the walkaways, Iceweasel is kidnapped by mercenaries hired by her father, Jacob, the head of the immeasurably wealthy Redwater family. He holds her captive while attempting to 'convert' her back to *default* society. For a long time, Iceweasel is strapped to a hospital bed, isolated, and fed intravenously when she refuses

to eat. Jacob tries to convince his daughter that the walkaways are terrorists and manipulative liars, and reveals that he has an extensive database of information on everyone whom Iceweasel has been living with over the last few years. Doctorow expresses concerns about surveillance technology in *Walkaway*. He explains in his article, 'Unchecked Surveillance Technology Is Leading Us Towards Totalitarianism', that the novel imagines how people who are oppressed by surveillance leave that society to create a parallel one in which their technological knowledge "creates a world of fluid, improvisational technological play". This, he argues, is in opposition to how people engage in "digital sociability" in the real world, where they are prompted to provide "compromising personal information that can be used to manipulate you" ('Unchecked'). The result is a legally sanctioned exchange of privacy for safety and allows companies and governments (and arguably individuals or groups) to potentially identify vulnerable individuals or groups, jeopardising justice (Doctorow, 'Unchecked'). Finally, Iceweasel convinces the mercenary whom her father hired to guard her to turn sides and help her escape in exchange for Iceweasel's entire inheritance. This is a clear example of the influence that money can have on moral decisions, which the novel emphasises particularly strongly during Iceweasel's captivity.

During Iceweasel's absence, the group of walkaways including Seth, Etcetera, Limpopo, and Gretyl, who is Iceweasel's partner, have moved to another walkaway camp in a ghost town called Thetford. When the walkaways are forced to flee from mercenaries, Limpopo and Etcetera fall behind and are ambushed. Their attackers, mercenaries whose faces remain hidden and who never speak, callously murder Etcetera and take Limpopo captive. The mercenaries are symbolic agents of capital's power, as it is revealed that Jacob arranged Limpopo's arrest and imprisonment under a false name. Based on the information Jacob gathered, he identified Limpopo as a leader figure to the walkaways, and her disappearance is meant to destabilise the walkaway group. Fourteen years pass, during which the ongoing conflict between walkaway and *default* reaches a breaking point. More and more people choose to walk away, dissatisfied with life in *default*, and many institutions such as schools, police forces, and prisons can no longer function. One of these prisons is where Limpopo has been held, and she is finally able to contact with

her walkaway family and tell them what happened to her. The group, now again including Iceweasel, immediately travel to Limpopo's prison to reunite.

Shortly after their arrival, however, they learn that a massive army of *default* mercenaries is marching to reclaim the prison. Despite the odds against them, the walkaways manage to force the mercenary army to a standstill. Through the global walkaway online network, family members of the mercenaries are identified and contacted. These send messages to their mercenary relatives, pleading with them to walk away from the fight. The weapon of information gathered through surveillance has been turned against *default*, and the army ultimately retreats as most of its members choose peace over violence. Walkaway is finally victorious. Over time, the walkaway lifestyle becomes the new standard. People are 'reborn' as AI simulations. Some are even downloaded into new, manufactured bodies, while others choose to live in orbit as bodiless beings. All is well in a new post-scarcity, immortal society.

Addressing the technology and immortality portrayed in *Walkaway*, Doctorow states that he is sceptical of transhumanism ('On *Walkaway*'), which seems contradictory because the novel reads like a transhumanist utopian dream. However, transhumanism is under-theorised and fails to explain the processes necessary to achieve its posited goals of technological immortality such as those suggested by Ray Kurzweil, Doctorow says ('On *Walkaway*'). Additionally, he admits that he is sceptical about some of his own theories of human action and how material abundance could be realised for the same reason as his scepticism towards transhumanism ('On *Walkaway*'). I believe that *Walkaway* should therefore be read as a thought experiment meant to inspire, as Doctorow states science fiction should ('Disasters'), and not an expression of concrete beliefs or a fictionalised transhumanist manifesto.

Although I find that *Walkaway's* foregrounding of philosophical discourses at times overshadows its story-telling power, it also lends the novel a unique aesthetic. The characters are largely highly educated, which facilitates the numerous jargon-riddled, philosophical, and technical discussions in the novel. It is interesting, then, to see what Doctorow does with a cast of highbrow characters that decide to abandon civilization as

they know it. Doctorow could have written academic work on the debates he presents in *Walkaway*; writing these discussions in a literary work is like releasing a group of academics from the rules and regulations of academia. In fiction, Doctorow had the freedom to play with his philosophical ideas and technical know-how and invite those outside of the academic context to join these conversations. In my opinion, though, he does not manage to bring these conversations fully outside of the academic sphere, which means that much of the content remains quite abstract and partly inaccessible to the layperson. As a novel, *Walkaway* does not fully succeed in bringing its complex philosophical discourse over the threshold of academia.

Nevertheless, the novel's plot provides an arena in which the 'science' of science fiction can be played out without the need to be strictly scientifically possible. One of the values of fiction is the opportunity it provides for dreaming and invention. Furthermore, *Walkaway's* form serves to highlight its points of interest. The long period of time over which the story takes place necessitates the omission of many years at a time in the narrative, which can be quite jarring because little information is provided to contextualise each jump forward in the chronology. Very little space is given to descriptions of the passage of time or the environment that the characters move through. The places that are treated to somewhat detailed descriptions are the buildings that the walkaways erect. These extensive time-leaps, coupled with the frequent, lengthy conversations that dominate the story, often eject the reader from the story itself. In terms of narrative success, this is naturally detrimental. Nonetheless, I find that the separation between the characters and their environment outside of those they constructed themselves, and the lack of a sense of time, reflect the division between humankind and Earth, as well as the human mind and body, that the novel encourages.

The fluidity and endlessness of time as it exists outside of the structure given to it by humans is furthermore invoked in the chapter titles, which are not capitalised. They read like phrases that floated out of the text and settled in the spaces between narrative shifts in time and place. This sense of being at times disoriented in the where and when of the plot lends itself to the experience of eternity that the characters are hoping to gain in techno-immortality, although, as a reader very much anchored in time and space, the

experience of reading the novel could thereby be frustrating. Furthermore, the strongly cerebral bent of the novel diminished a sense of the characters' physical experiences, and highlighted the end goal of becoming a bodiless 'brain in a jar'. This is contrasted with the detailed description of Iceweasel's physical imprisonment by her father. As much as she spends time physically restrained and locked in a room, the sense of being trapped in her body and by its needs is even greater. The physical pleasure felt by the walkaways when they bathe in their onsen, the only other time physical experience is described in great detail, is overshadowed by the presentation of the body as the shackles of the mind during Iceweasel's ordeal. By emphasising descriptions of physical experience when they are negative, the novel portrays its vision of bodiless existence as transcending beyond fear.

Annalee Newitz and *Autonomous*

First, Annalee Newitz prefers the 'they' pronoun, which I will therefore be using for them as well. The issue of gender identification plays a role in *Autonomous*, so Newitz's pronoun preference is pertinent. Newitz is an American who has worked as an author of both fiction and non-fiction, an editor, and a science journalist. In addition to *Autonomous*, their debut novel, Newitz has also authored the novels *The Future of Another Timeline* and *The Terraformers*. *Autonomous* was nominated for the Nebula and Locus Awards and won the Lambda Literary Award, which recognises contributions to "LGBTQ literature, culture, and community" (Lambda Literary). Their non-fiction works are *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction* and *Four Lost Cities: A Secret History of the Urban Age*. Newitz has a PhD in English and American Studies from UC Berkeley, and they were the recipient of a Knight Science Journalism Fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They were the founder of *io9*, a blog that covered science and science fiction, and were also the editor-in-chief of the website *Gizmodo*, which focuses on science, technology, and culture. They currently work as a freelance science journalist and write for, among others, the *New York Times* and have a monthly column in *New Scientist*.

Newitz writes on their personal website that their fiction is inspired by the science and technology that they write about as a journalist ('Science Fiction'). With *Autonomous*,

they wanted to explore a scenario in which automation resulted in an economy built on indentured labour, while offering a thought experiment on the "real-life dangers of unchecked capitalism" (Newitz, 'The Rise'). They tried to be as literal as possible about the development of a slave-based economy in order to offer a believable scenario to readers (Newitz, 'The Rise').

The story takes place in the year 2144. Jack, whose full name is Judith Chen, is a scientist who has become a drug pirate in an effort to circumvent patent laws and deliver much cheaper medication to poorer populations. She reverse-engineers pharmaceuticals by breaking down the chemical structure of a drug, essentially discovering its recipe, and then reproducing it. Newitz states that "IP maximalism", the extreme nature of current intellectual property laws, requires action and activism. In extreme cases, like in the pharmaceutical industry, the legal system cannot be relied on and the rules need to be broken to result in reform (Newitz, 'Interview'). For Jack, pharmaceutical piracy is the only way that she can work against the patent-controlled pharmaceutical industry and undermine the monopoly of Big Pharma. Jack was inspired by characters such as Robin Hood and Han Solo, who are both 'good' and 'bad' (Newitz, 'Interview'). Newitz ('Interview') states that they were also influenced by women characters who are bodyguards or hackers, such as in the films *Cherry 2000* and *La Femme Nikita*. The novel begins with Jack realising that cases of people obsessively performing one task, even to the point of death, have been caused by her pirated version of a productivity drug called Zacuity. The drug, produced by the Big Pharma company Zaxy, is addictive, something that was withheld from consumers taking it under medical supervision. Jack knows that the agency responsible for enforcing patent laws, the International Property Coalition (hereafter IPC), will soon be looking for her, but she decides that she must try to make reparations as best as she can before going into hiding. She sets out to find a way to create a cure for the addictions she feels responsible for.

Along her journey to a laboratory in Saskatoon, Jack frees a young indentured man named Threezed, and meets the researcher and biobot Medea (Med). Med ultimately manages to create a drug to counter Zacuity's addictiveness. She names this drug 'Retcon' and writes an academic paper exposing Zaxy. Med publishes this paper without going through the

proper channels, so that it is publicised before it can be censored. She is, however, soon forced to retract the paper by the university she works for, at the request of and under financial pressure from Zaxy. The novel again comments on the extent of the control that capital can grant, such as influencing the publication of scientific research. Zaxy owns majority shares in the journal that Med's paper will be reviewed by, so she knows that her paper will not be published again.

The novel strongly highlights the impact that patented pharmaceuticals have on the lives of those unable to afford them, even across generations. Although *Autonomous* focuses on Big Pharma and pharmaceutical patents, it thereby also exposes the inequality perpetuated by hypercapitalist practices. Newitz writes in an article about *Autonomous* that they wanted readers to feel that the described future could "realistically emerge from current technologies and social problems." According to Newitz ('How to'), this is because they firmly believe that science fiction is not about the future, but about the present. They suggest that by "confronting our problems in metaphors and thought experiments, we equip ourselves to solve them in the real world" ('The Rise'). However, although committing to being as realistic as possible in their novel, Newitz also states that they follow AI research, and are "incredibly sceptical" ('How to') that a robot like their character, Paladin, will be created for centuries, if at all. In contrast, Newitz reveals that creating a type of slave economy felt "alarmingly realistic" ('How to'), because slavery was legal only a relatively short period of time ago. Although they would "like to think we're headed toward reparations and civil rights for everyone" it is "just as likely we're going to figure out some new way to turn one another into chattel" ('How to'). Newitz ('Interview') explains that they wanted to explore the psychological and physical experience of being property. A simple but powerful example of this is Threezed's name, which is taken from the last two digits of his indenture number that is tattooed on his neck like a barcode identifying a product. Newitz cites two significant influences on *Autonomous* as Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler ('Interview'). They kept in mind Butler's nuanced approach to the effects of slavery and colonialism on both slaves and slave owners while writing about the power relationships between four of the primary characters in *Autonomous*.

During the time that Jack travels to Saskatoon with Threezed and Med, Zaxy realises that the extreme cases of addiction are being caused by pirated Zacuity. The company wants to ensure that their name and drug are never connected to the addiction cases, because that would result in massive financial losses. They contact the IPC, who sends two agents after the prime suspect, Jack. Eliasz Wójcik, a human, is paired with a military robot called Paladin. Through Paladin, Newitz wanted to investigate gender, and the extent to which privacy of the mind is a part of one's identity ('Interview'). Paladin is nonbinary but adopts the female pronoun for Eliasz, whom s/he wants to have sex with, because Eliasz is afraid of being homosexual. "Paladin doesn't change at all," Newitz states ('Interview'), "but our perceptions of her might." Thus Newitz investigates both anthropomorphising, sexual orientation, and gender identity through Paladin. The robot character was inspired by having worked a lot with computer networks and thinking about how computers communicate with one another (Newitz, 'Interview'). Anime in which characters do a lot of fighting but in which many of those robot and human characters also have romantic relationships, and the Cylons from *Battlestar Galactica*, were a further source of inspiration for Paladin (Newitz, 'Interview').

Eliasz and Paladin's hunt for Jack leads to several violent confrontations and interrogations, which are all sanctioned and covered up by the IPC. *Autonomous* grasps the power of institutions that create laws, to construct perceptions of justice and morality, and demonstrates the subjective nature of these two fundamental aspects of what is considered to be right. The two IPC agents corner Jack in her hideout, in old tunnels created during the prohibition era to smuggle alcohol. The parallel between the illegal alcohol and pharmaceutical trades is apparent, another subtle reminder of how what is considered 'right' and 'wrong' can quite easily change in a relatively short period of time. Eliasz and Paladin try to kill Jack, but Threezed and Med arrive just in time to save her life and escape. In the end, Jack remains free to continue piracy, although Eliasz tells the IPC that she was killed. Med takes over running the laboratory in Saskatoon, and Threezed begins a new life as John Chen, a legal and free citizen, with Jack's help. Eliasz resigns from the IPC and buys Paladin's autonomy, ending the robot's indenture term. The two, who developed a sexual and romantic relationship over the course of their mission, decide to move to the Mars colony together. Eliasz is no longer convinced that

his work at the IPC protects those who actually need it, like Threezed. By moving to Mars, he is trying to escape from a world in which 'right' and 'wrong' are so twisted by society's own desire for freedom.

Autonomous uses its plot, form, and characters to facilitate its critique of society. Aside from creating excitement and tension, the fast-paced plot is in itself a reflection of the rapid tempo of life in a globally interconnected civilization. The characters' ability to travel quickly and seamlessly across continents and oceans emphasizes this interconnectedness, as well as the fluid nature of the modern world. Within this setting, the use of flashbacks to expand on characters' histories and illuminate their choices in the narrative present also functions to highlight the way in which the past informs the present. Rather than creating a sense of despairing determinism, this emphasizes the importance of decisions made in the present for the future, and both the power and the responsibility that accompany that fact. It furthermore underlines the point that the novel makes about the difference between academic discussions about a problem and actions taken to address a problem. The moral and ethical ambiguity of the protagonists and antagonists showcases the risk that comes with action, which is contrasted to the relative safety of theoretical, academic work, but is also shown to make a greater impact in the world. This is not to say that the novel is dismissive of the value of theories and research. Rather, it stresses the need to follow through on knowledge with action.

The development of a system of slavery that focuses on poverty as the determining factor allows for a discussion of the effects of both slavery and poverty without the historical guilt that accompanies these topics in the real world. Of course, the indenture system also clearly illustrates the connection between freedom and money. It is a simple but powerful way to create a metaphor that helps to unpack an otherwise complex social problem without inundating it with a multitude of political, social, and philosophical theories. Similarly, Newitz manages to comment on the very topical issue of gender identity and sexual orientation through their portrayal of Paladin and his/her relationship with Eliasz. Again, Newitz creates a way for readers to engage with an issue without becoming lost in associated theories. The portrayal of Big Pharma through the example of a single company and drug likewise helps to simplify the opioid scandal in the U.S. to a more

manageable scale for readers, pointing out the main problems while avoiding losing the reader in legalese. The use of metaphors built into the fabric of the plot makes the philosophical discourse in *Autonomous* subtle, allowing the reader to experience the book both as a story and as social critique. In this way, the novel encourages readers to consider how the issues it touches on manifest in their own lives, and how they might personally respond to them, without the confusion and authoritative weight of highbrow philosophies and theories.

It must be acknowledged that both novels are set primarily in Canada and the United States of America. The ideas expressed in both novels therefore originate from a specific context, which contributes to each novel's misanthropic expression and must be kept in mind for the analysis of each story. Neither *Walkaway* nor *Autonomous* could serve as evidence that either author is blatantly misanthropic, and none of their characters display an outright, all-encompassing hatred for humanity. Yet there are definite instances in which misanthropy is being expressed, and core ideas and theories of misanthropy are expressed and even endorsed. It is impossible to properly analyse the presence of misanthropy in either novel without contextualising them. For this reason, an understanding of the historical development of misanthropy is necessary, in combination with the contemporary context of the Anthropocene in which it is now being expressed. Contemporary sociocultural circumstances are well described by Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity. The conditions of both the Anthropocene and liquid modernity are the result of anthropocentrism, the belief in the centrality and superiority of humans in the universe. Industrialism, contemporary capitalism, consumerism, globalization, and climate change are consequences of this attitude, along with an obsession with progress defined as limitless growth. The resultant form of democracy is skewed to serve an elite minority. This is not the democracy of all countries, but is what Newitz and Doctorow seem to be responding to in their novels. It is also the type of democracy with which the texts referenced below are concerned.

Additionally, extreme hypercapitalism and the hegemonic rule of capital, the failure of democracy, and broad socio-economic inequality are generalised to a global scale in each fictional world. While some countries are still portrayed as suffering more, for example,

from poverty and corruption than others, these factors are portrayed as so widespread that they are a serious problem in global society. *Autonomous* makes the point that there is a global economic and political link between poverty and exploitation in some countries, and greater wealth and social stability in others, more clearly than *Walkaway*. For example, the novel makes direct reference to the majority of industrial work being centred around the nine cities surrounding the Pearl River Delta area in China, and this area consequently being a common source of indentured labourers globally due to extreme poverty (77). This 'free' labour is then used in wealthier countries such as Canada (79), who benefit economically. This is clearly a reference to the outsourcing practices of many corporations in the real world to keep production costs as low as possible. The novels do not explore more egalitarian societies in which democracy functions well, as, for example, in countries such as Norway. This is to be expected from dystopian novels. Thus, from this viewpoint, humanity is faced with the coalescing of all of these elements into one looming crisis, and it has become disillusioned with contemporary society and even itself. It will be shown below how this disillusionment results in misanthropy as humankind is forced to confront the problems it has created, thereby having to confront itself.

In *Modern Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought*, Adam Stock states that modern dystopias commonly pose the question 'How did we get here?' by projecting actions into the future in order to reflect on the present (13). Additionally, Gregory Claeys (498) writes that, in both describing negative pasts and projecting negative futures, dystopias ask enduring questions about human identity. Dystopian fiction is therefore a useful tool for collective self-reflexivity, and its analysis can provide valuable insight into humanity's fears, desires, and hopes. *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* magnify primarily issues of socioeconomic inequality and the excessive power of capital in contemporary anthropocentric society in order to pose important questions about humanity's present and the choices that must be made now in order to potentiate a less dystopian future, if possible.

Furthermore, within the contemporary context, the combination of utopian and dystopian fiction and science fiction is ideal for the analysis of contemporary misanthropy. According to Peter Fitting, the primary characteristic of science fiction is the "ability to

reflect or express our hopes and fears about the future" (138), therein aligning with utopian and dystopian fiction. More specifically, Fitting adds, science fiction ties science and technology to those hopes and fears (138). Given the predominance of science and technology in society, historically as well as contemporaneously, the convergence of utopian and science fiction creates a self-portrait of humankind's hopes, fears, and desires. Most telling about the popularity of this combination of genres is that both are generally literatures of change (Schmeink 6). They reveal a rising belief that something should be different from the present state of society and, perhaps, about humanity itself.

Misanthropy is the expression of general discontent with humankind as it has been defined thus far, and the behaviours based upon that conceptualisation. It is the sense of disappointment and despair as human beings collectively grapple with the loss of an imagined future of a life of ease, promised by techno-scientific advancement, capitalism, and democracy. Through this disillusionment, humankind has reached a point of insecurity not only in its anthropogenic context but within itself. Humankind struggles to anchor itself in a new identity to guide future actions, fluctuating between hope and despair, and trying not to become overwhelmed by the size of its population. As humanity recognises the need to displace itself from the centre of the universe, it now finds itself collectively in a liquid state, as conceptualised by Bauman, lacking definition and direction and questioning whether it should have any at all. Thus, misanthropy reflects a belief that humans are unacceptable in their current state. This is largely due to the destructive impact of human activity on the environment. However, some, such as transhumanists, focus on the physical and mental limitations of human beings instead, arguing that all human life can be improved and even rid of suffering and death through biotechnological enhancement. These groups problematically often side-line or completely fail to acknowledge the ecological harm of human activity. Investigating misanthropy provides the opportunity to ask what needs to change so that humans become acceptable. As dystopian science fiction, *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* ask 'How did we get here?', but their misanthropic expression additionally creates the space to ask 'How can we be better?' It is this question that challenges anthropocentrism, because it first requires the acknowledgement of the flaws of a civilisation built upon the belief in human superiority.

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

The Anthropocene and Anthropocentrism

As future projections of today's context, the stories of *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* play out in the Anthropocene. The analysis of each novel's critique of society is aided by an understanding of the Anthropocene setting. There is no precise definition of the Anthropocene, as many of its parameters are still debated. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed to be a distinct geological epoch in which every sphere of the Earth (lithosphere, biosphere, cryosphere, atmosphere, and hydrosphere) has been impacted by human activity (Bonneuil and Fressoz). The definition can be broadened to include "transformations of the landscape, urbanisation, species extinctions, resource extraction and waste dumping [and] disruption to natural processes" (Hamilton et al. 3). The Anthropocene is the result of anthropocentrism, which places humans as the "central fact of the universe" (OED). Anthropocentrism divides nature and society as if the two are independent. There is much more to the history of anthropocentrism, but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will not be discussed here. It is important to understand, though, that the Anthropocene is the cumulative result of the history of anthropocentrism, to put it simply.

In both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, the Anthropocene is recognisable as the milieu, but neither novel directly engages with it in any depth. While it is certainly too late to prevent the Anthropocene, the impact of human activity can be mitigated if that activity changes to be more harmonious with the environment, yet neither novel investigates this. *Autonomous* suggests that technology can restore some equilibrium to the ecosphere in a scene depicting robots pollinating flowers by hand with tiny paintbrushes (62), and *Walkaway* makes the argument that the physical absence of humans would be most ecologically beneficial (275). Both suggestions are, in my opinion, insufficient; the former is quite arrogant and the latter shows an unwillingness to take responsibility. This will be discussed at greater length below.

Climate Change and Eco-misanthropy

Agricultural history set into motion the great imbalances that human industry would impose on nature over millennia. Two periods of time have been highlighted during which human influence on the Earth system (the totality of Earth's spheres) was significantly exacerbated. The first is the Industrial Revolution (1760-1820/40), with the rise of extensive fossil fuel use. The second is from 1945 to around 2000, called the Great Acceleration because of the even greater and more rapid upsurge in energy consumption (Zerzan; Bonneuil and Fressoz ch. 1, ch. 10). Energy and material consumption by humans became ever more wasteful with the rise of mass consumerism, and material production increasingly synthetic (Bonneuil and Fressoz ch. 10; Wessels 50-51). The global ecological metabolism of this lifestyle is unsustainable:

> [T]he human species, having increased from a population of 900 million in 1800 to 7 billion in 2012, takes nearly a third of the production of continental biomass for its own needs (in terms of food, clothing, housing, and many less vital things), and consumes each year one and a half times what the planet can annually produce on a sustainable basis. (Bonneuil and Fressoz 21)

The Anthropocene is considered the epoch of the sixth mass extinction, perpetrated by the actions of its namesake (Hamilton et al. 8). The climate is indisputably changing, which 97% of scientists attribute to human activity (NASA). Discourse around climate change, animal extinction, and ecocide has become more dominant, increasingly forcing humans to acknowledge their own destructiveness, exploitative tendencies, and complaisance. Humankind may have been stalling at a crucial juncture for several decades, debating and arguing about the reality of an environmental crisis, but it is now clearer than ever that action must be taken. We may continue along our current path, or drastically change our way of life. An existential threat looms.

The existence of eco-misanthropy is therefore not surprising. This is misanthropy on the basis of anthropogenic ecological destruction. Deep ecology, as a movement that

radically critiques the anthropocentric worldview and ethics that have shaped modern Western society (Sessions), can be a source of eco-misanthropy. Dark ecology is a particularly strong example of this, as it brings in object-oriented ontology and thus greatly abstracts identifying with the human. Steve Fuller ('Dark Ecology') refers to dark ecology as misanthropic "because it implies that there is something fundamentally unreliable about being 'human'." An extreme example of eco-misanthropy which does not make use of philosophical abstraction is eco-fascism. While this movement agrees on many key points with other strands of ecology, it concludes that people will never willingly adapt their behaviour to re-establish environmental equilibrium. It is morally justifiable, therefore, to impose a fascist regime to forcibly decrease the human population and closely control those who remain (Protopapadakis). A less aggressive approach is that of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (VHEMT). This movement asks people to stop having children, so that the human species can die out peacefully and avoid wars over resources and starvation, which they view as inevitable (Garrard, 'Worlds' 58). There is also the anti-natal movement, which is not necessarily in favour of voluntary extinction, but is in favour of having no, or fewer, children. According to anti-natalism, it is immoral to procreate because it is impossible to guarantee a life without suffering. Arthur Schopenhauer is a notable advocate of the anti-natal position, as well as David Benatar in contemporary philosophy. Voluntary extinction and anti-natalism both take a moral stand against procreation, but the former focuses on the moral obligation to nature, and the latter on the moral obligation to prevent suffering.

Greg Garrard ('Worlds') discusses the moral choice of having at most one child to curb, and eventually decrease, population growth. He points to the ways in which many of the problems facing humankind and the environment could be addressed, if not eliminated, simply by there being fewer people ('Worlds' 55-59). Additionally, Garrard ('Worlds') argues that the issue of overpopulation is purposefully avoided in environmentalism and ecocriticism because of historical guilt (55), and points out that it is a common tactic in the promotion of ecological preservation to appeal to people to leave a better world for hypothetical future generations (57). In light of the dream depicted in both novels, of transcending human limitations, it is significant to note here that it seems that neither novel is willing to consider placing a limitation on human procreation. Although both

clearly depict a world in which there seems to be a human surplus, this is only discussed in relation to its impact on human society, in terms of job scarcity, poverty, and alienation, for example. Technology in both novels is shown to have become more eco-friendly, but the ecological impact of population growth is not addressed in either novel. *Autonomous* comments on the social consequences of having children for those who are too poor to afford their care. For example, Threezed was sold into indentureship by his mother, a not uncommon practice in the novel (21, 77). Jack's friend, Mali, has a baby after decades of indecision (78). She is approximately fifty years old, but has been taking medication for thirty years that medically intervenes in the ageing process, so she looks much younger (78). It is unclear whether this medication also extends the period of time during which Mali could safely carry a baby to term, but given the apparent absence of a male partner, it can nonetheless be assumed that this baby was not conceived naturally. Mali quickly hands her baby off to an indentured nanny when she does not stop crying (79). Planned or not, children are subject to the financial status of their parents. However, the novel is commenting on social and economic issues with this, and the implications of both extending lives and continuing to have children are not addressed.

The same is true for *Walkaway*, although this novel does not comment on the issues of having children at all. It only mentions not having children once, as part of the description of the failed attempt to make the physical presence of humans on Earth less destructive (277). However, Iceweasel and Gretyl have two children (469), reinserting the narrative of heteronormative reproductive futurity and its ecological connection that their homosexual relationship could have commented on. Lee Edelman's argument about heteronormative reproductive futurity (qtd. in Garrard, 'Worlds') is discussed further in the third chapter. *Walkaway* makes a statement about the destructive effects of human activity on the environment, but makes no comment about the ecological impact of population size. In both novels, the human population continues to grow and take up more space on Earth and even beyond, but neither novel judges this to be problematic. In *Autonomous*, humans can simply relocate to another off-planet city (290), and whatever other ecological damage humans perpetuate can be addressed through technology (e.g. 62). The options for bodiless existence in *Walkaway* are made out to be enough to mitigate environmental damage, a topic which is only addressed once (271-281). In this regard,

the desire for transcendence remains anthropocentric, even if arguments for this transcendence include reference to its ecological benefit, as in *Walkaway*.

Eco-misanthropy furthermore typically makes an appearance in ecological literature that is anti-anthropocentric. Bryan L. Moore's book, *Ecological Literature and the Critique of Anthropocentrism*, for example, discusses Cormac McCarthy and Margaret Atwood as authors of contemporary science fiction whose work is notably anti-anthropocentric. In this same book, Moore makes an important distinction: "Antianthropocentrism [sic] and misanthropy are not synonymous" (31). It must be made clear that this is not the argument in this dissertation. It is possible for an anti-anthropocentric view to also be characterised by misanthropy, but that does not make these one and the same. It cannot be ignored how often the same names appear both in writing critiquing anthropocentrism, and in writing about misanthropy. There is unavoidable overlap between the critique of anthropocentrism and that of humankind, especially considering how much the latter involves the former. Eco-misanthropy can additionally be a feature of ecocriticism, the literary or cultural study of the relationship between human and non-human throughout human cultural history (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 3-5). In a world characterised by increasing global connections, ecocriticism has developed from a study of place to a study of place and time (Garrard, *Ecocriticism*). Thus it is concerned with gaining "a sense of how political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and ecological networks shape daily routines" (Heise 2008:55, qtd. Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 43).

As I have indicated above, *Autonomous* does not comment on the relationship between human activity and ecological destruction. Eco-misanthropy therefore does not make an appearance in this novel. However, despite being limited to a single conversation, eco-misanthropy is expressed in *Walkaway*. The argument for becoming AI simulations is based on the desire to be free of the threat of death, but it is also argued that the physical presence of humans is unavoidably destructive. Humans will never find a way to live harmoniously with nature (Doctorow, *Walkaway* 271-281), so the best course of action is to remove their physical presence. This argument is undermined by the fact that, at the end of the novel, humans have the option of downloading their simulated versions into physical bodies again, although this is perhaps a good demonstration of the difference

between anti-anthropocentrism and misanthropy. Misanthropy is not a shift in perspective in the way that anti-anthropocentrism is. Instead, as I will expand on in the third chapter, it is a worldview based on a lack of faith in people and on projected fears. Both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* focus on issues of society over issues of ecology, which their misanthropic expressions reflect.

The History of Capitalism in the History of the Anthropocene

The ecological history of the Anthropocene cannot be separated from its economic history, although as I have indicated above, this is something that both novels tend to miss, instead focusing on capitalism and its development into hypercapitalism. Nonetheless, I will briefly address the link between the history of capitalism and the development of the Anthropocene, as I believe it should not be neglected. There has been an extraordinary accumulation of wealth, for some at least, since the Industrial Revolution, or in other words, the beginning of the use of fossil fuels. The physical and social infrastructure that has since been erected across the globe is described as a 'second nature' that "structure[s] flows of matter, energy, goods and capital on a world scale" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 234). This "profit-oriented technostructure" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 234) directed the Earth system into the Anthropocene. In order to historically understand the globalization of the economy and how its inequalities were perpetuated between different areas of the world, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein developed the idea of world-systems (Bonneuil and Fressoz 235). These world-systems are oriented after the leading global power of the time. Each world-economy co-generated a world-ecology, based on the relationships of unequal exchange of material goods, labour, and capital of wealthy countries with less powerful countries or colonies (Bonneuil and Fressoz 235-256; Hornberg 59).

For example, the post-1945 world-system was dominated by the United States. When the U.S. army was deployed across the world during the Second World War, it brought with it supply corporations which then developed the capacity to globalize their production. These companies furthermore maintained connections with military and political decision-makers, allowing them to become multinational after the war (Bonneuil and Fressoz 250-255). Thus the U.S. had access to world resources in conditions that greatly

favoured them and granted them significant economic control and political prowess. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz state that "[e]conomic growth and the social model of the Western industrial countries would have been impossible without this unequal exchange" (255). It has been shown that two-thirds of the growth of the Western industrial countries is attributable to a growing use of fossil fuels, while the remaining one-third is due to sociotechnical progress (Giraud and Kahraman 1970-2011, as referenced in Bonneuil and Fressoz). The success of economic superpowers rests in part on a history of human and ecological resource exploitation, of which the United States is only one example, although China has risen as the new economic superpower.

In *Autonomous*, the inequality of resource distribution, which is inextricably linked to social inequality, is reflected in the example I discussed above of the majority of 'cheap' labour being extracted from poorer regions to work in richer ones. It is further implied in the reason given for one of Jack's early anti-patent protests, namely that the people in the poorer economic zone were the ones manufacturing pharmaceuticals for the richer economic zones, but could not themselves afford the very medication they produced (75). As a result, many died of illnesses that could be treated or prevented with that medication, which was instead sitting in warehouses in other countries (75). This example also showcases the power of capital in directing the flow of resources, such that they are not distributed according to need or necessity, but where wealth can pay for them. As long as pharmaceutical companies hold patents, they can raise prices exorbitantly, making life-saving medicine impossible to access for those without financial means. This theme in the novel is a clear reference to Big Pharma scandals (see Posner for a recent overview), and the plotline involving an addictive drug marketed as safe by a massive pharmaceutical company is directly parallel to the circumstances that resulted in America's opioid crisis (see Posner; Case and Deaton; Kolodny). What this example also reflects is that the benefits of progress are not equally distributed when they are directed by the power of capital. In this particular example, medical advancements are inaccessible to those without the financial capacity to pay for them.

In *Walkaway*, unequal resource distribution is discussed repeatedly as a fundamental wrong in the construction of capitalist society, and summarised in the example of the

tragedy of the commons. The premise is that, if there is common land meant to be used equally by inhabitants of a village to graze their sheep, someone will let their sheep overgraze so that there is nothing left for everyone else. People therefore rationalise that they themselves might as well do that, so that at least they can benefit, instead of suffering the consequences of someone else's greed. In order to prevent this, the common land is given to an overlord, a "robber-baron" (49), to own. The owner will take good care of this land so that they can make a profit from others paying to use it, and therefore its use will be regulated (49-50). It is by this logic that the plutocratic oligarchy in the novel, of which Iceweasel's family is a part, came to power (50). Though they each focus on particular problems of hypercapitalism, both novels are ultimately commenting on the same root issue, namely the power of capital in every aspect of society. In both instances, the fictional futures portrayed are projections of the real, authorial present, and the issues discussed are therefore also anchored in contemporary, modern society.

The Ideology of Progress

Furthermore, the conditions under which the now globalized economy developed, particularly during the Great Acceleration, generated an ideology of progress, in which progress is defined by expansion. Clive Hamilton describes global culture as "the globally integrated system of resource use and waste generation driven by the insatiable need to grow and the political institutions committed to perpetual expansion" (35). This is not a hegemonic ideology designed to control the population, but it is a pervasive and fundamental pillar of contemporary culture. This ideology was a means to stimulate growth in a stagnating economy by encouraging excess consumption (Bonneuil and Fressoz ch. 7), which paved the way for the culture of rampant mass consumerism prevalent today. However, the success of the capitalist market system based on this ideology of progress destabilises its own foundations. The accelerated rate at which resources are used – the market's metabolism – does not match the metabolism of the Earth system. Resources are being consumed faster than they can be replenished. This results in entropy and thus the destabilisation of the entire Earth system and, by extension, modern civilisation (Bonneuil and Fressoz; Wessels). An ideology of progress, in which progress is characterised by perpetual expansion, can also be seen in the emphasis on technological and scientific advancement as the solution to the problems of climate

change and to perceived human shortcomings. I suggest that this ideology stands in the way of the novels exploring the impact of an ever-expanding and human population with successively greater longevity on the environment, as I indicated above. Instead, the novels concentrate on the flaws in a capitalist ideology of progress, and depict this ideology in a positive light when it is refocused on technology and science.

In *Walkaway*, the ideology of technological and scientific progress is shown to be a success. Humans have "stolen the fire from the [...] gods" (167) when they discover how to create simulations of the deceased and usher in a new era of freedom from existential fear. As they realise their utopian society, they have reached the pinnacle of progress. In my opinion, there will be new things to fear, not in the least an even worse ennui than described at the novel's beginning. Immortality in a perfect society will quickly become boring. In the novel, once the goal of simulation is reached, it is replaced by goal of living "offworld" (548) in orbit as bodiless code (546), and then the goal of growing new bodies to be downloaded into (547). In this, I find that the novel's solution has the same fallacy as the ideology of progress in capitalism and consumerism. It will eventually become the reason for its own stagnation and destabilisation. The ideology of progress only works if there is progress to be made, and so it is incompatible with perfection. The emphasis on technology as the key to utopian society is therefore what may well undermine that ideal.

Autonomous seems to suggest that progress in science and technology will allow humans to address climate change to an extent, particularly through biotechnology. There is no utopian endpoint to this progress, however. Humans cannot use technology to transcend their limitations as the characters in *Walkaway* do, but they can use technological progress to expand beyond limitations, such as limited inhabitable space. The dream of cities beyond Earth, for example, has been fulfilled and is accessible by space elevator (Newitz, *Autonomous* 290). Humans may always be forced to remain mortal and fallible, subject to the drive of their fear, but they are not shackled to Earth. This is good news for humans if the crisis of climate change cannot be averted with technological know-how, but otherwise it simply provides a new way of searching for utopia elsewhere. Perhaps a new society can be built where the old one does not need to first be destroyed. However, if the might of this progress cannot bring about a better society, there is not much hope for all

of those off-world cities, either. Technological progress here is not truly a harbinger of social, economic, or political improvement, merely a vehicle for escape, and that only if, like Eliasz at the end of the novel, one has enough money to pay the fare. *Autonomous* is not so much concerned with the freedom of immortality, like *Walkaway*, as it is with the cost of living, which it portrays as unavoidable.

Modern Society

As a period of time and socio-cultural characteristic, modernity comprises of concepts that developed in many cultures worldwide and holds as ideals progress, reason, freedom, and democracy (Srnicek and Williams 83). The term 'modernity' denotes a break between past and present, a point from which a different and potentially better future may project. The link between it as the "discovery of the future" (84) and notions such as progress, improvement, Enlightenment, and growth suggest that deliberate human action can progress history. It is the nature of that progress that competing definitions of modernity disagree on (84). Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams contend that modernity has mistakenly been conflated with the institutions of capitalism. This has led to the belief that the end of capitalism can be brought about with the ending of modernity (82-3).

Instead of looking to move beyond modernity, Srnicek and Williams argue that the definition of 'progress' has to change. It can no longer be represented as history moving towards one destination, as the previous century alone proves that conception of progress false (85). Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernity as the era suspicious of grand metanarratives (Srnicek and Williams 86) indicates the centrality of those narratives in modernity. The contention that the current era is postmodern displays a "cultural condition of disillusionment with the kinds of grandiose narratives represented by capitalist, liberal and communist accounts of progress" (Srnicek and Williams 86). Although they argue for a redefinition of modernity through a different understanding of 'progress' and a liberation from capitalism, Srnicek and Williams agree with the assessment of a disillusioned contemporary society.

Bauman's work provides a study of the modernity experienced by this disillusioned society. The term 'postmodernity' is not enough, Bauman argues in *Liquid Modernity*, to

capture the state of continuous global change that is this era's core characteristic. Bauman describes contemporary modernity, from the twenty-first century onwards, as 'liquid' because of the globalized, late-capitalist, ceaselessly changing nature of society. Extensive global interconnectedness has emerged as "the most prominent and seminal feature of our time" (Bauman, 'Wars of the Globalization Era' 11). It is represented by the globalized economy, transnational capitalism, and worldwide media networks, and thus determines the future of global society because all of these factors are beyond the control of any one locality (Schmeink 48-9). Liquid modernity must therefore be understood as "a condition of *global space*" (Tester 2004:161, qtd. Schmeink 48). The constantly changing nature of the contemporary world blurs boundaries between people as well as the rigid delineations of the highly categorised pre-twenty-first century world. In the same way, liquid modernity is now leading to changes in conceptualisations of science, technology, and ways of being in various areas of human life (Schmeink 48).

In this liquid state, the defining mode of existence has become consumption as society is "guided by seduction, ever rising desires and volatile wishes" and no longer guided by norms (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 75). At the heart of a society defined by its never-ending changing nature is precariousness: "the combined experience of *insecurity* (of position, entitlements and livelihood), of *uncertainty* (as to their continuation and future stability) and of *unsafety* (of one's body, neighbourhood, community)" (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 160-61). Those who cannot move with the current of information, labour, and capital become stuck in 'space' and are left behind, whereas society's elite are no longer anchored to any particular 'space' and rather live only in 'time' (Bauman, 'Wars' 40). Their 'exterritoriality' is what allows the global elite so much power (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*). On the extreme opposite of the power hierarchy lies the group Bauman calls "human waste" (*Wasted Lives* 5), who are made excessive or redundant by the globalized economy and order maintenance. Refugees and economic immigrants share the trait of exterritoriality with elites, but "[w]hereas the elite cannot be confronted, fears cannot be defused, the refugees in their forced movement, be it for economic or political reasons, become the scapegoats to blame for any and all existential uncertainty" (Schmeink 55). With the all-pervasive destabilisation that characterises the Anthropocene, be it in the social, environmental, political, or economic sphere, existential uncertainty abounds. This

is particularly the case for those of lower socioeconomic status and the 'human waste,' which *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* reflect particularly in the social statuses of their respective protagonists.

The fictional societies in both novels are characterised by this liquid modernity. *Walkaway* depicts the elite and 'human waste' groups in quite simple terms, which makes them more easily identifiable and understandable for the reader. It is more nuanced in *Autonomous*, because that society is not split as neatly into two opposing camps. Nonetheless, elites and 'human waste' are present and play a significant role in the novel's central concerns. In both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, the central conflicts are characterised by underlying fear and uncertainty. The liquid condition of modernity lends itself to the upkeep of the illusion of progress as perpetual expansion and especially technological advancement as the solution to all of humanity's problems. Wrapped up in the ideology of progress are mass consumerism, a perpetually growing economy, and the pursuit of perfection in all areas of human life and, indeed, death. It is an ideology upheld by unrelenting focus on gaining capital, because that has been framed as making progress towards the ideal civilization: the utopia.

Nevertheless, there are dystopic elements this dream, as in all utopias. *Walkaway* explores surveillance enabled by the constant presence of technology in everyday life as both a tool of power and a tool of resistance. Jacob Redwater, for example, is able to use surveillance to monitor his daughter wherever she goes, both before she leaves *default* society (e.g. 30) and afterwards (325). He is able to use his database of personal information on members of the walkaway group that Iceweasel joined to have the unofficial leader, Limpopo, arrested (543), and his access to all of this information is granted by his capital power (e.g. 41). The power that comes with access to information is one of Doctorow's concerns about the present, as stated in the section on the author, above. The walkaways themselves also use surveillance technology, most notably in the final confrontation with *default* at the prison. Those making a stand from within the prison use facial recognition to identify individual soldiers in *default*'s army, and find family members across the globe to convince them to desert (526). This is done to prevent the army from launching a physical attack on the prison, where whole families, including

children, have taken shelter. What is emphasised here is the dual potential of technology for both good and bad purposes, and is one of the ways in which the novel demonstrates the precariousness of lives in a society ruled by capital power.

Yet the novel also makes the point that technology itself is merely a tool that can either make human life more precarious, or less, depending on what we do with it. This is a hopeful message, although it also reflects the current feeling of powerlessness as consumers readily provide personal information to corporations, which in turn becomes a commodity (see Doctorow, 'Unchecked'). Part of the overwhelming nature of liquid modernity is that, to remain part of the global social network, people have to participate in the systems that could realistically be used against them as forms of manipulation and control. Data sharing to create personalised advertisement experiences is an example of this.

Autonomous demonstrates how censorship is a form of power, but just as Jack undermines patent laws with her piracy, the vastness of cyberspace and the multitude of different servers undermines full censorship of information and regulation of who has access to it. Threezed, for example, is able to write an online journal-type blog documenting his experiences as an indentured child, although the indentured are prohibited from having an online presence, and the information that Threezed publishes should not be publicly available (242). Additionally, when Med first connects the addiction cases to the drug, a law-enforcement initiated algorithm flags the information she sends to the hospital and overwrites it before it can be read by anyone (49-50). One can assume this law-enforcement agency was the International Property Coalition, paid by Zaxy. It is also worth noting again that Med was forced to retract her paper because the university could not afford a lawsuit by Zaxy, and it is certain that her paper will never be published because Zaxy owns a majority stake in the academic journal tasked with reviewing it (281). Although a copy of Med's paper on Zacuity's addictiveness will always be available online (281), people would have to search for it to find it. In addition, there is always doubt as to the credibility of information if its source is in question. Thus, for example, people questioned whether Threezed's online posts were not actually made by

"anti-indenture radicals" (234), and it is speculated that Med has been programmed by a corporate rival of Zaxy's to make her claims about Zacuity (279).

Again, power over information through capital is a means to control and manipulate the public. Like *Walkaway*, *Autonomous* shows that technology can be used for good and bad purposes. The point that both novels do not explicitly make, however, is that in order for technology to be used as a tool of empowerment and resistance, people need to have access to it and know how to use it. It is often precisely the most vulnerable who lack this access in modern society, making their position even more precarious. Because the information that is available can so easily be manipulated, even those with access to it cannot be sure of its reliability. The insecurity of cyberspace parallels the precariousness of reality in a globally networked world.

The Anthropocene evidences that Earth's systems are inseparably related and together constitute a whole larger than the sum of its parts. Thus the impact of human activity on one system has had an impact on all systems, and that cumulative impact has resulted in a distinct epoch and climatological changes. This is accepted as a matter of fact in both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* and forms part of their milieu. The novels portray dystopic hypercapitalist societies in which life is characterised by precariousness, most particularly for its most vulnerable members. With the conflation of capital and social power, and the growing economic distance between the richest and the rest, the majority of humanity is left feeling ever more powerless. The struggle against the wide-reaching and overwhelming power of capital is showcased in both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* not only as part of the central conflict between protagonists and antagonists, but with specific reference to information and technology. The world economy creates connections globally, of course, but the internet does this on an even greater level. This provides both opportunities for oppression and resistance. In such a world, the influence of the media consumed by the public plays a pivotal role in shaping potential futures for the collective humankind.

CHAPTER 2: UTOPIAN AND SCIENCE FICTION

Ustopianism

As dystopian fiction, *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* are responses to their contemporary social context. They provide commentary and critiques about society's systems, and are generally reflective of humanity's current fears and desires. In order to understand the significance of novels such as these two, one must understand the function of utopianism and the purpose of its literature. Lyman Tower Sargent describes utopianism as social dreaming, and includes nightmares within that definition (3). He uses 'utopia' as a neutral term, describing "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in space and time" (9). I am using 'utopia' to denote the portrayal of a society that is significantly better than the reader's, and in contrast to 'dystopia'. In the social dreaming described by Sargent, the potential for hope (the dream), as well as disappointment (the nightmare) are always present. According to Oscar Wilde (qtd. in Sargent 1):

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of utopias.

The journey of progress described here can, according to Sargent, be read as a story of both hope and tragedy, though I would use the word 'despair' in place of tragedy. Atwood captures this enmeshment of utopia and dystopia in her term "ustopia", describing the latent presence of one within the active portrayal of the other. These are not polar opposite conditions, but rather in constant conversation with one another: "within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia" (Atwood, *Dire Cartographies* 25). A dystopia identifies what is wrong in a society, which implicitly identifies what would be ideal through the contrast between notions of 'right' and 'wrong', and 'good'

and ‘bad’. The same applies to a utopia. The conception of one always contains the implicit conception of the other. It is therefore a valuable representation of the “unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals” situated in unique historical contexts (Moylan, *Demand* 1).

The Function of Utopian and Science Fiction

Readers of utopian literature play a role in its characterisation (Sargent 6). Regardless of the author’s intentions, be they known or not, the reader may create something different to what the author meant to do. The context of the reader, which in this dissertation has been discussed above, has an impact on the reception of a utopian or dystopian literary work, as they and “the changes they undergo both help bring about and are reflections of paradigm shifts in the way a culture views itself” (Sargent 12).

Ruth Levitas uses Ernst Bloch’s definition of utopia as having a transformative function. In this capacity, utopia is a process consisting of five aspects. The first of these is expressive, in which the utopia articulates dissatisfaction (Levitas 117). Thereafter follow:

> its *cognitive function* as a mode of operation of constructive reason, its *educative function* as a mythography which instructs men to will and desire more and better, its *anticipatory function* as a futurology of possibilities which later become actual, and its *causal function* as an agent of historical change. (Hudson, qtd. in Levitas 117)

Walkaway and *Autonomous* perform these functions, which I will show with an example. In an article entitled ‘Hopes and fears for intelligent machines in fiction and reality’, Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal present four categories of paired hopes and fears regarding the development of AI. These four dichotomies are constructed based on a substantial survey of both fictional and non-fictional works, including *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, showing them to be part of the discourse around the future of AI. Cave and Dihal identify hopes for immortality, ease, gratification, and dominance, and their respective fears, inhumanity, obsolescence, alienation, and uprising. These dichotomies appear in the

analyses of the novels in their respective chapters. All four of these dichotomies make an appearance in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, and within these dichotomies, the five aspects of utopian fiction's transformative function can be found. In stimulating thought about the meaning of humanity and what maintains its integrity, both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* are performing cognitive and educative functions. While neither novel anticipates the circumstances they describe with certainty, they are based on possible or proposed outcomes of current research and technological developments. They furthermore project a possible type of hypercapitalist future. As such, both novels perform the anticipatory function of their genre. Although their causal function as an agent of historical change cannot yet be determined, their inclusion in Cave and Dihal's survey, for example, shows that they are among a sample of literature that influences thought and feelings about the future.

The transformative function of utopias is also crucial to Bauman's conceptualisation of them in *Socialism: The Active Utopia*. Their role in the historical process is fourfold (Levitas 196). They function to undermine the naturalisation of human society – that the status quo is an inevitable and immutable state of things – by presenting alternative versions of it. By exploring extrapolations of the present, utopias ask what might be hoped for. Thus *Walkaway* invites the reader to consider what a world with a different economic system might look like, specifically one that does not rely on the condition of scarcity. Although certain scarcities are not imposed by capitalist practices, one can take as example of instituted scarcity the massive waste generated by supermarkets or restaurants whose policy it is to dispose of food instead of donating it. *Autonomous* draws attention to the cruelty of an economic system that exploits cheap labour, creating such inequality that those who make products cannot afford to buy them. In these ways, the novels highlight the issues in contemporary capitalism, presenting a more ideal and less ideal scenario, in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* respectively. By drawing attention to these issues, the novels have the potential to undermine the normalisation of problematic capitalist practices. Additionally, utopias divide the future into "a set of competing and class-committed projects" (Levitas 196), thereby revitalising it. Lastly, utopia influences action. Thus, Bauman defines utopia as

an image of a future and better world which is:

1. felt as still unfulfilled and requiring an additional effort to be brought about;
2. perceived as desirable, as a world not so much bound to come as which should come;
3. critical of the existing society; in fact a system of ideas remains utopian and thus able to boost human activity only in so far as it is perceived as representing a system essentially different from, if not antithetical to, the existing one;
4. involving a measure of hazard; for an image of the future to possess the qualities of utopia, it must be ascertained that it will not come to pass unless fostered by a deliberate collective action. (*Socialism* 17)

As I categorise *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* as more dystopian than utopian, some of these characteristics are less applicable. Having a sound definition of utopia is still useful in understanding its function as well as that of dystopia.

Dystopian Fiction and Function

The dystopian genre has gained "symbolic cultural value in representing fears and anxieties about the future", Stock writes (2). Dystopian stories are important because they produce and reproduce cognitive frameworks of the author and the reader, revealing ideas and ideals about the world and how a person fits into it (Shepherd, qtd. in Stock 15-16). Dystopia allows authors to project many variations of the fate of humankind (Claeys 497). Stock emphasises the importance of dystopian fictions as a means to mediate between past, present, and future. As political narratives, dystopias use historical knowledge to consider what the consequences of their contemporaneous anxieties may be when projected into the future (Claeys 15). Dystopian fiction can, at the same time, also show how past and present fears are not bound to proceed to an inevitable end.

The reader is a part of the process of constructing the fictional dystopian future, and therefore a part of its examination. Stock describes two temporal fields within the dystopian narrative. 'Future as past' refers to that period of time between the authorial

present and the main narrated future. The author provides pieces of "ironic and contested 'historical' narratives" (25) for the reader to use to reconstruct the path from the authorial present to the narrated future. The reader fills in the gaps in the 'future-history' through guesses and their own contextual knowledge and thus becomes part of the creative process of the construction of a dystopian future setting (Stock 25). Drawing the reader into the creative process in this way initiates a sense of connection between the reader's present and the imagined future, making the story more relatable and providing a sense of realism within the fiction. The reader is, hopefully, moved to reflect on the multitudinous facets of the world in which they live and their role in it, depending on the focus of the novel. What can be said with certainty is that the utopian genre, encompassing all types of utopias as defined in the section on utopian fiction above, functions as a mirror through which the reader's world can be investigated, analysed, and interpreted.

As the evolution of different types of utopian fiction demonstrates, novels are informed by the culture and time period in which they are produced (Stock 16). The popularity of dystopian fiction typically surges in response to great changes impacting society. The dystopian literary tradition, born out of satire, "grew, by the 1890s, into an established means of confronting, promoting, and assailing prospects of revolutionary, social, political, and economic transformation" (Claeys 494). Engagement in dystopian literature moved through the impact of machinery and scientific discovery on human life, fears of and warnings against political systems, to dynamics of group and individual interaction. It progressed then to nuclear warfare, overpopulation, scientific and technological domination of humans, and carried these concerns through to catastrophic possibilities of climate change (Claeys 494). Dystopian fiction reflects the dominant fears of a time period and is therefore rife with negativity.

Alexis Lothian uses Ernst Bloch's concept of the utopian impulse (*The Principle of Hope*) to propose a concomitant dystopian impulse. The utopian impulse is an 'active' form of political desire for a better world, expressed through cultural artefacts (Stock 16-17). The dystopian impulse, although a negative critique, aims to work against presumptions of the inevitability and external nature of the present's political problems (Lothian 448). Negativity is not synonymous with hopelessness, nor does it function as such in dystopian

fiction. The majority of dystopias include some element of hope, but those that do not "are no less edifying in their pessimism" (Claeys 494-495). This is again what Atwood describes as ustopia. As will be discussed further below, fears reveal desires, and despair reveals what is hoped for. These things are not mutually exclusive because they inform each other, which is demonstrated in branches of the overall utopian genre such as critical utopias and dystopias, and the more recently coined hopepunk.

Critical Utopias, Critical Dystopias, and Hopepunk

In *Demand the Impossible*, Tom Moylan analyses the novels of Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Samuel Delaney as examples of what he calls 'critical utopia'. Levitas (198) describes critical utopias as self-reflexive. They question the possibility of any society achieving perfection by examining whether utopias can emerge, and how that may occur (198). Characteristic of critical utopias is a more detailed representation of the society they critique than in other utopian fiction. Utopia is no longer presented as a perfect place or state of affairs, but also as imperfect, subject to difficulties, change, and inconsistencies. They "reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream" (Moylan, *Demand* 10), and by holding on to the dream, critical utopias maintain a sense of hope.

Between the trend of utopias in the 1970s and the tendency to dystopias in the early 1980s, some science fiction writers began to employ dystopian narrative strategies as a way of trying to understand a social reality that is shaped by the rise of transnational corporate power, the financialization of capitalism, ongoing exploitation of nature and people, and the accelerating ecological crisis, and the critical dystopia emerged as a genre (Moylan, *Scraps* 184-6). Like critical utopias, critical dystopias "negate static ideals, preserve radical action, and create a space in which opposition can be articulated and received" (Baccolini, qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 188). They thereby provide a space and voice for those whose subject positions have been excluded by hegemonic discourse. This allows the authors to explore how the system they are critiquing may be changed to become more equitable for all, including the marginalised (Moylan, *Scraps* 189). What I find notable in this regard about both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* is their inclusion of different sexual orientations, gender identities, and races, not just as generic gestures toward inclusivity but as characteristics of the protagonists. In *Autonomous*, specifically, gender identity and

sexual orientation are important features of the relationship between Eliasz and Paladin. By breaking free from the constraints of the old dystopian form, critical dystopias increase their potential for critical expression. Like critical utopias, they deconstruct genre purity by borrowing conventions and blurring genres, thus aiming critique at society as well as fixed assumptions of literary forms, including its own (Moylan, *Scraps* 189). By drawing a much larger circle of inclusivity, the novels speak to a greater variety of people, all of whom are a part of the human collective. They insert these traditionally marginalised characteristics into their exploration of what it means to be human on an individual and collective scale. I find this absolutely necessary in any conversation about humankind. This also means that, when I discuss misanthropy, it is in reference to all humans, and independent of prejudice against those groups that otherwise face much negativity and hatred.

'Hopepunk' functions similarly to critical utopias and dystopias. The term, much younger than the genre it describes, refers to "a literary and artistic movement that celebrates the pursuit of positive aims in the face of adversity" (*Collins English Dictionary*, qtd. in Robson). Author Alexandra Rowland introduced hopepunk as the opposite of the fantasy fiction subgenre 'grimdark', typified by George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Grimdark emphasises humanity's flaws and capacity for cruelty. Hopepunk, in contrast, aims to highlight kindness in spite of, or because of, a cynical and nihilistic world. Indeed, Rowland views this as a political and rebellious act through which "a better, kinder world" is demanded (qtd. in Robson). Examples of hopepunk include Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and more recently, Annalee Newitz's *The Future of Another Timeline* and Becky Chambers' *Wayfarers* series (Robson). Like the societies depicted in critical utopias, Chambers' fictional societies are imperfect and include unavoidable difficulties. At the same time, hopepunk refuses to completely give up on an optimistic vision of a future built on empathy and cooperation between a variety of beings (Robson).

David Robson suggests that this genre could be the antidote to the cynicism and pessimism arising in response to the current political, environmental, and economic uncertainties. He offers two ways of interpreting the Pandora myth to demonstrate that

people have held ambivalent views on hope throughout history. According to the myth, Zeus creates Pandora to punish humankind after Prometheus steals the gods' fire to give to humans. When Pandora opens her jar, she releases innumerable evils into the world. Yet hope was also contained in this jar, and it alone remains within its unbreakable confines. This is often interpreted as hope's ability to comfort people in life's inevitable times of misery and duress and is thus seen as a "sustaining force" (Robson). A darker interpretation of the myth argues that hope's presence in the jar marks it as a form of evil. Nietzsche, for example, suggests in *Human, All Too Human* that hope was retained as a means to bind people to life and suffer through its misery (Robson). In this interpretation, hope functions to keep people in "torment" (Nietzsche, qtd. in Robson) by ensuring that they continuously choose to stay alive in spite of their suffering and difficulties. Similarly, Schopenhauer describes hope as "a folly of the heart" ('Psychological Remarks', qtd. in Robson) and a delusion. "A hopeless misfortune is like a quick death blow, whilst a hope that is always frustrated and constantly revived resembles a kind of slow death by prolonged torture", Schopenhauer wrote in 'Psychological Remarks' (qtd. in Robson).

As I have been indicating throughout, I find Atwood's concept of ustopia the best way to approach utopias and dystopias. I extend this opinion to genres such as hopepunk and grimdark. This is because of the relationship between fear, desire, and hope, which I expand on in the next chapter. I therefore do not view any of these genre categories as mutually exclusive. What the dual interpretation of hope in the Pandora myth highlights is the ustopian characteristic of this emotion. It contains both our desires and fears, which colour individual interpretations of the function of hope. As I will explain in the next chapter, hope should not be conceptualised as either completely present or completely absent. It is possible to hope for something, even if there is little to no evidence for success. Tolkien calls this a fool's hope (*The Lord of the Rings* 1009), for example.

Dystopias are not a genre of hopelessness. Thus, in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* for example, their critiques of hypercapitalism express varying degrees of hope for an improved society. *Walkaway* explicitly expresses hope for a better future, but this is undermined by the idealism of its utopian vision and the novel's inability to depict the transition to that future. It furthermore proposes the ideal human to be a simulation of a

person that can be transplanted into other bodies or simply exist as a program as long as it can be stored on some kind of hardware. This indicates to me that the novel does not hold much hope for human beings themselves. Hope in *Walkaway* seems to lie in severing the mind from the body, which I argue is a pessimistic expression of hope and actually expressive of a deep fear. *Autonomous* appears to have a somewhat hopeful outlook at the end of its story, suggesting that a better society may be possible. At the same time, however, just like *Walkaway*, the novel displays a lack of faith in humankind's ability to achieve this. It suggests instead that hope for a better future rests with robotics and artificial intelligence. Again, there is hope that lacks conviction, suggesting that perhaps Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's interpretations of hope are, at least in part, apt in reference to these novels. In this light, hope seems futile, and in my opinion, this futility is reflected in *Walkaway*'s idealism and *Autonomous*' yearning for the unattainable ideal of *Walkaway*'s ending.

CHAPTER 3: MISANTHROPY

Influences on Western Misanthropy

The common definition of misanthropy is an intense dislike or hatred of humankind. This attitude is difficult to sustain permanently because we ourselves are human. Misanthropy therefore often occurs in varying degrees, partly because it is interwoven with the various intellectual and emotional beliefs, attitudes and positions of individuals, cultures, and societies (Gibson 5-6), and is heavily dependent on circumstance (Gibson 7). In *Misanthropy*, Andrew Gibson provides an in-depth critical study of this attitude toward the human race from a Western perspective. He identifies sources of misanthropy by investigating when, where, and by whom misanthropy was expressed throughout human history. According to him, three particular sources of and influences on Western misanthropy are the Cynic philosophers, Roman satire, and St Augustine. Gibson's discussion of these is centred around four themes: "*saeva indignatio*; total depravity (as rooted in original sin); the exception; and the *méchants* and the *complaisants*" (14). Discussing the history associated with each source and influence is not necessary for this dissertation. However, these four themes are important in the analysis of misanthropy and will therefore be discussed.

Briefly, it should be noted that the idea of total depravity derives from St Augustine, who concluded that evil was inherently human and doomed all but a pre-selected few (Gibson 26-30). Gibson emphasises the influence of this idea on Western misanthropy (26). The belief that humans have an inherent 'badness' is present in many key texts connected with misanthropy, including More's *Utopia* and Molière's *Le Misanthrope*. Human fallibility continues to be a central misanthropic concern, irrespective of its connection to any religion. It will be referred to throughout this dissertation as fallibility, or in connection with human imperfection and imperfectability, rather than as total depravity in order to broaden its applicability beyond its religious connotation.

Furthermore, Gibson's argument that misanthropists make themselves exceptions to that which they condemn is arguably too great a generalisation. He uses the character Alceste from Molière's *Le Misanthrope* as one example, stating that Alceste's misanthropy is in part a form of self-love and not purely self-condemnation (2-3). Gibson is not the only one to interpret Alceste's character this way. For example, Richard Wilbur writes in the introduction to his translation of the play that Alceste indulges in the cult of alienation, wanting to be distinguished from others, which is seen, for example, when he says that "the friend of mankind is no friend of mine" (*The Misanthrope* I.i 65, p. 17). It is true that misanthropists can easily come across as conceited, particularly because there is a common implicit assumption that criticism does not apply to the person expressing it. However, to say that it is characteristic of misanthropists to make themselves exceptions to their hatred is not always applicable. Some are willing to admit that, while others are not. A more generalizable characterisation is that misanthropists have a self-deceptive tendency, which is discussed further below.

The dynamic of the *méchants* and the *complaisants* also originates from *Le Misanthrope*. It describes a worldview in which the human race is divided into villains (*méchants*) and those who enable villainy through complacency (*complaisants*). This is how Alceste describes society:

> Some men I hate for being rogues; the others
> I hate because they treat the rogues like brothers,
> And, lacking a virtuous scorn for what is vile,
> Receive the villain with a complaisant smile.
> (*The Misanthrope* I.i 125-128, p. 20)

This theme is evident as a fundamental description of the state of both societies represented in *Autonomous* and *Walkaway*. The merging of money and political power, discussed further in a section below, has created a social elite of *méchants*. Both novels make the argument that the masses become *complaisants* simply by participating as they are expected to, without questioning the rules of their societies. The protagonists in each novel try to challenge complaisance through various means available to them. By

highlighting this theme, both novels invite the readers to reflect on the presence of *méchants* and *complaisants* in their own society and to locate themselves within this dynamic.

Conditions for Misanthropy

Gibson defines three conditions under which misanthropy has historically thrived. Firstly, he argues that misanthropy arises due to "a failure or absence of democracy" (207, 31-62), when people feel oppressed and powerless. Secondly, feeling disgust or hatred toward the human body leads to a misanthropic attitude (207, 63-90), exemplified strongly by Jonathan Swift. The third source of misanthropy is what Gibson calls "a lack of historical consciousness" (207, 91-118). Misanthropy is a product of "convert[ing] a historical moment or a social and historical predicament into a generally human one" (Gibson 118). Such misanthropists generalise the 'here and now' to 'everywhere and always.'

Although Gibson states that these conditions are no longer present and thus cannot explain the presence of misanthropy in the contemporary context, I believe that this is not wholly the case. Democracy is failing to deliver decreased intra- and interstate inequality and seems instead increasingly ineffective for the masses in some countries. The human body is still commonly regarded as aesthetically and functionally insufficient and inadequate. In fact, body dysmorphic disorder is relatively common (Bjornsson et al.). Dreams of perfectibility through science and technology remain popular and are expressed in, for example, post- and transhumanism. Additionally, the physical presence of humans is judged to be anything from problematic to abhorrent for its destructive effects on Earth, for example in the eco-misanthropy and eco-fascism movements. Increases in rates of chronic physical and mental illnesses indicate friction between humans and the environment they occupy.

Additionally, with the climate crisis, humans are faced with a global-scale, man-made predicament. Globalized media has created a condition in which people are constantly informed of issues not only in their own countries, but worldwide. This continuous exposure to seemingly endless ecological and social maladies and their human causes,

which I will call ‘doomscrolling’, feeds into misanthropy. Increased historical consciousness in the general population shows that predicaments are not permanent, but also that issues will continue to arise. This, in combination with the negativity of doomscrolling, can overshadow positive events, and lead back to the tendency to generalise the ‘here and now’ to ‘everywhere and always’. Each of these conditions is present in both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway*, and form a part of their misanthropic expression. The tendency to generalise issues that have a global reach but do not exist in equal measure everywhere is also present in both novels, as I have indicated in the introduction chapter.

Gibson further identifies three contemporary types of misanthropy that are not the result of the aforementioned conditions. These are dark radicalisms, post-liberalisms or post-progressivisms, and popular misanthropies (Gibson 208). Dark radical thought tends to originate from radical philosophies and decentres human perspective and experience (208-210). Post-liberalisms or post-progressivisms are mostly academic and “emerge out of a bleak, melancholic, disbelieving if sporadic implosion of contemporary liberal faiths” (208). Gibson describes contemporary culture as full of “assertions of indifference to humanity, declarations of humanity’s categorical inadequacy and expressions of a desire to see it come to an end or be superseded by other life forms” (208-209). This is reflected in popular misanthropies, which include criticism of, among others, liberalism, humanism, capitalism, and humanity’s obsession with progress and growth. The discussion further below will elucidate how these conditions, as well as the three historical conditions above, are present in the misanthropy expressed in both novels.

Disanthropy

Garrard (‘Worlds’) points out the need to distinguish misanthropy from what he calls disanthropy. This is misanthropy with the desire for the complete absence of humans from earth. Garrard suggests that disanthropy may be a defensive response to the challenge of the ecological crisis to someone’s sense of reality (44). It is both politically disabling and “sado-dispassionate” (Brennan, qtd. in Curry 158) because those who express disanthropy often simultaneously distance themselves from it through intellectualisation. Because of the necessary absence of humans in disanthropy, it is uncommon and practically

impossible to convey in literature, as narrative voice and anthropomorphic characterisation are unavoidable (43). Therefore, instead of being expressed in terms of deep time from which disanthropy originates and to which it gestures, it is expressed in moments and microcosms (43).

For example, "the heavily ironic depiction of the Chernobyl site as a wilderness idyll where human absence has outweighed radioactive contamination" (Garrard, 'Worlds' 52) is common. This disanthropy is not fully convincing, because mutations are evident in animal and plant life. The impact of human activity will remain long after humans themselves are gone, however and whenever that happens. The use of Chernobyl as evidence for the benefits of human absence is wishful thinking and, arguably, displays an unwillingness (conscious or not) to take responsibility. This is something that *Walkaway* in particular touches on by attempting to imagine a world simultaneously with and without humans. The novel contains a lengthy conversation between two characters considering the benefits of human absence on the natural environment. However, disanthropic dreams of nature retaking places once dominated by human activity leave out the "permanent [anthropogenic] biogeographical alteration of the world" (Garrard, 'Worlds' 53). It is idealistic, or, as Garrard puts it, "a dangerously utopian construct" ('Worlds' 53).

As stated previously, Garrard addresses the lack of attention given to the issue of overpopulation in ecocriticism and mainstream environmentalism, stating that it is avoided because of historical guilt associated with it ('Worlds' 55). Garrard points to several examples in which concern about overpopulation is argued to be a cover for political objectives and therefore condemned or dismissed. The focus is instead redirected to call out inequality and the consumption patterns of the rich as the main cause of ecological problems. Garrard, agreeing with Patrick Curry and Mike Hulme, quite reasonably argues that greed and unequal resource distribution would be a much smaller concern if the population were smaller ('Worlds' 55). As I have stated in the first chapter, *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* focus on economic inequality and the abuse of power through wealth and forgo discussing overpopulation. This is particularly problematic as both novels include as either part of their fictional societal norms or ultimate goal a

substantially increased lifespan. They do not consider how a dramatically increased and long-lived population may have contributed to not only to the ecological crisis but the social issues that both novels focus on.

According to Garrard ('Worlds' 55-6), queer theorist Edelman challenges over-reproduction with his argument against heteronormative reproductive futurity. Although Edelman's argument is never made in environmental terms, it is nonetheless applicable to the narrative employed by environmentalists. He states that "[the figure of the] Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2004:3, qtd. Garrard, 'Worlds' 56). People are urged by environmental activists to leave behind a better Earth for 'our children,' yet none acknowledge that the emphasis on having children feeds directly into the problem of overpopulation. They are too ensconced in an anthropocentric worldview to recognise this. Garrard ('Worlds' 56) identifies the paradoxical there-but-not-there nature of the representation of disanthropic absence as implicit in the assurance of reproductive futurity in the following quote from Edelman:

> To be there *always*, though unperceived, to inhabit the space of perception as such and thus become the witness to one's absence, one's disembodiment; such fantasy presumes a reality guaranteed, not threatened by time, sustained by the certainty that a "course of events" is bound to continue in due course after we are gone. (34, qtd. Garrard, 'Worlds' 56)

This desire arguably stems from the anthropocentric values around which civilization has been built. Like much concerning misanthropy, there are two contradictory beliefs about the relationship between Earth and humans. On the one hand, the realisation that Earth's history is far longer than human history made the argument that human activity is too trivial to have an ecological impact of any consequence believable, before there were scientific means to show otherwise (Bonneuil and Fressoz 32, 40). At the same time, the rhetoric employed by environmentalists implies an inability to truly conceive of a world without humans, as if Earth will die with human extinction (Clark 37). Both beliefs

function to enforce a delusion of human power, thereby feeding a fantasy of humans as saviours. What happens, however, when this anthropocentric illusion fails? Misanthropy challenges anthropocentrism because it has lost faith in its illusions.

Characteristics of Misanthropes

Literature is an excellent source of misanthropic characters, born out of different contexts, who can be analysed and explored within a set framework. This makes the challenge of unpacking misanthropy more manageable. Paul G. Zolbrod presents a study in misanthropic characteristics by comparing the characters Alceste, from Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, and Caius Marcius Coriolanus, from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. An important feature of both men is that they have worldviews based on polarised (black-and-white) thinking and have rigid principles they refuse to compromise on (55). Both men are idealists, according to Zolbrod, who are heroic in their hatred of vices, but their downfall is the extension of that hatred to the people who practice those vices (57). Zolbrod pinpoints a core feature of misanthropy when he writes, "They cannot endure the imperfection of human beings" (57). Yet beneath each character's misanthropy, Zolbrod identifies a desire to be loved more, and to have better relationships with those they apparently hate (58). They themselves are therefore guilty of deception, of themselves and the targets of their hatred.

Some misanthropic characters, such as Folly from Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* and Hythloday from More's *Utopia*, set out to refashion humanity because it fails to meet their standard (Berger). Harry Berger describes Folly as personifying the relationship between the desire for a life of ease, and the fear of a life of suffering. Folly's pastoral idyll creates a cynical view of humans as tiny, inconsequential creatures that are nonetheless the cause of "much trouble and tragedy" (Erasmus 143, qtd. Berger 274). Folly therefore makes the argument that it is not worth living an examined life, nor knowing an examined self, because self-knowledge leads to self-hatred. Instead complicity, through which the self and others are deceived, is all that holds society together (274). "The basis of the condition embodied by Folly, the source of both the golden-age fantasy and the *saeva indignatio* dialectically coupled with it, is hatred of self" (278), Berger concludes.

More's Utopia is constructed around the belief that humans cannot be trusted to solve their problems, so a social structure will do it for them instead (Berger 279). It is apparent that Utopians do not expect people to inconvenience themselves for others, God, or virtue (278). They instead focus on pleasurable states of consciousness as virtue in their hedonist culture, which, Berger argues, induces *philautia* (conceited self-love) (287-288). Berger goes on to state that the arguments for *philautia* and pleasure originate from subliminal anxiety and *misautia* (self-hate) (288). Additionally, the "basis of the hedonist calculus is *apprehension*, which is a form of self-knowledge – the knowledge of one's desire to *take*, and the corresponding fear of *being taken*" (288, emphasis in original).

This 'take or be taken' worldview is not only a character trait ascribed to literary figures. The "faith in people" scale is a tool commonly used in psychology to measure levels of misanthropy in individuals (Freitas et al. 136). It poses a series of questions aimed at gauging a person's belief in others' trustworthiness. Just as the literary works discussed above depict, it has been found in psychological studies that pessimistic beliefs toward other issues, such as politics (Rosenberg, qtd. in Freitas et al. 137) and international relations (Rosenberg, qtd. in Freitas et al. 137), can be expected in those with misanthropic traits (Freitas et al. 137). Interestingly, and seemingly paradoxically, Freitas et al. found that misanthropes from four interdependent cultures consistently believed in a good true self in others. The true self is an essential conception of the self, that 'genuine' or 'real' core of who someone is. It is often used by people to explain their own and others' behaviour (135). Studies have consistently found that people tend to attribute morally good traits to the true self (135), and that moral traits are more closely tied to the true self than other mental faculties (e.g. personality, memory, perception, and preferences) (Strohminger and Nichols, qtd. in Freitas et al. 136). Additionally, morally good traits are linked more strongly to the true self than morally bad ones (Tobia, qtd. in Freitas et al. 136).

Although there are cultural variations in beliefs regarding the true self, there are also universal beliefs, which the authors suggest is due to psychological essentialism. This "is the tendency to conceive of entities as having a deeper essence that is not readily

observed" (Freitas et al. 138). This tendency is robust, emerges early in development, and is similar across cultures (138). Because people generally tend to understand various entities, including non-living ones, by attributing essences to them, the authors hypothesise that judgements about the true self involve this same tendency. They add that research indicates that people also have a tendency to explain a number of phenomena by ascribing a deeper purpose to them. Therefore, Freitas et al. propose that the judgement of a true self as morally good originates from the tendency to think that human beings' purpose is to be morally good (154). This leads to the question of how someone can believe in the good true self and be misanthropic at the same time. I suggest that the answer can, at least in part, be found in hope.

Hope, Existential Fear, and Desire

The standard theory of hope, commonly attributed to J. P. Day, is that to hope is to desire a certain outcome and believe that this desire is possible to fulfil (Kwong; Mason). However, this definition has been found lacking, unable to account for the full range of the experience of hope and its active role in motivating behaviour (Kwong; Mason). To address the first of these gaps in definition, Jack Kwong proposes shifting the conceptualisation of hope as something one does to something one has. When hope is used as a verb, Kwong argues, it functions merely to register a particular desire which is believed possible to fulfil at a future point (834). In this case, hope is a reaction or response to one's environment, which opens up avenues of potential consequent actions. Yet, if hope is a noun, hoping is a separate mental function from the actions taken as a consequence of hope. Hope as a noun remains a neutral concept because it does not relate to positive or negative feelings that may accompany the feeling of hope (Kwong 835).

Significantly, this understanding of hope allows for hope and despair to exist simultaneously in the same space. Kwong borrows an example from Adrienne Martin, of a cancer patient who is taking part in experimental treatment but who does not believe that the treatment will cure his cancer. As Kwong argues, the patient can reasonably be said to hope that the treatment is successful, while at the same time doubt that this will be the case and therefore feel despair. At the same time, his despair does not negate his hope. The two are not opposites if 'to hope' is understood simply as registering a particular

desire. They are two responses to different aspects of the same experience. This is why Kwong suggests that hope as verb and *hopefulness* are distinct: "Since the act of registering one's desires is distinct from how we feel about the likelihood that they will be realized, a person could then coherently say or think, 'I hope that *x*, but I am not hopeful that it will come about.'" (837).

The word 'hope' can therefore denote either to hope or to be hopeful, and Kwong distinguishes between the two by understanding the first as a mental act and the second as an attitude (838). A person can therefore hope and experience degrees of hopefulness that may have a more positive or negative valence. For a person to be hopeful, Kwong states that they must, on average, feel more positively than negatively about the chances of obtaining the desired outcome (840). This understanding still allows for negative feelings in association with the chances of obtaining the desired outcome, but stipulates that there must be more positive than negative feelings overall. Kwong also makes clear that hopefulness is independent of the probability of obtaining the desired outcome, and instead simply requires the possibility of obtaining it.

I find Kwong's differentiation between hoping and hopefulness useful in explaining the apparent contradiction in misanthropy, in which it can appear that someone has a negative view of humans without absolutely condemning them as hopeless. I would say that the misanthropist does hope for people to be better, but that, on average, does not feel hopeful that this will come about. Thus, for example, in the psychological study by Freitas et al. discussed above, misanthropy is measured by the amount of faith someone has in people. Misanthropists scored low on this scale, but still showed a general belief that people had good true selves. Misanthropy can therefore be said to originate in a sense of hopelessness or even despair, while at the same time not being a complete lack of hope in humankind.

Kwong's dual definition of hope is furthermore valuable to me in explaining why the ending of *Autonomous* displays varying degrees of hope, while overall expressing very little hope. At the end of the story, nothing has actually changed in this society. None of the actions taken by the individual characters resulted in conditions being different at the end of the novel to how they were at the beginning. Both positive and negative changes

have certainly taken place in the lives of those individuals, but in terms of human collectiveness, either on the scale of society or humankind in total, no positive outcome has been achieved. This suggests a long-term, large-scale hopelessness (as in, a low degree of hope) in the probability of human beings creating a better global society, and in this way, expresses misanthropy as a lack of faith in people. The novel nonetheless does not forsake hope, that is, the realisation of the desire for a better global society, which includes the acknowledgement of the possibility of obtaining this outcome. It shows individual characters such as Jack and Med doing what they believe is morally good, by continuing to distribute free and cheap medication, and by running the Saskatoon laboratory and thereby generating cheaper pharmaceutical alternatives. These characters have not given up hope in the potential to make what positive difference they can. In contrast, Eliasz has given up hope that he can make a positive change in Earth's society, and he effectively abandons it for the one on Mars.

Kwong's framework might indicate, then, that *Walkaway* succeeds in portraying hope to its full extent, both in the sense of recognising the desire for a better global society and in the sense of believing it to be probable. I would agree with Doctorow's ('Disasters') statement that, in this sense, *Walkaway* is a utopian novel. Nonetheless, I am not convinced that the novel is truly successful in portraying hope. Rather, the idealism of its conclusion pushes it into the region of wishing for the reader. In differentiating between hoping and wishing, Cathy Mason argues that hope depends on evidence of possibility of an outcome being attainable, which thereby shapes and drives intention to act. She writes that "[w]ishful thinking is thinking that is unresponsive to evidence about how things are" (521). The state of immortality and peace described at the end of *Walkaway*, as well as how this is achieved, is in my view idealistic because it is, in Mason's terms, unresponsive to evidence about how things are. The novel portrays a post-scarcity world of endlessly available resources, for example, which is an almost opposite condition of the reader's reality. There is additionally no explanation of how a post-scarcity world can exist at the same time as a hypercapitalist society ruled by a wealthy elite, as in *Walkaway*, when at the same time, the novel explains that the condition of scarcity is necessary for the elite to maintain their position of power. It is briefly acknowledged that the walkaways are stealing whatever resources they use (453), but is also seems that these resources are

simply lying about the landscape, such as abandoned jets (59). How this comes to be, though, is not described. In this sense, *Walkaway*'s idealism instils a false hope.

I characterise false hope as stemming from a position defined primarily by fear, although not necessarily by an absence of desire. I believe that fear and desire are not polar opposites but exist along the same spectrum. Valérie de Courville Nicol's explanation of the relationship between fear and desire, and the role of hope in the interaction between those emotions, is helpful in elucidating what I mean. Firstly, fear and desire need to be understood in terms of their full ranges. For example, I can be both afraid of missing an appointment and of drowning. In the same way, I can desire to eat an ice cream, and I can desire to win a gold medal in the Olympics. The strength of the fear or desire may differ, but the underlying emotion is the same. I can say that I am far more afraid of drowning than of missing an appointment, but I experience a degree of fear in both instances. This makes defining fear and desire challenging, because the definition needs to be true to every experience. In the following discussion, it must be kept in mind that the words used in the definitions are meant in their broadest sense.

Courville Nicol defines fear as "the painfully felt urge to overcome danger in order to avoid pain" and desire as "the pleasurably felt urge to implement security in order to pursue pleasure" (21). We seek to move away from fear and toward desire through anticipation of pain or pleasure, respectively. Fear experiences and desire experiences are the emotional experiences of pain and pleasure in their most general forms (17). One can think of fear and desire as two states of being with their own respective depths and ranges, and a person as a node moving between the most extreme points of each emotion. The point at which fear and desire meet is indifference. Generally, people aim to move away from the range of fear experiences and toward that of desire experiences. Furthermore, the dialectical relationship between the two emotions is that "[t]he object of fear is the problem content of the object of desire, while the object of desire is the solved content of the object of fear" (Courville Nicol 17). Danger is the threat to security, while security is the solution to the threat of danger; without danger, there is no threat to security, and without security, there is no solution to danger. Therefore, Courville Nicol states, objects

of fear and desire have the same solution (17), and "fear and desire constitute the most basic forms of subjective motivation to act" (21).

The translation of fear or desire into action is called "the hope response" (21). Hope structures fear and desire, because the urge to act out of fear or desire implies the belief in the possibility of avoiding pain or attaining pleasure (21). This understanding of hope is in line with that discussed above, based on Kwong and Mason. Furthermore, hope also requires the acknowledgement of the absence of the means to avoid pain or attain pleasure, but with the possibility of obtaining those means. Courville Nicol calls this absence "lack" (21). According to Courville Nicol's analysis, overcoming the power of a threat requires identifying what is necessary to move from incapacity to capacity and then acting in that capacity: "The feeling of **powerlessness** or of **incapacity** is the fear associated with the perception that one lacks the capacity to overcome danger, whose pair is the feeling of **powerfulness** or of **capacity**, which is the perception of the capacity to implement security" (27, emphasis in original). Therefore, the actions required to fulfil desire involve searching for and determining the means of attaining the power or capacity to implement security (28). The sense of having power is accompanied by a feeling of freedom, while the sense of powerlessness is accompanied by what Courville Nicol calls "unfreedom" (28). Courville Nicol additionally defines the subjective motivation to act as based on the feelings of hope and hopelessness, in that feeling capacity to fulfil desire provides hopefulness, and feeling incapable of doing so invokes hopelessness (28). The powerfulness/powerlessness, freedom/unfreedom, and hopefulness/hopelessness dynamics are called basic emotional-norm pairs (27). All of these pairs structure the movement along the continuum between fear and desire, in which the aim is to move away from fear and thus toward desire (26-27). I want to add the concept of 'control' to this definition simply by expanding that if one feels powerfulness, hopefulness, or freedom, one can be described as feeling in control of the particular event which has elicited fear or desire in the first place. Conversely, the feeling of powerlessness, hopelessness, or unfreedom indicates that one lacks control to ensure the desired outcome.

The addition of control will simplify my analysis of responses to existential fear in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*. Based on the understanding of fear and desire discussed

above, I define existential fear as the emotional response to a perceived threat to the security of one's being, where 'being' refers to existing ('to be'), and the summation of the psychological and physical attributes that constitute an individual's sense of self. In the precariousness that defines the liquid modern context, particularly hypercapitalism and elitism defined by capital as described in the novels, and with the threat of the climate crisis, humankind as a collective is faced with an existential threat and must respond.

Courville Nicol summarises three general strategic responses to problems, namely confrontation, avoidance, and prevention. Each is accompanied by an emotional-norm pair that structures the response. Confrontation is structured by the feelings of either terror or courage, depending on the perceived incapacity or capacity of success in this strategy. Phobia and escape structure the avoidance strategy, where phobia is the perceived incapacity and escape is the perceived capacity to overcome danger. Lastly, the prevention strategy is structured by worry and safety, where worry is the perceived incapacity and safety the perceived capacity to overcome danger (29). These emotional-norm pairs of terror/courage, phobia/escape, and worry/safety are in turn structured by the emotional-norm pair of self-confidence and self-doubt. Self-confidence is the belief that one has the capacity to successfully confront, avoid, or prevent danger, while self-doubt is the belief that one is incapable of doing so (29).

Prevention is not a viable strategy to counter the existential threat posed by the sum of problems that make up the state of precariousness depicted in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, as it is not an anticipated threat but one already present. I characterise *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* as trying to negotiate the emotional-norm pairs of confrontation (terror/courage) and avoidance (phobia/escape), in which *Walkaway*'s narrative is structured by self-confidence and *Autonomous*' by self-doubt. The presence of misanthropy in both novels evidences a failure to truly engage with the existential threat posed by humans to themselves. In the confrontation of humankind with itself, misanthropy is the realisation that humankind is lacking. I mean this 'lacking' in the sense defined by Courville Nicol as the absence of the means to avoid what is feared. The desire to escape the body in both novels is, in my opinion, a reaction born of feeling overwhelmed not just by the dystopic fictional present, but by feeling responsible for it.

In this sense, escape from the body and Earth is a failure to accept the responsibility that humanity has toward itself and the Earth system.

The confrontation of humankind with itself and the resultant attitude of misanthropy can be better understood in terms of hyperobjects. A hyperobject is something that exists on a much larger scale in time and space relative to a human. In *Dark Ecology*, Timothy Morton describes the "uncanny sense of existing on more than one scale at once" (25) as an individual and a member of the human species as a collective. This sense comes with the recognition of the Anthropocene. As Morton explains: "I'm a person. I'm also part of an entity that is now a *geological force on a planetary scale*. The darkness of ecological awareness is the darkness of [the film genre] noir, which is a strange loop: the detective is the criminal" (9, emphasis in original).

Conceptualising humankind as a hyperobject sheds light on how the rejection of, and desire to accept, humans comes to coexist simultaneously in the misanthropist. By being both a constituent of the human race and an individual human being, a person is the agency behind the Anthropocene on a collective level, yet not on a personal level. The development of the Anthropocene was set in motion long before any person alive today was born. Timothy Clark (15) borrows Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan (*Leviathan*) to explain that the agency of humanity as a geological force is not distinguishable in the individuals or groups that make up the collective.

> One can picture the current humanity as a super-Leviathan whose body is made up of lots of smaller Leviathans or human groups. Many would be rational, peaceful and accommodating, or people just trying to get by as best as they can. But this time the giant they comprise would not be the force of restraint and order that it was in the Leviathan in Hobbes. Rather, if characterised in terms of the psychology of an individual, this planetary giant would not seem to have the supposedly definitive human characteristics of foresight and restraint, but it would be a self-destructive and self-deluding figure, more like a psychopath. (Clark 15)

Misanthropists may view the human collective in such a way. In the study on psychological essentialism in misanthropists discussed above, it is explained that people may not attribute a good essence to a category, but that they have a tendency to still see good essences in people who form part of that category (Freitas et al. 154). Thus, for example, misanthrope Jonathan Swift wrote, "principally I hate and detest that animal called man; although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth" (Ratcliffe). The super-Leviathan, the category 'humankind', appears to lack a good true self as it hardly recognises the nature of its own power and "is not really capable of voluntary action or planning, as it arises from the often-unforeseen circumstances of the plans and acts of its constituents" (Clark 15). Dio Chrysostom expressed a similar opinion in his sixth oration, in which he explains that humans create more problems with each implemented solution to previous problems (Dobbin). He criticises humans for endlessly seeking pleasure and ease, stating this as the root cause of the vicious cycle of problems and solutions that society experiences. It is what generates perpetual human unhappiness:

> The fact is, all man's ingenuity and advances in technology were at best mixed blessings in the lives of later generations. For man did not use his intelligence in the service of justice or bravery, only pleasure. And in this single-minded pursuit their lives actually became less pleasant and more oppressive; their devotion to self-interest brought them to dreadful ends. (Dobbin 138)

The apparently fundamental restlessness of humans that drives them to keep searching for something better can be attributed to the interaction between fear and desire. When problems are perceived as threats, they stimulate fear. The desire to ease this fear drives the development of a solution, but solutions inevitably bring with them more problems. The cycle repeats indefinitely. This pattern follows that of humanity's perpetual urge to seek utopia as described by Oscar Wilde, quoted above, and gives credit to Dio Chrysostom's conclusion that the greater struggle is actually against pleasure (desire), not painful circumstances (fear) (Dobbin 147). The novels, *Autonomous* and *Walkaway*, also make this argument by showcasing the destructive effects of greed. Greed is a form of desire, partnered with the fear of losing what has been accumulated. Of course, both desire

and fear are healthy emotions which provide people with necessary and relevant feedback about themselves and their circumstances. Both novels demonstrate that fear and desire become problematic when they grow to excessive proportions, critiquing in particular the use of private property to generate capital on a massive scale as a function of greed in contemporary capitalism.

The problem lies in scarcity and severe socio-economic inequality, so that when a few accumulate a large portion of the available resources, a share of those resources is unavailable to the rest. A spread of wealth among the population, in which some have more and some less, is in and of itself not problematic, although *Walkaway* argues to the contrary. The novel's engagement in this area is more of a criticism than an argument, however, because of its portrayal of a post-scarcity world without any explanation of how that condition is achieved. The criticism of hypercapitalism and the suffering it causes is nevertheless valid, but *Autonomous* is more successful in its argument against hypercapitalism. It showcases the consequences of poverty, perpetuated by exploitation and systemic inequality, on the lives of individuals and, by explaining Jack's motivation for pharmaceutical piracy, also points out how far-reaching the power of capital is. In a world of finite resources in which the distribution of resources is directed by capital, those with little or no capital are severely disadvantaged. The novels argue against some having excess luxury as a result of a system that simultaneously results in great suffering for many. Their misanthropy is, in this respect, a response to the unwillingness of the elite few to allow changes to be made to the system that advantages them, as well as to the perceived complacency of the large socio-economic middle, whose action is required for change.

Summary of Misanthropies

Misanthropy: An intense hatred or dislike of humankind.

Disanthropy: The hatred of humankind with the desire for a world devoid of them.

Pastoral misanthropy: Embodied in Erasmus' character of Folly, this misanthropy is characterised by the dialectic between the fantasy of idealism and the disappointment of reality in comparison. To avoid facing one's contempt of reality, life and one's self should remain unexamined. Self-knowledge and self-

hatred are inextricably linked, for knowing oneself means acknowledging one's own inherent badness and guilt. Instead, passivity and helplessness are made unchangeable human characteristics for which people cannot be held responsible. Thus one lives by a cultural system that functions on the complicity through which all participants deceive themselves and each other.

Utopian misanthropy: This is acted out in More's *Utopia*. Based on the belief that humans are weak-willed and deceitful, utopian misanthropy urges the construction of a society that fully regulates human life to perfection. A hedonist ideology allows for the pursuit of pleasure to mask the fear of pain and to distract from self-hatred induced by the knowledge of humankind's imperfection. It enables conceited self-love through self-deception. Self-hatred is instead redirected outwards in the form of physical aggression toward enemies.

Contemporary misanthropy begins with disillusionment. Like in pastoral misanthropy, the imagination is perpetually disappointed by painful reality. It shares the starting point of pastoral and utopian misanthropy. In all three, an imagined state of human perfection or perfectibility is thrown into doubt. Pastoral and utopian misanthropy are specific responses to that. Contemporary misanthropy is the response to the failure of the types of self-deception offered up by cultural and social systems such as Folly and Utopia. In *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*, this is explicitly a disillusionment with the portrayed system of capitalism, which is meant as a critique of contemporary hypercapitalism. It is at heart a loss of faith in the illusions of anthropocentrism and its values. Misanthropy therefore challenges the "species narcissism" (Clark 152) that is anthropocentrism, "Man's Greatest Illusion" (Moore 4). What is less obvious in both novels, but particularly in *Autonomous*, is the sense of not being in control which is attributed to the limitations of the human body and even human psychology. Both take the stance of bio-entrapment, which *Walkaway* tries to overcome through idealism and *Autonomous* indicates as inescapable. I will next discuss the ways in which each novel shows the human to be fundamentally problematic.

CHAPTER 4: THE HUMAN PROBLEM

Cyborg Identity

Walkaway and *Autonomous* are concerned with desire in the form of greed. The drive to accumulate resources is understandable, as a certain degree of selfishness is a necessary mechanism of survival. However, the excessive hoarding of resources is the epitome of selfish desire and comes from the corresponding fear of losing what has been accumulated or attained. In both novels, greed is explored in terms of capital, as the exploitation of many to the benefit of the few, and in terms of climate, as the exploitation of resources and manipulation of organic matter. According to Claeys' *Dystopia: A Natural History*, the most obvious and important dystopian trends that have developed over the past century are overpopulation, climate change (488), and the increasingly predominant depiction of the impact of science and technology (490; 495).

The possible effects of technological developments on both society and individuals have been explored in dystopian fiction with increasing focus on machines and invasive surveillance. Human life is dominated by technology to the point of almost helpless dependence, Claeys states, leading to concern over the "human/machine identity spectrum" (489). This is reflected in the dichotomies categorised by Cave and Dihal, discussed above in the section on the function of utopian and science fiction. These all show a fear of moving too far into the territory of machine on the identity spectrum, and reaching a point at which there is no longer any human identity. This also acknowledges that human and machine are longer being constructed as binary categories, but instead as lying on one spectrum. As Donna Haraway argues in 'A Cyborg Manifesto', and which Rosi Braidotti expands on in *The Posthuman*, the integration of technology into everyday life is so extensive that we can think of humans as cyborgs even if they have not physically merged with machines. Haraway uses the metaphor of the cyborg as embodying the deconstruction of binary categories. *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* engage in the discourse

around breaking down categories, with references made to sexual orientation, gender identity, class, race, and the category of human itself.

Deconstructing and Reconstructing 'Human'

Human, as a category, is a historically specific and temporary concept (Schmeink 29). While there is no single definition of 'humanism' (Soper 9-21), Kate Soper (11-12) outlines it as:

> *Humanism*: appeals (positively) to the notion of a core humanity or common essential features in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood, thus (negatively) to concepts ('alienation', 'inauthenticity', reification', etc.) designating, and intended to explain, the perversion or 'loss' of this common being. Humanism takes history to be a product of human thought and action, and thus claims that the categories of 'consciousness', 'agency', 'choice', 'responsibility', 'moral value', etc. are indispensable to its understanding.

Anti-humanism is additionally summarised by Soper (12) as follows:

> *Anti-humanism*: claims that humanism as outlined above is pre-scientific 'philosophical anthropology'. All humanism is 'ideological'; the ideological status of humanism is to be explained in terms of the systems of thought or 'consciousness' produced in response to particular historical periods. Anthropology, if it is possible at all, is possible only on condition that it rejects the concept of the human subject; 'men' do not make history, nor find their 'truth' or 'purpose' in it; history is a process without a subject.

Between these two opposing, relatively extreme positions lie a variety of positions which can be read as, essentially, a debate on the place of humans in the world and the appropriate accompanying worldview. Nonetheless, Soper asserts that every humanism shares at heart the belief that humans have the power to come to know and therefore

control their environment and "destiny" (14). This belief is evident in both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*. However, the novels each express differing beliefs about the relationship between human progress and nature. According to Soper (15-16), capitalist industrialisation split Enlightenment thinkers by introducing the "question of the 'humanity' of science and technology" and thereby putting "an end to an unquestioned faith in the harmonization of human progress with the dictates of nature" (15).

Historically, there has been a central notion of a hierarchy in humanism, with an essentialist and universalist conception of 'Man' at the top as separate and superior. Technology and science are endeavours that grew out of that worldview, in line with the belief in human perfectibility (Braidotti 13-16). Yet it is exactly the pursuit of rational progress and human perfectibility which brought about the Anthropocene and thereby also the destabilisation of the humanist worldview. To be clear, this is not a condemnation of technology or science in and of themselves, but it must be recognised that the beliefs and values that accompanied, and still largely guide, techno-scientific practices and projects rationalised and justified the exploitation of everything considered 'non-human.' By demythologising the world through a rational and calculated perspective, humans can gain knowledge of, and thereby a measure of control over, their environment. This liberates humankind from natural and supernatural powers and allows for a view of the world in "quantitative and functionalist terms" (Rutsky 186), over time resulting in the transformation of that world into objects and resources that can be used and exploited (Rutsky 185-186). This is the worldview that forms the basis of much of modern technology. However,

> If rationality and technology had originally "aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters," the extension of these tendencies subjects nature, art, culture, and ultimately human beings themselves to these same processes of quantification, instrumentalization, commodification, and mastery. Humans are, metaphorically at least, technologized by their own zeal to master the world through technology. (Rutsky 186)

The depictions of the relationship between humans and technoscience in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* do not reflect a fear of humankind being overthrown by technology, but rather show a search for where humans, specifically non-technologized humans, fit into a thoroughly technologized world. This question is necessary in a context that is the result of the strong emphasis on anthropocentrism in humanism, but which is also set to collapse because of it. The novels both express anxiety about the best courses of action for a future for humanity.

Autonomous demonstrates that humans do not occupy a prime position of mastery over the world. The discourse around human and robot equivalency functions well as a means to portray a world in which humans are decentred, although basing the measure of equivalence only on how robots compare to humans and not the other way around as well keeps the novel from being fully anti-anthropocentric. It might be better described as 'anthropodecentric'. I find this position useful in highlighting the fallacies of anthropocentric reasoning that humanism has been charged with, seen for example in the fictional history that *Autonomous* provides for its slave economy. I also feel that using only intelligence as a measure of equivalence between robots and humans is reflective of a reductionist view of what constitutes a human being because it leaves out emotional intelligence. Contrasting robots and humans in terms of emotional intelligence as well would have allowed for a deeper exploration of an often side-lined aspect of humanity, and in my opinion, the novel falls short in this regard. *Autonomous* does make reference to emotional development in the comparison made between Paladin and Threezed in terms of the effect of their indentureship, but makes almost only oblique references to Threezed's emotional development in the context of trauma and abuse. This unexplored angle makes it clear that the novel focuses more on social than individual issues, although it makes reference to the relationship between social and individual problems.

The novel also includes instances which suggest that technoscience remains a tool with which humans (and even robots) can avoid the devastating consequences of their actions. In this sense, humans have not stepped aside from their self-appointed position as masters, but are becoming co-rulers of the world with intelligent technology instead. There is still a sense of shaping the world to human needs. The Anthropocene is flourishing in

Autonomous, and the type of posthuman future indicated here lacks a human identity integrated with the Earth system. *Autonomous* offers the reader several branches of possible posthuman futures depending on the choices of individuals and their influence on society as a whole. One might, like Eliasz, choose to couple with technology, metaphorically hybridising, and leave Earth and its problems behind to build a 'better' future elsewhere. Earth might be a better place if populated by biobots like Med, who are raised by humans and are outwardly indistinguishable from them, but who do not suffer the same emotional and physical faults. Jack's decision to return to piracy indicates that perhaps the best option for humans is to continuously try to do what is morally good without the guarantee of success. Yet the plot also clearly demonstrates the potential disastrous consequences of good intentions, and how context influences personal beliefs about right and wrong. I find the lack of a definitive position reflective of the uncertainty of the future in the Anthropocene, and it creates an atmosphere of an impending apocalypse that I think is strongly felt in reality, for example as climate anxiety (see Hickman et al.). Nonetheless, I also think that science fiction is precisely the arena in which to explore possible positions to their fullest extent, safe within the parameters of fiction, and therefore the open-endedness of *Autonomous* with regards to future courses of action is disappointing.

It is this hesitancy to decisively act for the future that is criticised in *Walkaway*, although the novel calls it "irrationality" (280). The argument for simulated existence in the novel rests partially on the ability to remove irrationality from the programmed mind. Irrationality is what makes humans fickle, unable to make up their minds and follow through on decisions, and it is what has led to the crises in ecology, economy, and politics described in the novel (278-280). In addition to the apparent invulnerability that the characters in *Walkaway* believe to achieve by becoming simulations, the argument is made that humans are incompatible with the rest of the ecosphere (274-281). *Walkaway* strongly expresses that, to borrow Fuller's words, there is something fundamentally unreliable about being human, and portrays science and technology as the keys to solving humankind's problems, and then finally to solving the problem of humankind itself. The underlying philosophy in *Walkaway* thus seems to be transhumanist, or what Ana Honnacker describes as "techno-humanism" (73), which takes a data-centred approach

that will increasingly make human bodies obsolete. This is, to my mind, an extreme reaction to the uncertainty and anxiety felt about the future, something the novel itself suggests when characters wish for the ability to program away their anxiety (281). What is needed is a way to find a middle ground between the positions of *Autonomous* and *Walkaway*, where this anxiety can be confronted without becoming so overwhelmed that one looks for escape. I believe that moral responsibility is a good place to start, because it acknowledges agency.

Both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* make a point about people's ability to make choices, and in this way they reflect a fundamental belief of French humanism, that "individuals are autonomous within society in the sense that it is their actions which lie at the source of what is social" (Soper 18). Thus, and this is a central argument in both novels, "[i]t is human beings who create the structures and institutions of society; they who are constitutive of social life; and they who are able, therefore, in the last analysis, to control its progress" (Soper 18). This is arguably similar to the easily misinterpreted Protagorean principle that humans are the measure of all things. Honnacker quotes F. C. S. Schiller (1912:12) to explain that, philosophically, this means "that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of human minds" (76). It acknowledges that perception of the world for humans will always be filtered by their humanity. What this means is that humans play an active role in the construction of reality, but it also makes clear the limitation that some things are beyond human control because reality cannot be created from nothing, or simply at will (Honnacker 76-77). Here it must also be said that this is a belief that can easily be radicalized and distorted, as Honnacker herself states, particularly when progressivist ideas are overemphasised and the democratic framework is broken down (77). Thus, for example, F. C. S. Schiller argued for an evolutionary humanism through which a better society can be built by purposefully breeding better humans (qtd. in Honnacker 77). Honnacker therefore stresses the importance of inclusive pluralism in humanism (79).

From this point, Honnacker proposes a pragmatic humanism as an alternative to humanism that is too anthropocentric and exclusionist, while also preventing the possibility of subjectivity and personal agency being lost in the emphasis on the

interconnectedness and shared consciousness of all matter, as in some posthuman positions. Pragmatic humanism highlights an inclusive understanding of humans in and of the world and dismisses the mind-matter duality. This broadens the scope of those to whom humans have a moral obligation in their agency to include everything with which they are connected, even the inanimate (79). Pragmatic humanism still emphasises embodiment and human agency, and therefore *responsibility*: "it fosters a human self-understanding that critically reflects on our role in the larger eco-system, which entails being aware of human potentials as well as of human responsibilities and limitations" (Honnacker 83). This is the feature of pragmatic posthumanism that I want to highlight and which I feel is not emphasised clearly enough in posthumanism. However, my inclusion of pragmatic humanism in this discussion does not indicate a rejection of posthumanism on my part. The issue of responsibility is one that *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* address for the duration of their respective narratives, but on which they do not follow through in the projected long term in their escapist orientation toward the future.

Posthumanism and Transhumanism

As I have indicated above, *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* are informed by transhumanist and posthumanist philosophies. Transhumanism is categorised as a type of posthumanism, so I will discuss posthumanism first. In the broadest sense, posthumanism grew in the space opened up by the shortcomings and contradictions of humanism. It can be understood as both 'post-humanism', as an episteme that comes after humanism, and as 'posthuman-ism', as coming after the human (Herbrechter and Callus). Lars Schmeink (34) describes the posthuman, represented by Frankenstein's monster, as "a being replacing the human, coming after the human, and existing beyond human capacity." Posthumanism questions and attempts to deconstruct the fundamental beliefs and values of humanism so as to build an understanding of what the human is, and might become, in the contemporary world. It reconsiders the place and role of humans in their current context, as well as how humans relate to all other matter in the Earth system (Clarke and Rossini; Braidotti; Hayles) and in this way also links to the questions posed in science fiction literature (Schmeink 32-34; Yaszek and Ellis 71-83). It thus attempts to provide a

new frame of reference for the human, made obviously necessary in a time characterised by change and instability.

Posthumanism is a useful tool for critically examining the construction of a new subject position, as Braidotti demonstrates in *The Posthuman*. In this application of post-humanism, the subject position takes the place of the idea of a human essence or nature. Yet, by rejecting the simplicity of a universal human essence, posthumanism must grapple with the complexity of the new subject position it aims to construct. In arguing that technology is an inseparable part of that subject position, posthumanism needs to establish at which point the human-machine ratio crosses over the threshold of human into non-human. Proponents such as Haraway and Braidotti state that the posthuman subject must be understood as having multiple identities. This can be understood as broadening the subject's identifiers to be more inclusive, thus doing away with classical humanism's norm of 'white male' (Honnacker). Furthermore, this identity is connected to other beings and matter, and so is not exclusively limited to 'human'. In addition, Schmeink explains that "as cyborgs or posthumans, [we] do not inhabit a certain natural order or pure essence" (36) because we are beings in "technoscience culture" (Haraway 83). From this perspective, the human identity itself must become liquid. However, it thereby also risks instability. It is in this space that the most pertinent discourse around misanthropy takes place in *Walkaway* and *Autonomous*.

The fluidity and multiplicity of the posthuman identity may seem to imply that posthumanism would be best lived without the constraints of a physical body, as transhumanism suggests. N. Katherine Hayles argues against the separation of mind and body, and the belief that consciousness rests in the mind only and therefore makes the body unnecessary. She describes how information has become disembodied, and states that "embodiment continues to be discussed as if it were a supplement to be purged from the dominant term of information, an accident of evolution we are now in a position to correct" (12). The freedom of disembodied information in terms of time and space would, in an ideal scenario, liberate humans from their fears (such as death) while fulfilling their desires (such as life free of hardships). Many of humankind's problems would vanish if the human body were to be removed. This is the key to *Walkaway*'s utopia, and is

explored in *Autonomous* as well. However, "for information to exist, it must *always* be instantiated in a medium" (Hayles 13, emphasis in original). It follows, then, that if the human must have a body, and this embodiment is technoculturally determined, a discourse is required to negotiate this physical being in a world in which the humanist subject is increasingly out of place.

Critical posthumanism takes on this task, informed by Derrida's critique of the anti-humanist attempt to completely break from humanism. As such, critical posthumanism aims to deconstruct anthropocentric thought without radically breaking from humanism. The pragmatic humanism proposed by Honnacker is similar in this regard. As a critical theory, this posthumanism investigates the effect that technological, social, and political changes have had on the conceptualisation of the human. It must therefore both consider and critique humanism, maintaining some of its values and aspirations, but also showing "how those aspirations are undercut by the philosophical and ethical frameworks used to conceptualise them" (Wolfe xvi). In attempting to build an understanding of the human not based in humanism, critical posthumanism emphasises the connection between the human being and all other matter. This connection means that "*the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines*" (Nayar 11, emphasis in original). Braidotti argues that all living matter is autopoietic because it exists in connection with all other organic life; humans are thus only one part of a much larger system that she calls "*zoe*" (59-60). Life needs to be understood as common to all beings and not the privilege of humans alone (Schmeink 43). Ostensibly drawing from the ecological argument of a transcorporeal connectedness with all of nature, critical posthumanism thus builds a conceptualisation of the human (and all living matter) within the framework of a complex system, not a simple one as humanism had assumed. This means that the basic assumptions of humanity's collective values and aspirations have to be rethought – for example progress, capitalism, and democracy, as discussed above. The humanist human being does not fit into the contemporary world if humankind is to acknowledge and accept responsibility for its current state.

Walkaway explores whether the integrity of the human identity is maintained across simulations and copies. The novel asks if humans could move from body to body either by transferring or copying their minds in the form of data, while remaining conceptually human as well as remaining the same personality. The possibility of this type of transcendence is the techno-utopian dream of transhumanism. Transhumanists such as Nick Bostrom and Hans Moravec believe that "current human nature is improvable through the use of applied science and other rational methods, which may make it possible to increase human health-span, extend our intellectual and physical capacities, and give us increased control over our own mental states and moods" (Bostrom 2005:202-203, qtd. Nayar 17). As such, transhumanism does not aim to reconstruct human subjectivity, but instead wants to amplify the human beyond the limits of the physical form. By idealising a state of existence separable or completely separated from embodiment, transhumanism intensifies the dualist conceptualisation of mind and body. The movement seems little concerned with the connection between humans and other species, maintaining a strong anthropocentric focus. Questions regarding human subjectivity therefore do not have much to do with universal interconnectedness or transcorporality. Transhumanism is described by Cary Wolfe as an "*intensification* of humanism" (xv, emphasis in original) because it adheres to the belief in a 'human nature' and the human-nature duality, and thus human supremacy (Nayar 18; Schmeink 37). As a novel that draws heavily on transhumanist ideas, *Walkaway* focuses on embodied and disembodied existence, and questions whether affective intelligence is a vital component of human cognition.

Walkaway appears to have drawn inspiration from Moravec's *Mind Children* with the concept of uploading a person's mind and then, eventually, downloading it into artificial copies of those people's bodies, which do not age or sicken. Alternatively, uploaded people can remain so, existing everywhere and even merging together (the technological process behind this is not explained in the novel). However, instead of Moravec's argument that humans exist as "halfbreeds" (4), comprised of cultural and biological parts and technological extensions that are at odds with one another, *Walkaway* suggests that humans have managed to create a cohesive techno-existence that integrates all aspects of the walkaway lifestyle. The only factor that remains at odds in this vision is the small pockets of the rich elite, called *zottas*, who live in walled cities, separated from the rest

of humankind and still effectively imprisoned by their fear. Throughout the novel, *zottas* are described as inhuman, in the sense that they are disconnected from the community of humanity. They are often referred to as sociopaths (50, 147, 367, 521, 533) and Iceweasel describes the smell of default society as "inhuman" (233). It is implied that capital power and the humane quality of humans cannot coexist, most clearly when Limpopo describes Jacob Redwater's concern for Iceweasel's safety during the confrontation at the prison as "[s]ome kind of shear between Jacob Redwater, zotta, and Jacob Redwater, human" (533). This implies that 'human' is more than a biological category, and can be measured by humane behaviour, which is always in relation to some 'other.' Isolating the *zottas* at the end of the novel implies that, even though all people have undergone multiple transformations of constitutive matter, the walkaway community retains its 'human' quality, in contrast to the *zottas*.

What is left to the reader to judge is whether it is important that people remain the same across multiple iterations, or if it is better for them to be tweaked until they can exist harmoniously. It seems in *Walkaway* that either individual integrity or communal integrity can be maintained, but not both. The novel shows that the simulated version of people becomes different to who they were when organically alive. This is largely shown through the examples of Dis, the first simulation of a deceased person, and Limpopo, who is both simulated and still alive. As Dis roams the internet and hacks herself into networks, she creates multiple instances or copies of herself. Once these have served their purpose, she terminates them. It is never said whether the original Dis, that is, the first uploaded version, is the one that still exists later, or if that first simulation has been displaced by a copy at some point. Perhaps this is the case, and that is why Gretyl states that the simulated Dis is not the same as she was when alive. The novel also acknowledges that the physical body is a part of personal identity, so the change in Dis' personality could additionally or alternatively be attributed to the loss of her human body. In Limpopo's case, a simulation is created of her when her friends believe that she has most likely died when she disappears, although she has actually been arrested. By the end of the novel, there are two iterations of Limpopo: the one that was never simulated and lives physically embodied in the world, and the simulation. These two develop divergent personalities.

Different experiences shaped each Limpopo into a different character with their own beliefs. Thus personal identity is informed by experience as well as embodiment.

This brings into question whether the novel's protagonists really survive the novel while the utopian ending poses the question of whether it truly matters. Indeed, the epilogue has a strange, dreamlike quality to it. Time and place are uncertain. The epilogue takes place in the future, but how far and whether even on Earth is not given. Iceweasel wakes up, disoriented, and slowly remembers that she decided to 'deadhead' herself because she had cancer (546). Deadheading is what the walkaways call putting the body into a deep coma, kept barely alive. Yet Iceweasel finds herself in a young body, about the age she was at the novel's beginning, perhaps. She feels none of the effects of age or illness. Etcetera, in a likewise young body, walks into the room and briefly explains that the ability to grow new bodies and download minds into them has finally been developed. Lastly, Etcetera tells Iceweasel that all of their group is waiting for her, and she smells the eucalyptus scent of the onsen that the B&Bs always had. The description is such that this may be an experience in the physical world of *Walkaway*, but it could also be entirely simulated. One has the sense that the characters themselves would not even know the difference.

The complete overtaking of reality by simulacra is how Jean Baudrillard describes the postmodern world. Everything is already a simulation of a reality of which only a few vestiges remain, if any, according to his writing in *Simulacra and Simulation*. The search for truth, reality, or authenticity is almost impossible, because the "world is from the beginning of culture a gigantic simulacrum, perpetuated by the process of using previous signs as referentials" (Lipecký). In science fiction, simulacra are used to create a dynamic narrative which poses many questions, but provides few and ambivalent answers (Lipecký). This seems to be the case for *Walkaway*, which introduces several debates but makes few conclusive statements, even though the novel's ending shows an unambiguous transhumanist techno-utopia. This is indicative, to me, of Doctorow's own scepticism regarding transhumanism. The story reflects hope for a better future, but is sceptical about its achievement by the means depicted. This hope for the future registers the desire for a life without suffering and conflict, but the scepticism expressed through the ambiguity of

the epilogue's 'realness' also shows hesitancy in being hopeful for that future's realisation. Although *Walkaway* expresses frustration at indecisiveness, as I have mentioned above, this quality is also present in the ambiguity and inconclusive nature of the novel's philosophical and moral debates. Once again, I believe this is reflective of real-world general consciousness brought about by uncertainty in the precariousness of this contemporary context.

With the transhumanist dream comes a respective nightmare: the desire to exist in an unlimited capacity is shadowed by the fear of not existing at all. This extinction is a threat on the physical level, issued foremost by the climate crisis, and on a metaphysical level, through the "loss of human nature through technologization and cyborgization" (Schmeink 38). It must be acknowledged that human nature is a vague and ill-defined concept. Cave and Dihal suggest that the loss of humanity through cyborgization or technological transcendence into AI-format, like in *Walkaway*, can mean the loss of human values and emotions, for example (76). I have already indicated, and will discuss at greater length below, the loss of emotional range for the simulated in *Walkaway* as one of the factors throwing into question the survival of those who have undergone 'techno-transcendence' through uploading. There is the fear of the loss of human-ness (individual) and humanity (collective) as humankind's own actions fashion it into something inhuman(e). Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* expresses such a fear, for example, in the statement that "the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a 'posthuman' stage of history" (7). Braidotti describes this as "deep concern for the status of the human" (64). This unsettling of the 'human' is what makes posthuman discourse necessary, and at the same time, the unsettling is encouraged by that discourse. The status of the human, as the definition of how the human relates to everything else in the Earth system, is an indispensable feature of human identity, it seems.

Autonomous rejects the possibility of simulated existence as depicted in *Walkaway*. The novel instead investigates the conceptualisation of human by narrating human and robot subject positions alongside each other, thereby allowing for comparisons and contrasts to be made. Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg to describe the posthuman as a being of

hybridisation, broken dichotomies, and blurred categories is well represented in *Autonomous*. The novel features robots with human parts, humans with robotic augmentation, and robots whose physical exterior is indistinguishable from humans. Technology is very much an extension of the physical body. The metaphor is furthermore applicable in terms of the indenture laws, which require one to consider the differences and similarities between humans and robots. This is not only an ethical consideration that is part of real-life discourse with the advances in AI and robotics (see e.g. Leslie-McCarthy), but is pertinent to the question of the point at which a human becomes a robot.

For example, Paladin is a robot with a human brain. The brain is used only for facial recognition, because every other function can be fulfilled technologically. If a person underwent such an extensive cyborgization process that all that remained of their original body was the brain, and the brain was only necessary for facial recognition, would the resultant being still be a human? Following this line of questioning, one can also ask whether Eliasz falls in love with a human or a robot. He himself refers to Paladin as "woman" (288), although Paladin's narration always indicates that the robot thinks of him-/herself as a mechanical being, not human. Paladin adopts the female pronoun to align with Eliasz's insistence that he is heterosexual and therefore cannot be in a relationship with Paladin if the robot is designated as male. Newitz is making a point here about gender identity and sexual orientation, the ways in which they are culturally constructed, showing how these inform a person's sense of self. Newitz is clearly also making a point about how anthropomorphisation can lead humans to misunderstand or misidentify non-human others. It is in cases such as this that the Protagorean principle of applying humans as 'the measure of all things' becomes problematic, as critical posthumanism points out. Thus the tendency to anthropomorphise needs to be recognised and taken into account. Nevertheless, I believe that anthropomorphising is not necessarily a negative trait. For example, it arguably informs human empathy towards non-human others. It is a trait that can have positive and negative consequences when employed, and so it should be critically mediated. This is an example of an area in which increased self-awareness, which careful examination of misanthropy can facilitate, would allow people to take more responsibility for their behaviour.

Human identity and subjectivity are clearly complex and multi-faceted. *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* offer no answers to the question, 'What is human?', but they certainly enter into that discussion. Each novel points out where the conceptualisation of human identity falls short, and explores how it might be extended or altered in the liquid, technocultural contemporary world. As part of this, both novels deconstruct traditional social, political, and economic narratives and investigate their histories and faults. However, neither novel sufficiently provides alternative constructions. Misanthropy finds expression in the conflict between the fear of becoming inhuman and the desire to transcend human limitations, as humanity tries to navigate its identity crisis amidst the number of other crises it is responsible for. *Walkaway* favours transhumanism, arguing for human enhancement through complete technologization and suggesting that aspects of being human should be edited out to create a harmonious society. *Autonomous* explores posthuman subjectivity, and attempts to unpack the fallacies of anthropocentric reasoning, through a comparison between robots and humans. Nonetheless, both novels express uncertainty in the future and which courses of action would be best for humankind, even in those they themselves explore, which is reflective of the general current psycho-emotional climate. In the next chapters, I will examine the specific issues each novel touches on in more detail and highlight their individual expressions of misanthropy.

CHAPTER 5: TECHNO-UTOPIAN MISANTHROPY IN *WALKAWAY*

Walkaway reads more like a long thought experiment than a story because it foregrounds philosophical discussions and presents a number of hypothetical scenarios in conversations between characters. In its portrayal of a liquid modern society, the novel also depicts the power play between the exterritoriality of the wealthy elite and the 'human waste' groups. It is this dynamic that highlights how becoming an uploaded consciousness without a physical body beyond what hardware is required for processing could present an escape from the perpetual presence of existential fear. *Walkaway*'s ending portrays a utopian vision of humankind finally defeating its nemesis, existential fear, but in the shadow of this vision lies the misanthropic inability to accept humans as they are. Most notable about the misanthropy in *Walkaway* is the treatment of the human body as disposable and replaceable, and the human mind as unreliable. Society has furthermore evolved to promote the worst of humanity to the most powerful positions. These views about the human body, mind, and civilisation form the basis of the techno-utopia which the novel constructs, and expresses the belief that the ideal human can only exist as a simulation. By depicting this simulated state as achievable, *Walkaway* escapes bio-entrapment, which *Autonomous* deems impossible. Nonetheless, *Walkaway* suggests that the ideal society, populated by ideal beings, is not a human one.

The Evolution of a Dysfunctional Society

Doctorow's fictional society is fractured, consisting of those so rich that their wealth is uncountable, a vague, undefined middle, and those who cannot find a place within the societal structure. The conflict that drives the story's plot takes place between the rich elite, the *zottarich* or *zottas* for short, and the *walkaways*. The novel expresses the opinion that the evolution of society has resulted in a dysfunctional social system. It likens the state of its society to a psychosis with delusions of grandeur, in which the richest believe

that they are special and unique and therefore deserve their positions. This delusion is held up by the narrative of a meritocracy in a capitalist system.

Yet meritocracy does not function in this society. Capital, not ability, determines one's position, because capital and power have been conflated to the point that "[m]oney's just keeping score" (535) of social power levels. This is demonstrated on a small scale when the Redwaters' self-driving car manoeuvres through traffic unusually well, and Iceweasel explains that it has "custom firmware…which makes the other cars back off because we're driving like unpredictable assholes" (33). Iceweasel's father, Jacob, casually states that this is "a civil offense" (33), adding that "fines are paid by direct-debit" (33). This exchange demonstrates a critique which runs throughout the novel, namely that laws can be circumvented if one has enough money. Jacob has illegal firmware installed in his car, and is so wealthy that he does not mind paying the fines for the convenience of travelling through traffic more quickly. In a simple yet effective way, this scene shows that money allows people to act outside of the laws which are meant to give society structure. The same critique is made in *Autonomous*, with clear reference to the Purdue Pharma scandal and its resolution according to the law, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

An example of the conflation of money and power is given on a much larger scale toward the end of the novel. The prison in which Limpopo was incarcerated is owned by a company called TransCanada. As the stand-off between the walkaways and ex-prisoners inside the prison and the mercenary army outside goes on, a parallel back-and-forth takes place on the stock market. Spectators of the live-streamed battle watch "the company's share price slide down, as default analysts […] changed their bets on whether TransCanada was going to end up with usable plant or smoking rubble" (524). Desperate to rescue his daughter and grandchildren from the prison he believes they are trapped in, Jacob manages to bring the battle to a stand-still so that he can enter the building to speak to Gretyl personally. A single man has the power to pause a conflict because he has the money and leverage in the form of shares to do so (532-533).

The novel makes the point that, in a capitalist society, money is the means to survival. One needs money to pay for food, clothing, housing, and basic amenities. In broader

application, money facilitates social and political influence, also showcased by the Redwater family (17-18, 32, 324), and provides power over other people's lives, from surveillance (e.g. 30-31, 325) to kidnapping and captivity (e.g. 232-257, 534), to death (e.g. 456). Those unable to earn enough money do not have a real place in society:

> There's nothing for us in default. Nowhere to live. Nothing to eat. Nothing to do. We are surplus. (453)

They are, in a word, powerless, which places them as the most vulnerable in their society. They are the "human waste" described by Bauman (*Wasted Lives* 5) in their most precarious position. The power of exterritoriality, as explained in the section on modern society, is showcased strongly in *Walkaway*. The walkaways aim to deconstruct the current power dynamic by nullifying the power of capital. Their cost-free virtual 'immortality' allows them to create a type of exterritoriality that is independent from economic prowess, while also enabling them to escape from the body, which they view as the conduit for destruction, suffering, and oppression. The walkaways race against *default*'s scientists to create technological immortality. They argue that the *zottarich* will either keep immortality for themselves, or sell it at exorbitant prices, so that only the rich will ever have access to it. In contrast, the walkaways state that they want to make technological immortality available to everyone, at no cost (147-148). By making techno-immortality freely available, the walkaways neutralise capital as a means of power over life. Additionally, creating a way to move consciousness into different 'bodies' of storage, such as an organically grown clone or computer hardware, means that life is no longer dependent on the survival of one body. This removes physical suffering as a means of control over people as well. While the novel identifies systemic issues of human society, achieving transhumanist pseudo-immortality seems to be the only solution that is presented. One character, Sita, argues with Limpopo for simulated existence by saying: "You want to change the history of the future, give us a chance for a life worth living, without oppression? There's only one way" (278).

This strongly suggests that human problems are impossible for humans to solve. In simulation, Sita argues, minds can be framed by set parameters that will maintain

harmony. I will discuss this in more detail below. First, I want to point to the similarity between this logic and that of disanthropy. The common idea here is that there will be no human problems if there are no humans, which, as I have already discussed, is flawed reasoning. It nevertheless indicates desperation and frustration at the level of powerlessness and entrapment felt by the novel's characters in their situation, and to a degree indicates the same in the real world. Just like the novel's characters decide to walk away from confrontation rather than engage in conflict, there is a desire to walk away from this problem that often seems insurmountable. The threat is too great. However, as Limpopo states after fourteen years of imprisonment, "[w]alking away isn't victory, it's just not losing" (477). Walking away from the human body, and simulating the mind until it seems consciously controllable because it has been constrained to specific parameters, is in my opinion a short-sighted and simplistic attempt to avoid responsibility in the face of difficulty. It shows a lack of faith in humans.

The argument for techno-immortality in the novel is about more than the immediate threat of the *zottarich*, who have branded the walkaways not just criminals but also terrorists (e.g. 290), adding persecution to the state of insecurity that the walkaways already inhabit. This is about the battle against existential fear itself, and making real what humans have dreamed of "for as long as we've wondered where the dead were and what happened when we joined `em" (147). The greatest threat to existence is death, which is seen as a condition of the physical, and so dying is a physical failure. In order to avoid dying, the physical body must either never fail, or be removed as a necessity for survival. I view the split between the mind and the body, in which the body belongs to the physical sphere and the mind to the metaphysical sphere, as an attempt to fulfil the desire to overcome the threat of death. The potential for transcending death and the bonds of the physical is thus focused on divorcing the mind from the body. In liquid modernity, human existence is characterised by precariousness, or a state of insecurity, and therefore fear. *Walkaway* shows technology to provide the means for connection in a world of alienation, safety in a world of danger, and transcendence in a world of finitude. Thus technology is seen as the force of power to attain human beings' greatest desire. It is viewed as the ultimate power, once freed from capital control, and by becoming technological in form, the characters in *Walkaway* hope to overcome existential fear once and for all. The

misanthropy in this idealism lies in the belief that the ideal society, which must consist of ideal people, cannot be achieved by humans until they have transcended to a state of perceived perfection that may, ultimately, not be human or even real at all. It suggests that the only hope for peaceful existence lies in the simulated illusion of utopia.

However, the utopian state depicted at the end of *Walkaway* cannot truly be described as inspiring a hopeful attitude in the reader. According to Mason, an attitude of hope is adopted when a person "believes certain outcomes to be possible and values those outcomes" (521). Thus, the reader would have to believe in the possibility of the type of digital immortality described in the novel, with which there are a number of issues. For example, I believe that the idea that a human's personality can be virtually recreated or 'uploaded' requires a highly reductionist view of the human being that I do not share. Furthermore, momentarily allowing for the possibility of uploading, to posit the simulated state as being one of immortality does not take into account that the program that is one's personality must be stored physically on some hardware. The program still requires a medium to exist, and so humans are not truly rid of a body after all. One has merely been replaced by another. This body would still have to be maintained so that it does not deteriorate, it would have to be protected from damage by external forces, the software would be susceptible to errors, hacking, and computer viruses, electricity would have to be in constant supply, and the Wi-Fi signal impeccable globally. How would all of this be achieved, particularly if every human decides against being 'downloaded' into a manoeuvrable body? Therefore, even if the reader values the outcomes of peace and immortality, the perceived impossibility of these outcomes as described in *Walkaway* stands in the way of the reader feeling hopeful about them. In this regard, the novel arguably portrays a wish that is experienced as a hope.

Nevertheless, *Walkaway* manages to show that hope plays an important role in people's intentions, and I am not stating that *Walkaway* only portrays false hope. *Walkaway* points out that choosing to believe in the potential for good in people, instead of expecting the bad, strongly influences behaviour toward others. Consider the following example given in the novel:

> If there's a disaster, do you go over to your neighbor's house with: a) a covered dish or b) a shotgun? It's game theory. If you believe your neighbour is coming over with a shotgun, you'd be an idiot to pick a); if she believes the same thing about you, you can bet she's not going to choose a) either. The way to get to a) is to do a) even if you think your neighbor will pick b). (210)

What this means is that one has to act with hope. Mason describes a value-intention account of hope: "To hope that x obtains is to value x, to regard x's being realized as uncertain, and as a result to shape one's intentions in accordance with x" (519). In the quote from *Walkaway* above, it is clear that positive interaction, which I will call 'friendliness' for this example, is the desired end result. In terms of Mason's value-intention account, friendliness is what one hopes to obtain, and therefore friendliness is valued. Yet the realisation of that friendliness is uncertain given the disaster event. To act with hope in this case is thus to shape one's intentions in accordance with obtaining friendliness and taking a covered dish to one's neighbour. This increases the probability of one's neighbour responding with friendliness. *Walkaway* argues that it is up to the individual to generate hopefulness, in Kwong's sense of reflecting the probability of hope-fulfilment, by acting as if obtaining the desired outcome is a certainty so as to increase the probability of it becoming a certainty. It is not an approach that is applicable in every scenario, of course, but the novel argues that if the majority of people have this attitude and act accordingly in most situations, the chances of a more peaceful society become significantly greater. This is a valuable lesson that I find is unfortunately overshadowed by the focus on digital immortality and undermined by the false hope that that aspect of the plot portrays.

The Physical Burden

It seems that the problem with which the characters are most concerned is the physical body. The body has a significant impact on how the world is experienced and how people think about themselves and their identities, but the characters in *Walkaway* seem uncomfortable and unhappy in their bodies. Comparisons are continuously drawn between the human brain and body, and technology. In these comparisons, the physical

aspects of human existence are always judged as inferior to technology. For example, when Limpopo and Etcetera begin to flirtingly touch hands, testing boundaries, Limpopo describes this interaction as "sending pulsed SYN/ACK/SYNACKs over a balky network" (97). SYN/ACK/SYNACK refers to the exchange between two computers to establish a wireless connection, where the first computer transmits a synchronisation message (SYN), the receiving computer acknowledges this synchronisation (SYNACK), and the first computer receives this message and acknowledges it in return (ACK). Limpopo and Etcetera's interaction is described as if they are already simulations, but still housed in inconvenient bodies. It is not described as a human connection, nor a human experience. While the walkaways are still in their bodies, they relate to their own organic form as if it were machinery, while constantly regretting its inconvenience, frailties, and limitations. In some instances, they ironically even regret not being able to impose limitations, such as a way to turn off uncomfortable emotions (281). Characters become frustrated because tiny computers have to be housed in containers large enough to physically handle "with stupid human hands" (149), the "[s]tupid brain" (193) lacks on/off switches for specific thoughts, the "stupid under-brain" (139) is manipulated by neurochemicals, and the "stupid body" (191) wants attention. The mind, once uploaded, "wouldn't have to play out the idiot conversion of sunlight to flora, flora to fauna, fauna to energy, energy to muscular action" (177). The body becomes a burden, the "brain inexplicably tethered to inconvenient meat, easily coerced, thanks to its ridiculous frailties" (248-249).

Again, frustration and even bitterness are evident in the treatment of the human body and natural processes. The scorn with which nature itself is treated in the examples above show firstly, immense hubris, because the obvious implication is that humans can create better forms of life for themselves than nature has. Given how long nature has sustainably survived, adapted, and thrived in comparison to humankind, this belief is ridiculous. Evolution in nature does not require perfection, but humanity is seemingly compelled to strive for that ideal. It is the greatest possible fulfilment of desire, because every desire would be fulfilled in a state of perfection. The true struggle for humankind is with themselves, which is precisely what misanthropy is about. In redesigning their mode of existence, even at the risk of losing their humanity, the characters show themselves not

to be battling against natural courses of events such as ageing and dying, but rather their inability to come to terms with themselves.

Lose the Body

The hope for immortality is realised in *Walkaway* when the characters transform themselves into AI-like simulations. However, *Walkaway* also brings into question whether the integrity of a person's identity remains the same throughout this transformation. The loss of humanity, or becoming inhuman, can be interpreted as the loss of human values and emotions, or as emerging from a transformation or transcendence to immortality as so different that the original person cannot be said to have survived (Cave and Dihal 76). The name of the first deceased person to become an AI-driven simulation in *Walkaway*, Dis, actually stands for the name "Disjointed" (139) but, in its shortened version, serves well as a representative of simulated existence, implying a severed connection or alienation, such as in 'disembodied' or 'dislocated.' Dis describes herself as "liberated from the vagaries of the flesh" and "able to adjust her mind's parameters so she stayed in an optimal working state" (150). She has also "constrained [her] consciousness to the narrowest possible sim[ulation], nothing human in it, just blind heuristics" (167) to avoid shutting down once she realises that she is dead. An interesting implication here is that existential terror is a definitive part of being human. Dis has to disconnect from her relation to life and death in order to function, but this forces her to disconnect from human experience as well. Simulated existence is extremely limited as a human, but nonetheless holds the possibility of god-like qualities such as omnipresence and immortality if that confinement to the body can be overcome. Dis can make unlimited copies of herself, and 'kill' those copies once they have served their purpose. In this way, there are also multiple Dis instances, so she can effectively be in several places at once. Iceweasel reflects that the instance of Dis' immortality is transcendent, that "[o]ther adventurers had dabbled, fretted about venturing into the jealous realm of the gods, but walkaways fearlessly burst from mortal into mythical" (172).

Driven by the need to escape existential fear as the walkaways are, to say that they "fearlessly" transformed themselves into AI simulations is both ironic and untrue. When

someone leaps from a high burning structure because they have no other way down, they are not fearless, they are desperate. The walkaways' desperation shows in the description of simulated existence as god-like. This implies the knowledge that what a person becomes as a simulation is no longer human, and it is coupled with the need to believe that the person has transcended to an improved state of being. However, at the end of the novel, the characters themselves have no way of knowing if they are still the same as they were before they were uploaded and then downloaded again (548). The need to escape the perceived confines of human existence is so great that these characters are willing to risk destroying themselves as humans, and it is implied in Dis that they do. The self-aggrandising description of becoming god-like as an AI is as much a delusion as that which the walkaways accuse the *zottas* of playing out in *default*.

Uploaded existence exists in the virtual realm, a world of data rather than organic matter. For Dis to acquire her supposedly god-like qualities, she must lose her humanity. This is the ultimate alienation. Dis recognises the chasm between human and uploaded existence as she reports of one of her copies that, "[r]ight at the end, as she was about to go, she let go of all the parameterizations on her simulation, took the breaks off her emotions, lived the full spectrum of everything she could feel. Should feel. I should feel" (399). Dis feels increasingly less certain that she is still herself the longer she exists in the uploaded state (357). When she explains this to Gretyl, the latter considers that

> [Dis] wasn't the person Gretyl had known – maybe she wasn't a person at all. She had been through a dramatic experience – killed, brought back, forked and ramified and simulated – and existed in a programmatically constrained state to prevent her from thinking certain thoughts. Who knew what other emotions were choked off because they co-occurred with existential crises? Maybe angst and empathy were entangled particles, and extinguishing one extinguished both. (314-315)

Dis loses her sense of self as soon as she becomes an upload. While the walkaway scientists try to stabilise Dis' simulation to stop her AI program from crashing, she tells Iceweasel that "I'm sensitive to initial parameters and prone to singularities. So are you.

That's what defines us. Or you. I don't know what defines me anymore" (141-142). Dis' identity fractures even more throughout the novel, as countless copies of her are made (310). Each copy becomes its own entity (311). This undermines the argument that an AI is omnipotent. An omnipotent being can be in multiple places at once, but the AI has to copy itself, and those copies become independent. Thus the AI is not in multiple places at once at all. As Baudrillard states in *Simulacra and Simulation*, the sign takes over the real until the real is lost. Techno-utopianism is an idealism that uses the illusion of perfection to hide its misanthropy, and thus the utopia described at the end of *Walkaway* is much like More's Utopia described in Berger's article, above. Despite the evidence that simulations are not the same as the people they are based on, that copies of a simulation develop their own identities, as well as how personal development depends on one's body and interactions with others (e.g. 431-432), people still go through with the simulation process. Additionally, as I have indicated above, the epilogue has a dreamlike quality to it that suggests that the human world has become part of a simulation itself. The novel thus suggests that it is better to live in simulated perfection than in real imperfection, and additionally hints that, because the simulation becomes its own reality, it ceases to matter that it is a simulation in the first place. The fear that motivates this novel's misanthropic expression is deeply potent.

The draw of a "post-fear" (16) existence is understandably powerful. It is in a lengthy conversation between Limpopo, one of the main protagonists and natural leader of the group, and a character called Sita, that another argument for becoming bodiless is made. This time, it is the devastating effect of human activity on the environment that is a factor. While the two characters hike through the asbestos-poisoned landscape of an area called Thetford (270-281), Limpopo remarks on the incongruence between the beauty and serenity of the natural scenery and its animal inhabitants and the fact that "it's a blasted wasteland" (270). Sita replies that this is because there are no people who live in the area, as with Chernobyl, because it "[t]urns out that, relative to sharing a biome with humans, living in the shadow of a radioactive plume or a place where the dirt and air are forty percent asbestos is a good deal" (271).

This comment sparks a discussion about uploaded, simulated existence, which will absent humans from the physical environment. The reader has been made aware of changes in the climate with references to this throughout the story. These include passing mentions, such as the existence of "climate refu[gees]" (59), rising water levels (69, 203), and 'green' technology like solar power (71, 112, 265, 342, 419, 490), hydrogen cells (41, 59, 91, 93, 204, 206, 225, 528), zeppelins as "climate appropriate transport" (13), and continuous recycling and renewing capabilities (e.g. 5, 93, 204, 445). There are additionally direct references to climate change overall (105), erratic weather patterns (330, 485), as well as to contamination of nature (e.g. 202, 330, 332, 359). Walkaways can live the way they do because "[d]efault had produced an endless surplus of sacrifice zones, superfund sites, no-man's-lands and dead cities" and to "a first approximation, all blasted wastelands were fungible" (342). Thus, whenever *default* forces sought to evict walkaways from where they had settled, the walkaways would happily move on to another wasteland. The walkaways seem to take the same approach to their bodies, so that once age, illness, injury, or simply inconvenience threatened, they could simply evict their own bodies and become AIs. This is one of the main issues with the novel's philosophy, however. It treats finite resources as infinite, as if every time humans create a blasted wasteland it has no lasting consequences. In this way, the novel is dismissive of the serious consequences of actions, and by extension, it is dismissive of responsibility.

Thetford is *Walkaway*'s Chernobyl, an example of the long-term consequences of human activity on the environment and climate (263). Although the novel depicts it as a place in which nature is healing the wounds caused by humans, it suffers the same fallacy as the disanthropic logic regarding Chernobyl. It ignores the long-term impact of human activity, something that even the complete absence of humans will not change. This depiction of nature thriving in environments harmed by humans is, on the one hand, at least an acknowledgement that nature can survive where humans cannot. On the other hand, to depict nature as continuing as if unaffected by anthropogenic damage is untrue and wishful thinking. The description of Thetford contains references to phenomena that the reader knows exist in reality as well, making it not only relatable, but frighteningly plausible. Despite its highly toxic nature, asbestos has not been banned in the U.S.A and is still widely used in China, Russia, India, and Mexico (Whitmer). Additionally, Sita's

statement that “even the federal government couldn’t ignore” the high levels of asbestos contamination may be a reference to the long-term denial by government and companies that the substance is toxic (Whitmer). Abandoned villages, towns, and cities are also part of the reader’s reality (e.g. Urie et al.). The erratic weather patterns described above are furthermore increasingly familiar. The most extreme examples of fires occurred recently (“2019-2020 Australian Bushfires”; “2020 North American Wildfire Season”), and flooding has been a regularity in recent years as well. For example, South Africa experienced devastating floods in 2019 (Floodlist News, Apr. and Dec.; Tshona). The year 2020 saw an extensive list of environmental disasters around the world, including storms and flooding (Bir; Irfan; Thompson; Watts).

The parallels between Thetford and the reader’s world add an uncomfortable element of realism to the conversation between Limpopo and Sita, forcing the reader to be a part of it and consider, hypothetically, a world without humans (275). Without human fallibility, Earth is “beautiful, good and virtuous. It is most prolific and healthy without us” (275). Humans are “violations of the second law of thermodynamics” (278). They are a physical presence so destructive that “the environmental prescription has been to act as much as possible like you were already dead. Don’t reproduce. Don’t consume. Don’t trample the earth or you’ll compress the dirt and kill the plants. Every exhalation poisons the atmosphere with CO2” (277). Having “a body is worse [for the environment] than asbestos” (271). The climate crisis is an existential threat to humans. Neither capitalism nor the anthropogenic climate changes were maliciously and purposefully designed to cause damage to people or the planet yet they evolved that way, nonetheless. In this way, the novel inserts a sense of inevitability into the situation, as if human endeavours are doomed simply because they are human. Sita seems to be struggling with this mindset of inevitable doom, saying:

> We know there’s truth in it. It’s all around us. You can only act like the planet is infinite—like wishful thinking trumped physics—for so long before it goes to shit. That’s why Cape Canaveral is a SCUBA site. Think about it too long and you’ll come to the conclusion that nothing you do

> matters. It's either kill yourself now or kill your descendants just by drawing breath. (277)

The argument comes back to the body. If people cannot physically act on the environment, then they cannot do any damage. Additionally, in their simulated versions, people can be constrained into beings that truly care about nature (276-277). They can be programmed to finally agree on things and therefore align priorities (279-280), and coded into discipline so that they can keep to their choices (278). Losing the body and redesigning the parameters of the mind will allow humankind to finally unburden themselves of the inherited history of human fallibility. Every generation has "unwanted family heirlooms" (537) as a result of decisions, misjudgements, and mistakes made by previous generations. Generations' worth of burdens press down on the current one, and as each generation fails to solve its inherited problems, or creates new problems through solutions, a sense of despair creeps in, bringing with it existential fear as the world seems to decline. The difficulty of dealing with their reality is reflected in the fact that, irrespective of which side of the societal split they inhabit, the characters in *Walkaway* seem to rely regularly on substances to help them cope with existence (e.g. 17, 60, 125, 181, 266, 359).

It seems that human existence requires a lot of chemical help, with the goal of disconnecting from objective reality, retreating within the mind, and coping with the boundaries of physical and physiological capabilities. Losing the body is another form of this. Dis comments that "not being embodied is awesome. […] There's something pure about it. It's much simpler than psychotherapy, and more effective" (200); and of course it is, because Dis' 'mind' is strictly controlled by parameters. While Dis tells her living companions that "[y]ou haven't known freedom until you've experienced cognitive liberty, the right to choose your state of mind" (200), she arguably does *not* have the right to choose her state of mind. She was forced to constrain herself to certain parameters because that was the only state in which her simulation did not fail. Even though *Walkaway* seems to argue that the human body is what needs to be removed, with all the complexities of human existence, the countless opportunities for pain and suffering, it ultimately implies that the "mind could use some killing" (209). *Walkaway* posits that the

human needs to be reparametrized, the body removed as a conduit of death and suffering, and the mind reprogrammed to no longer be the seat of existential fear. It is the inability to live with existential fear that drives misanthropy in this novel.

This misanthropy is useful insofar as it helps to illuminate our fears and how these influence our behaviour. It can therefore be a tool to help us reflect on our future decisions so that those are made with greater hopefulness than fear. As I have indicated in my discussion of fear, hope, and desire, I do not conceptualise these as being separate or opposites. Thus it would be impossible, in my opinion, to say that an action is driven only by the hope to fulfil a desire, or only by fear, as these emotional forces are mutually informed. To say, then, that we can act from a place of hope and not fear would not be true to this conceptualisation. This is why I have said that our behaviour should come from more hope than fear, on balance, rather than only hope, as *Walkaway* argues. Misanthropy shows that, even though the characters call their techno-immortality hope, it is the result of fear, and when fear is greater than hope, desperation can build illusions of safety that are, ultimately, more dangerous because of their falsehood.

Techno-utopian Misanthropy

If we take misanthropy to state that humans are unacceptable as they currently are, then *Walkaway*'s misanthropy states that humans will remain unacceptable so long as their actions come from fear. I agree that behaviour stemming from fear tends to be more aggressive and defensive, and that it is important for a more peaceful society to make decisions as a collective from a hopeful perspective. Nonetheless, as I have argued above, the relationship between fear, hope, and desire is in my opinion such that they cannot be separated. I think fear will always play a role, but it can be moderated. This, though, is something the novel does not seem to believe. The state of the world in the novel is described as the result of the primordial fear of death and, one can assume, the accompanying desire to survive. This fear has evolved into a delusion that justifies the rule of a wealthy elite in the hypercapitalist system that the novel portrays. This delusion is described by the tragedy of the commons (49-50) in which a communal area is given to one person to run for profit so that no one person can use it for more than their fair share. The rationale behind this solution is based on the belief that humans are inherently

selfish and thus sharing needs to be managed by some authority figure. In the novel, such a fascist worldview does seem to underlie that society's structure. I believe that, in the real world, capitalism and politics have a more complex relationship that is influenced by a much larger number of factors than portrayed in *Walkaway*. However, I can see that the novel is trying to comment on specific aspects of society and that this is perhaps the reason for the simplified portrayal of the socio-economic and political relationship.

In a materialistic world, 'kill or be killed' becomes 'take or be taken' because survival has been translated into accruing wealth. This belief makes sense in early historical contexts in which humans had to contend with wild predators. In that context, I would not call this belief a delusion. The novel argues that this belief has become unnecessary because civilisation has actually reached a post-scarcity state. Because no history is provided for how this state has been achieved in the novel, this argument is difficult to take seriously. The reader is apparently meant to simply accept post-scarcity, even though the real world is far from such a state. The novel nonetheless argues that because capitalism functions on supply and demand, scarcity is a required and created condition, and thus the belief must be maintained as a delusion. Survival has always depended on resource acquisition – we need food, water, and shelter – and in the contemporary context, capital enables access to those resources. Money means survival. Etcetera draws the parallel between our ancient ancestors' fear of predators and adults' fear of poverty, because both speak to the same fear, which signals that there is a threat to our wellbeing, and at worst, our life: "the whispered conversations about money and jobs that all grown-ups had all the time were the outward reflection of deep, unending terror. A fear that gnawed at every grown person. A primordial terror of the tiger outside the cave" (52).

What functioned as self-preservation grew into a cultural system of exploitation and greed, *Walkaway* argues. Drawing on Darwinism, Sita states that a society based on the culture of 'take or be taken' "selects for people who are wasteful jerks that succeed by stabbing their neighbors in the back" (276). Although I agree with the first point about the development of self-preservation into greed, I find Sita's argument too one-sided. There are certainly people like the ones she describes, and these people often do hold positions of power and vast capital, but they are not the only type of person that succeeds

in society. Furthermore, there are plenty of wasteful and deceitful people who are not successful. Sita's frustration and anger about her present context, and her anxiety about the future, shape a very cynical view. This is furthermore evident in Sita's statement that humans care about the Earth because they co-evolved with it and its other inhabitants, but that humans are simultaneously top predators, highly consumptive, and engage in "self-evolution" (275). The argument made here is that these two characteristics are contrary to each other because humans as predators are ecologically destructive. The growth that results from human evolutionary success is unsustainable on a finite planet (277-278).

The proposed solution is to become a simulation – a digital reconstruction of a person made of recordings of them while they were alive and housed computationally as virtual ghosts. Simulations can be manipulated into preferring disembodiment over being a force of nature's destruction (276), and existential terror can be erased from their code (280-281). Because thus far, the prescription for protecting the environment has been for people to behave as if they are already dead, Sita says (276-277), becoming simulations is the only way "to change the history of the future, give us a chance for a life worth living, without oppression" (278). There is no other option because humans have evolved "to foil our own better natures" (279) by being unable to control their rational priorities. Misanthropy in *Walkaway* is a response to existential terror and the helplessness of the perceived inability to escape it. It is reflected in the undercurrent of desperate desire in the following description of simulated existence: "Become an immortal being of pure thought and feeling, able to travel the universe at light speed, unkillable, consciously deciding how you want to live your life and making it stick, by fine-tuning your parameter so you're the version of yourself that does the right thing, that knows and honors itself" (277).

Walkaway suggests that technology can create a utopian pastoral idyll in the novel's epilogue. Humans are shown to have 'self-evolved' to a new way of being by first uploading simulations, and then eventually recreating bodies into which those simulations can be downloaded (547-548). It is indicated that the group of protagonists, who can be described as recycled in their new bodies, are living in another B&B like those they had built earlier (548). The novel shows a circular understanding of time in that it states that

everything new becomes old in an infinitely repeated pattern: “Everything becomes default, no matter how new” (549). The story has come full circle. At the beginning of the novel, “[t]he impulse to walk away” is described as being “bound up with the urge to write Thoreauvian memoirs about societal malaise and the tradecraft of going off-grid in the age of total information awareness” (54) – and this is what *Walkaway* then proceeds to describe. *Walkaway* reflects the quality of *Walden* (Thoreau) described by Martin Bickman (121): “It gives us a sense of future possibilities by appealing to some of our most regressive fantasies.” The most regressive fantasy, arguably, is that of rebirth, as a deep desire to return to the beginning. Humans are remade into younger versions of themselves, and their environment is remade in the image of pastoral idyll but accomplished with green technology. The future holds the key to reforming the past (in both senses of the word) into something better, and then even better, in endless cycles. Throughout the novel, the characters speak of living in the first days of a better nation, and the epilogue is titled “Even Better Nation” (546), although, as stated previously, the setting is a recycled version of the B&B. The deep existential terror of *Walkaway*’s characters is met with an idealism of equal intensity.

However, that idealism only seems achievable through a remaking of human beings into AI, a transformation that is very much like a rebirth and so acts as a fulfilment of the deepest regressive fantasy. This is an expression of a desire to return to the security of a time before humankind had made the mistakes that are now apparent, coupled with the need to ensure that mistakes are not made again. This is why the AI simulations of the once-human characters have to be controlled by strict parameters, particularly emotionally. *Walkaway*’s misanthropy thus serves as a warning that what may appear to give us freedom can actually be what traps us. Many of humanity’s actions that have had negative consequences fall into this category. The use of fossil fuels, whose application has made various areas of life easier, has also caused severe environmental damage. Systems such as democracy and capitalism have many social benefits, but they can also be manipulated and exploited, resulting in great inequality. Of course, not all of these consequences are foreseeable. Humankind should not become paralysed by the fear of making a decision that could have negative consequences. That, arguably, is the same as making decisions out of fear, but fear cannot be ignored. As an emotion, it is a useful and

necessary tool to guide humanity's actions, concomitantly with hope. Thus we should make decisions prepared to take responsibility for negative consequences, which means being prepared, as best as we are able, to face those consequences should they come.

CHAPTER 6: BIO-ENTRAPMENT MISANTHROPY IN *AUTONOMOUS*

Autonomous comments on a number of social issues and current debates, but buried within this rather dense project is a misanthropy that comes from feeling trapped by the perceived weaknesses of the psychological and physical aspects of human existence. In this way, the novel's misanthropic expression is a response to existential fear, as it is in *Walkaway*. *Autonomous* explores a hypercapitalist world in which humans have made themselves into property by implementing a system of indentured labour. Within this context, the plot focuses on the extensive power that patent laws can grant corporations. What this shows, though, is humankind as self-interested, manipulative, and duplicitous, subject to insensible reasoning and emotional fallacy. The novel furthermore contrasts robots and humans, showcasing how humans are physically weaker and psychologically messy. The relationship between the human character Eliasz and the robot Paladin is exemplary of this, and expresses a deep longing on the part of the human to transcend their physical limitations to become superior beings, as robots are shown to be. The novel ends with humans ultimately being unable to achieve true escape from their physical boundaries and the problems they continuously create for themselves, but nonetheless reflects the dream of escaping this entrapment. *Autonomous* yearns for the techno-utopianism of *Walkaway*, but denies its possibility. However, like in *Walkaway*, it's bio-entrapment view suggests that an ideal society may not consist of humans at all.

Self-entrapment

The world of *Autonomous* is divided into economic coalitions, and grouped according to geographical zones: the Asian Union, the African Federation, and the Free Trade Zone. The IPC (International Property Coalition) is the legal authority in the majority of these areas. The indenture system that forms the economy's basis was created because robots, built possessing human-level intelligence and programmed with the need to survive, were deemed human-equivalent and given equal rights (25, 214). Consequently, a period of

time was established during which robots would work off the cost of their manufacture, and after which they would be made autonomous. I will hereafter refer to the period of being indentured as 'indentureship' for simplicity. An argument was made that if robots are equal to humans, then humans are equal to robots, and all should have the same rights, including the right to settle debts through indentureship. Although robots are initially developed as a tool for humans, making them autonomous frees them of this function. The treatment of robots in human society is reminiscent of Asimov's robot novels (*I, Robot*), grappling with law and justice in a posthuman society (Leslie-McCarthy). People become trapped within this economic system of slavery, as once they enter indentureship, it becomes almost impossible to exit. Furthermore, children of the poor inherit their parents' debts and are forced into indentureship as well. The indenture system did nothing to ease poverty, rather feeding into the nearly inescapable, generational cycle instead. Additionally, citizenship has to be bought. Called franchises, citizenships come in different bundles that allow people to live and work in certain locations. Children whose parents cannot afford to buy them a franchise have to enter indentureship at age eighteen. The IPC regulates indentureship, because just like robots, indentured humans become property until they can pay for their autonomy.

International law stipulates that a robot's indentured service last a maximum of ten years, "a period deemed more than enough time to make the Federation's investment in creating a new life-form worthwhile" (25, 214). Paladin already knows at the beginning of his/her term of service that "the Federation interpreted the law fairly liberally" (25), and that the majority of robots do not survive service long enough to become autonomous. Unlike for robots, there are "no laws that allow humans to be born indentured" (214). Yet this, too, seems to be interpreted fairly liberally. Indeed, "[f]amilies with nothing would sometimes sell their toddlers to indenture schools, where managers trained them to be submissive just like they were programming a bot" (21). Many are indentured at such an early age that their freedom at birth is meaningless. For example, Threezed was sold to an indenture school when he was five (77). Like the cycle of poverty, indentured labour is almost impossible to escape once entered into, and is commonly inherited by the following generation.

Such perpetual cycles suggest that humans become easily trapped within problems of their own making. For all their technological and scientific ingenuity, humans appear to have flawed and short-sighted reasoning that generates more problems than it solves, as described in Dio Chrysostom's vicious cycle (Dobbin). It furthermore demonstrates the perpetuity of human problems, passed on like genes from one generation to the next. Long after the humans responsible for a problem are gone, the problem itself persists, as Garrard ('Worlds' 52-3) points out in his criticism of Chernobyl as a disanthropic utopia. Those who are now responsible for solving problems they did not cause are left with feelings of resentment and helplessness as they have no one at whom they can direct their anger. The indenture system set in a hypercapitalist world as portrayed in *Autonomous* demonstrates a broader system that was initially designed to solve social issues but became a minefield of new problems through self-interested manipulations, desperate actions, or simple human fallacy. Humankind is portrayed as consisting of self-interested individuals and corporations who prioritise themselves over the collective, as long as they have the power to deny responsibility and shift blame. For example, the IPC is able to cover up the fatalities of Eliasz and Paladin's interrogations and disguise them as accidents (e.g. 277), and Zaxy censors Med's paper by threatening to sue the university where she works (280-281).

A type of inhumanity is highlighted when humans and robots are deemed equivalent. This is not the obviously non-human aspects of the robots, such as physical characteristics like not needing to eat or being able to port from one body to another, but rather where humans begin to lack humanity in how they treat each other. A stark contrast is made, for example, between how Jack's friend Mali treats Jack and Threezed, and her own indentured labourer. Mali treats the latter with casual rudeness (79) and refers to her only as "the girl" (82), yet in the same scene she gives Threezed a hug and promises to find him work after Jack tells her how he was indentured as a child and abused since (82). Similarly, Eliasz treats robots and even a stray kitten (145) with more care and respect than other humans, whom he easily hurts or kills. Notably, Eliasz seems to be sensitive and compassionate, but exposure to a brutal reality in a society of slavery that emphasises capital above human life has turned his sense of powerlessness into anger. Being unable to regulate extreme emotional responses potentially makes us as inhuman as having no

emotions. Affective intelligence is an integral part of being human. The novel, which does not explore AI as a means to immortality like *Walkaway*, suggests that humans can be inhumane irrespective of technological hybridisation. Humans themselves, not AI, are what threatens humanity in *Autonomous*. In the posthuman context and search for a new subjectivity, I find this a very pertinent point.

Escape into Illusion

From the beginning of this story, it has been demonstrated that the indenture system is badly disguised slavery, and the reader is aware that the indentured work in cities all over the world in poor and inhumane conditions. According to Eliasz, Las Vegas is a black market hub of slavery, where people "don't value human life" (26). It is therefore telling that Las Vegas, where human lives hold no value, is also "the center of the human resources industry" (26). This is the true face of the indenture system, not the IPC, not equal rights, and not justice. Las Vegas illustrates that exploitation and cruelty feed the secret debauchery of those rich enough to afford it. The city thrives on the extremes of human desires, like greed, lust, and gluttony.

Las Vegas serves as the microcosmic example of what humanity as a whole subconsciously keeps well hidden – the dirty secret of its ugly side. As Threezed says, "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" (234), exposing the way general humankind deals with the activities that take place there. It is acceptable, so long as it remains secret, like tidying one's room by shoving everything haphazardly into the closet. This city is society's equivalent of an individual's psychological repression. Both the real, current Las Vegas and the fictional one of *Autonomous* is a city made of illusions, teeming with misdirection and technical loopholes. *Autonomous*' Las Vegas is described as follows:

> The sky rained pixels and the market awnings expelled cool mist as fine as smoke. […] Projectors painted the dome above them with fantastical weather. […] There were silver and gold buildings so narrow they looked like playing cards balanced on their edges; bulbous palaces; simulated cities, their landmarks rendered in caricature; transparent inverted pyramids; and, of course, the famous gardens whose sculptures were made

> of fire, fountains, music, wild animals, giant robots, and full-scale replica slave ships. (235)

Everything is designed to awe, but it is all simulated and replicated; a sparkling show to distract from the "barely legal" (237) and illicit. It is an attractive simulacrum of desire-fulfilment created to cover a disturbing reality, as per Baudrillard's theory of simulation. It functions to direct attention at the desired part of human existence to thereby hide the feared flipside in a form of denial. Eliasz was aware of the duplicitous nature of Las Vegas even before he started working there, which the reader learns in a memory that resurfaces after Eliasz reads Threezed's online posts as SlaveBoy (245). It is also suggested in this memory how and why Eliasz began to approach humans and robots so differently. Eliasz tends to treat robots as if they are real and humans as if they are fabricated. As the novel emphasises repeatedly, humans are complex, multi-faceted, and fraught with physical and psychological conflicts. In comparison, robots are straightforward and simple. In this way, they are anthropomorphised simulations of ideal humans to Eliasz, and his behaviour towards humans shows his rejection of them. He seems not to want to be a part of humankind. This way of thinking about robots and people starts early in Eliasz's life, when he begins to see more humanity in robots than in the humans around him, while failing to see the trauma and hurt that motivates negative behaviour in people, including himself. Again, this can be seen as a form of denial to hide the unwanted or feared aspects of something.

Eliasz's memory takes the reader back to his early life in Warsaw. His father had managed to buy him a limited franchise, allowing him to work for the church as dormitory guard for the "Boys Manufacturing Internship Program" (245), where his main duty is to catch runaways. (245). The name of this program contains a subtle irony: an ambiguity in whether boys are being manufactured, or doing the manufacturing. In a world of robot and human equivalents and indentured lives, the difference should hardly matter. Yet at night, Eliasz listens "to the boys crying themselves to sleep or getting into pointless fights over nothing" (245), and not the behaviour of indentured robots. The reader is reminded of Jack's thoughts on trauma affecting humans in a way that autonomy keys, which

release robots from indentureship, cannot undo when she finds Threezed at the beginning of the novel (21).

The experience, which seems to have been a turning point for Eliasz, places robots and humans into direct comparison. One night, Eliasz discovers two of the program's boys with an "unprogrammed biobot" (245). The machine, identified as 'she,' had obviously "been cobbled together out of castoff parts, with her skin applied patchily and her mind left unformatted" (245). This description recalls that of Threezed at the start of the novel, whom Jack misidentifies as a bot: "[it] was some awful, hacked-together thing […] its skin layer practically fried off in places. […] It stared at her, mouth open, as if it were running something seriously buggy" (5-6). Eliasz notes that the biobot "looked uncannily like an unconscious teenage girl" (246), just as Jack thinks that the bot she finds had "been built to look like a boy in his teens" (6), before she realises that he is a human. After the boys flee from him, Eliasz gently and carefully disassembles the biobot (246). That the boys had based her on "a common sex worker bot" (246) makes clear the nature of their activities with it.

The similarities between Threezed as Jack finds him and the biobot from Eliasz's memory, combined with the excerpts of Threezed's online journal documenting his indentureship, create a discomfiting metaphor. The reader is already aware of the ongoing sexual relationship between Jack and Threezed, as well as Threezed's history of sexual abuse and exploitation. He writes as SlaveBoy that "[e]very master loves to fuck a slave. It is a law of nature, or maybe culture" (243). This is after the start of his relationship with Jack. His statement is indicative of a belief about human beings in general, and can be taken as an example of psychological essentialism. He has spent his life being exploited and violated, and is symbolic of the 'victims of the system' in the novel. When he encounters Jack, who disables his tracking chip and wants to release him to go his own way, Threezed is still trapped in a power dynamic. He has to stay with Jack, because without a franchise, money, or work history, he will not be able to make a living (228). Threezed begins to offer Jack any benefit of his presence he can, so that she will let him stay with her, because his life has taught him that you cannot get something for nothing. He appears to be correct in this case. Only after he disables two robots while they question

Jack does she agree to take him along (57-58). Perhaps a less specific statement about humans, but with the same gist as Threezed's, is that they are motivated to fulfil their own desires and selfish enough to take what they want from others.

With SlaveBoy's experiences still freshly in mind, the reader is then taken through Eliasz's memory, primed for signs of abuse, neglect, and perversion. For Eliasz, "[t]he more he saw of what the boys had done to [the biobot], the more mesmerized and revolted he was" (246). He experiences desire, but is also afraid of its implications, and is confronted with an uncomfortable truth about himself. Eliasz remains distracted by images of the biobot's "inert body parts" (247) and wonders "what it would be like to do what the boys had done with a bot" (247). After disassembling the biobot, Eliasz is thanked by Scrappy, the indentured robot who keeps watch over the heaps of robot parts and who alerted Eliasz to the boys' activities. During their conversation, Eliasz notices that there is "something undeniably beautiful about [Scrappy]" (247), and is drawn to the robot's bones, "threaded with soft fabric stronger than anything on Earth" (247). This encapsulates something for which Eliasz seems to yearn, and perhaps wishes he could be: a softness that can withstand any force. At the same time, it exposes Eliasz's feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

Eliasz feels emotions strongly. He is a sensitive person, but with a very 'black-and-white' worldview. There are clear delineations between right and wrong for him, and he *needs* these to structure an otherwise turbulent world. When Scrappy reveals that his legs are permanently bonded to the floor, Eliasz immediately reaches for the laws of indenture. He may not be sure of all the laws, "but he [knows] one thing: The indentured could not be permanently bound" (247). The cynical reader may scoff at this point, because the indentured are as good as bound for life. There is a sad irony in Eliasz's compassion for Scrappy, whom he immediately tries to free from the floor, while his main duty is to make sure none of the indentured children at the church can run away. Eliasz's soft reaction to Scrappy, even including a growing sexual attraction, is jarringly juxtaposed with his violent reaction a moment later. Some boys have returned, see Eliasz kneeling before Scrappy, and start jeering about the homosexuality implied by the position. Eliasz's rage is explosive, and "[a]t least one of the boys wouldn't be able to say the word "faggot"

again for a long time. For people without franchises, there was a three-month waiting period to access Warsaw's bone printer […] The boy could live with a shattered lower jaw, as long as the church had wires and straws" (248). Finally, to drive the memory and others like it out of his mind, Eliasz focuses on his first sexual experience with Paladin – a kind of mutual masturbation, physical for the human and programmatic for the robot – and realises that he is in love with him (248). Eliasz's love, however, appears symbolic of his deep desire for robotic existence: straightforward, without the illusions and complexities of humans, and without their physical weaknesses.

The final confrontation with Jack is a pivotal experience for Eliasz, when he makes the choice between robots and humans. When he has one last chance to kill Jack, Eliasz turns away to ensure that Paladin is not "fatally wounded" (275). In this moment, Eliasz symbolically chooses his escape from the unsafety, duplicity and violence of human society. He recognises that people are trapped by the misfortune of their circumstances, and that this society cannot free them: "Even the worst of them didn't deserve the hand they'd been dealt. They were just unlucky to be born without franchises" (275). Eliasz remembers all of the people he could not save (275), and he seems to lose faith in his dream of justice. He had believed that stopping Jack would protect people from a terrorist (16, 183, 185) who has apparently already "killed hundreds" (223, 260, 273), and so when Eliasz chooses to ensure Paladin's safety instead, he also chooses the robot over all the people he meant to save.

Even as Eliasz finally sees through the denial and duplicity of the indenture system to the trauma and suffering that it causes, when he turns to Paladin, he metaphorically turns his back on humankind. Although the reader is relieved that Jack is saved, Eliasz's decision can be read as a reflection of human beings' fickle nature, which *Walkaway* criticises as well. At the culmination of everything he has done, Eliasz fails to follow through, because he chooses selfishly. His decision not to kill Jack is not as a result of his realising the "perverse miracle" (275) of Threezed's rehabilitation through meeting Jack. He chooses between killing Jack, symbolic to him of society's badness, and saving Paladin, symbolic of his own ideal. As I have argued above, holding an ideal is not in and of itself the problem. Eliasz choosing to save his ideal over destroying an enemy is not an inherently

bad decision. However, he becomes immersed in the ideal, so that his symbolically attaining perfection by cementing his relationship with Paladin also means that he stops trying to make a positive change in society (as misguided as his attempt to do this as an IPC agent arguably was). Considering the society in which he lives, Eliasz's desire to escape humanity is understandable. He cannot face the consequences of society's mistakes, and because he is a part of society, his rejection of humankind is a rejection of his responsibility to the larger system of which he is a part.

Weakness of the Human Being

Eliasz's misanthropy takes the form of emotionally rejecting humankind because he, unlike the characters in *Walkaway*, cannot escape his humanness through a physical and cognitive transformation. The novel represents humans as easily damaged, hypocritical, self-interested, and manipulative. This is shown in the interactions between humans and robots, in which the nuances of human interactions are contrasted with the simplicity of robots largely by pointing out an apparently inherent duplicity in human communication. Paladin describes communicating with robots as "soothingly unambiguous" (70), where s/he is not asked "to overlook fundamental realities" (70). S/he learns how to lie and manipulate while learning how to communicate like humans, realising that s/he can "get the answers he wanted, by stretching his truths into strategic lies" (86). In contrast, s/he feels "relief communicating with someone who didn't require any form of subterfuge" (113) when s/he communicates with a fellow robot. Humans require patience and effort. For example, Med spends time in a cow barn to "get away from humans" (265), and her career as a researcher is a choice to distance herself from "human drama" (49).

Moreover, human bodies can easily be broken, and their minds manipulated through drugs and pain, which is showcased effectively by the torture employed by Eliasz and Paladin during their interrogations (e.g. 184-187, 222-224). Robots like Paladin and Med are an anthropomorphised projection of the dream to subsume human and machine to create a being capable of defeating psychological and physical threats and, therefore, existential fear. The relationship between Paladin and Eliasz can be read as symbolic of this desire. As a military robot, Paladin is essentially a walking weapon with artificial intelligence and a permanent internet connection. S/he is power. Paladin is technically

limitless as long as s/he has a source of energy. It is not specified how Paladin is powered, but Med, for example, charges with solar power (277). Paladin's program is also not bound to a single body but can be transferred, unlike human consciousness. His/her only human organ, the brain so vital to human life, is dispensable to the robot (117). Aside from facial recognition, it is "useless" (92), and s/he easily adapts to its loss (287). Here, the same dismissive attitude towards the body and its functions is displayed as in *Walkaway*, suggesting bitterness and frustration about the brain in comparison to AI. Whichever body Paladin occupies can be continuously upgraded; it requires no effort to maintain physical strength or to gain knowledge. As long as the core program that is Paladin is not destroyed, the machine is immortal. S/he is control, the human dream of dominating everything else to secure safety. This is what Eliasz ultimately lusts for and what he falls in love with. As someone who has felt so very powerless in his own life and in his ability to help and protect others, Paladin is everything Eliasz desires. Paladin acts as a shield against his fears, and a projection of his hopes and dreams. This relationship is a direct reflection of humankind's relationship with technology. At the same time, humans give technology a purpose and meaning, similar to how Paladin constructs his/her identity through interaction with Eliasz. This reciprocal relationship is part of the posthuman identity, but, as Braidotti strongly argues, this relationship must expand to include the entirety of the Earth system. Until then, it remains anthropocentric, a rather controlling narcissistic relationship between humanity and the ideal of themselves.

The first time any indication of attraction between Eliasz and Paladin is given is at a shooting range. Eliasz asks if he can take control of Paladin (65). Paladin allows Eliasz to believe that this is possible, and so lets him climb onto his/her back and give him/her directions. As the robot destroys a prop house under Eliasz's direction, the man becomes sexually aroused. Paladin can sense that Eliasz is trying to control his physiological response, and "transduc[es] the man's conflicted pleasure into his own, feeling each shot as more than just the ecstasy of a target hit" (68). Briefly, the two become one in the shared experience of demolishing the house. They feel the same pleasure, and although Eliasz is not actually controlling Paladin's guns, the robot is responding to the man's verbal input. The experience, particularly when read through a psychoanalytic lens, strongly parallels a sexual encounter. The timing of Eliasz's sexual arousal reveals what

he truly desires, however. Although the times when Eliasz and Paladin are together are narrated from the robot's perspective, nothing prior to this experience indicated that Eliasz felt anything but friendly toward Paladin. The idea of riding on Paladin's back and controlling his/her weapons seems to excite Eliasz, but the act itself is when he experiences physical arousal as well as psychological excitement.

It may be argued that Eliasz is not really in control of Paladin, as Paladin is only accommodating him (68), but the pertinent fact is that Eliasz *believes* himself to be in control. During their shooting exercise before this, when Paladin shoots under his/her own direction, Eliasz shows no sign of arousal. It can be concluded, then, that it is precisely the experience of 'merging' with Paladin and taking control that gives Eliasz such pleasure. Paladin represents security in the form of shelter. The robot acts as a physical shield for Eliasz during combat (e.g. 89), and when he is vulnerable to attacks (e.g. 153). Paladin even screens Eliasz psychologically from the judgement regarding his sexual orientation that caused him such distress previously (e.g. 153) "creating a private shelter with her armored embrace" (291). When they are symbolically merged, Eliasz is secure from existential fear because Paladin provides him with the illusion of control. This, again, is like the relationship between humans and technology in the real world. Technology is treated as if it can be used to solve any problem that humans encounter or even create themselves. For the transhumanists, as *Walkaway* shows, it can facilitate transcendence to an ideal state of being. As I have argued in the previous chapter, this is an illusion. The idea that technology unequivocally provides solutions to humankind's problems is an illusion of control that brings comfort, in the same way that the idea of restarting civilisation on Mars and living as technological beings brings comfort. It presents, however illusory, an option in which humans do not have to relinquish the apparent control that comes with anthropocentrism. Yet, as I have argued throughout, anthropocentrism and its illusions are unsustainable.

Bio-entrapment Misanthropy

Autonomous represents people as capable of good and bad actions while being fully defined by neither. However, humans are also generally characterised by ambiguity, and prone to deception of both the self and others, which results in systemic contradictions

and hypocrisy. The novel furthermore strongly suggests that "people don't change that much from century to century" (40). The reader thus gains the sense that humans as a collective are greedy, exploitative, selfish, and perpetually the cause of their own problems. The characters are examples of the general struggles of humankind with its deep systemic issues. The novel makes a point of showing that history and context are important in shaping who people become, but also shows how, at a basic level, humans stay the same. As Eliasz and Paladin are being briefed on their mission to stop Jack, they see a video of the victims of pirated Zacuity, "watching the tiny, struggling figures loop through the same tiny struggles again" (15). The gist of this view is repeated throughout the novel, encapsulated by the description of Las Vegas (ch. 18), which is entirely human-made (26) and never changes (235). The important message here is not that humans are therefore a hopeless case and incapable of change, but rather that humans *continuously* need to work to create systems in which people are encouraged to be more good than bad.

This means that attention needs to be paid to individual psychology. A society is made up of individuals. It cannot function well if its population does not. Systemic and individual issues are in a reciprocal relationship, so that neither influence on the other can be ignored. For example, Eliasz's history shows how his actions as an IPC agent are informed by the anger and helplessness he experienced in the past. He becomes part of a systemic issue, but his behaviour as a part of that system is informed by his individual psychology. This in turn is informed by the individual psychology of others, such as his father, whose views were shaped by his own history and religious affiliation (27). The novel may sound idealistic and even obviously simplistic in arguing that addressing systemic and individual issues will grow an improved society, but it never indicates the belief that a perfect society is achievable. There is no concrete indication that the systemic issues in this society will be resolved. In fact, the long history of humans being essentially the same (206), coupled with how systemic issues are inherited by each new generation (46) along with their own personal problems, leaves the viability and probability of a better society open-ended. It suggests that the best humans can aim for is 'good enough', not as an end-point to progress, but as progression itself. *Autonomous* suggests, rather subtly, that 'good enough' means that our actions need to be guided by our moral sense of what is good. However, the novel also shows that moral orientation is individually

informed and therefore not universal. Eliasz and Jack, for example, have conflicting moral views on what is right, and unfortunately, the novel does not indicate how this rather fundamental problem could be addressed.

Instead, *Autonomous* explores how the future is constructed in the past, and comments on the nostalgic danger that viewing the past as better than the present holds for the future. The relative ease with which this world manoeuvred itself into a slave economy also warns against how easily society can slip backwards. The novel uses hypercapitalism and the patent system to demonstrate how systems that once had a positive impact can be manipulated and thus maladapted to changing circumstances. The past is portrayed as a psychological refuge from a precarious present and unsure future. Thus, for example, living on Mars holds an idyllic pastoral appeal in the sense of escaping to a simpler way of life, before society developed to such a dysfunctional stage. One can think of society as aging the way humans do, in that the older it becomes, the more it is prone to developing illnesses and ailments. In *Autonomous*, hypercapitalism and the patent system are diseases of this society. When Eliasz asks Paladin to come with him to Mars, he says that he wants to "get away from this business" (288) of policing property law, and he thought that "maybe we could go away together for a while" (288). There is a labour shortage on Mars, so everyone is welcomed because they are needed, and Eliasz and Paladin's unconventional relationship will not matter as much there (290). Pastoral living is also shown as safe and peaceful in the description of Jack poaching spirulina from algae farms while she waits for spring to arrive, when she will resume her piracy. Harvesting the algae reminds Jack of being a little girl on her parents' farm (283), and she is pleased to be living a "safer, alternate version" (284) of her life for a little while. The desire for security is reflected in this fantasy as much as it is in Eliasz and Paladin's leaving for Mars.

Escaping to the ease of the simplicity of pastoral idyll will not address the problems of this world's reality. Additionally, although it may appear to in some ways, the technology in *Autonomous* does not address systemic social issues. Green technology may address issues of climate change in the novel, but it does not change human issues. *Autonomous* presents a posthuman world in which technology is woven into every aspect of life and

into bodies themselves. It indicates a more ecologically conscious people, with many manufactured items being biodegradable, recyclable, and powered partly through solar and wind energy, but this civilisation is still built on anthropocentrism and views the environment as a repository of tools and resources. Even though the technology is environmentally friendly in the sense that it has been designed to work with nature instead of against it or through the exploitation of natural resources, it is still not green in the sense of a harmonious existence between humans, their technology, and the natural sphere. This world lacks the aspect of transcorporeality that posthumanist theorists such as Haraway and Braidotti promote as vital. Organic life, from bacteria to large animals, is in service to humans. Technoscience has focused on "transgenic animals that secreted drugs; synthetic fast-growing organisms; metagenetic topsoil engineering; and exo-agriculture that could thrive offworld for export to the Moon and Mars colonies" (136). Humans are not stewards of Earth, but proprietors. This proprietary view towards nature indicates the fear of bio-entrapment. As long as nature can be manipulated to serve human needs, the illusion of anthropocentric control over the natural world is maintained. This allows for the continued belief that the human mind and body can be manipulated into an ideal state that does not experience fear, suffering, and death. For humans to accept their position within the Earth system, they would have to acknowledge their own organic nature, which is the source of their existential fear. The posthuman subjectivity described by theorists such as Braidotti seems to require confrontation of this issue, which is avoided in the novel and serves as a further example of its pattern of denial through illusion.

Autonomous' world is also posthuman in the sense that humans are no longer the dominant life form they had positioned themselves as, having created machines of human-level or superior intelligence and given these human rights. Yet it remains an anthropocentric world and, by anthropocentric reasoning, humans have managed to entrap themselves further in labour instead of freeing themselves from it through machinery. The premise on which the indenture system is built – that 'beings' of human-level intelligence should have human rights, and then vice versa (214) – evidences that anthropocentrism is still ingrained in this society's worldview. A good example of anthropocentrism and its problematic reasoning is that the desire to survive defines robots

"as human-equivalent and therefore deserving autonomy" (25), yet this reasoning is not applied to other forms of life, from bacteria to plants and animals. These are experimented on, modified, and utilised (e.g. 75, 130, 143, 157, 265). However, it may be the same anthropocentric reasoning that gives robots human rights in this fictitious example, that can protect nature if nature is granted personhood and therefore legal rights. Such attempts have been in process for the last several years (Dogaru and Dogaru, 'The Rights of Nature' I, 'The Rights of Nature' II). A notable objection to granting nature legal status is that this will limit human freedom (Dogaru and Dogaru 'The Rights of Nature' I) – an anthropocentric argument, which captures an essential criticism of humans that both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* make. At present, with the anthropocentric worldview still holding firm, humankind is selfish and short-sighted.

Autonomous demonstrates that humans are self-centred in a way that goes beyond what is necessary for self-preservation both on a collective and individual level. For example, Jack accepts when Threezed offers sex as gratitude for freeing him, despite knowing that he may be trying to manipulate her or behaving as his indentureship had trained him to (42), and despite him never giving clear consent when she asks him if he is certain of his offer (43). In that moment, she is thinking about "dying wishes" (43) as she realises that the IPC will most likely assassinate her. It might be argued that this is a moment of vulnerability for her, and thus her questionable and selfish behaviour in taking advantage of Threezed is at least understandable. However, they continue their sexual relationship throughout the novel, long past Jack's moment of existential fear. Eliasz, too, acts in self-interest when he pays for Paladin's autonomy at the end of the novel, because he "can't stand the idea of the woman [he loves] not being autonomous" (288). It seems that he made this decision more for himself than for Paladin. He also choses to ensure that Paladin is not irreparably damaged during the confrontation with Jack, Med, and Threezed (275) instead of completing his mission to stop the woman he believes is a terrorist (16), a mission during which he tortured and killed a number of people (e.g. 93, 187). His priorities are aligned with a sense of 'the greater good' until they could negatively affect himself.

The above behaviours of individuals and society generally reflect the underlying issue of ownership that the novel explores. It posits that the mindset of ownership in humankind is a fundamental flaw in this civilisation. It is not ownership itself that it being criticised, though, but the notion that everything can and should be owned, even freedom. As long as one can pay for citizenship, food, housing, transport, even pharmaceuticals, one is autonomous. Without money, one is forced to become indentured. Yet the convoluted nature of this reasoning is apparent in the realisation that people are not truly autonomous, because, in this society, they are beholden to their financial status. It is the same reasoning that led to the implementation of the human indenture system itself. In this society, freedom is an illusion.

The ownership mindset is an essential feature of the human civilisation depicted in the novel. As has already been argued in the section on *Walkaway*, humanity's proclivity to accumulate resources is driven by the desire to survive, and the fear of death. As long as ownership is equated with survival as it is in this society, humans' fear of death traps them in this dysfunctional, maladaptive economy. However, humans desire more than just survival once this seems secured. They want to thrive, as well, and so they create illusions to supress the fear that drives them and to delude themselves into believing that their desires are being met. When we build societies and identities on delusion, reality will undercut their structure and threaten collapse. *Autonomous* suggests that humans commonly meet this threat with convoluted reasoning and short-sightedness, because what they fear most is the collapse of the structure which has, thus far, meant survival to them.

The misanthropy in *Autonomous* is an essentialist misanthropy. It reflects a belief that humans tend to double standards and hypocrisy, are ambiguous, deceptive, and emotionally messy, which traps society in a perpetual loop of self-induced problems. Additionally, the body ties humans to existential fear. We die because our bodies age, are irreparably damaged, or become terminally ill. If our bodies' needs are not met, we suffer. Underlying all of this is the desire to survive, programmed into humans as much as it is in robots and which feels "like hope" (25), but the pursuit of this hope is always matched by the fear of despair, struggle, and death. It is because fear is the shadow of desire that

humans are, essentially, selfish. The misanthropy in *Autonomous* states that humans are trapped by their own biology, and thus imprisoned in their bodies.

CONCLUSION

Both *Walkaway* and *Autonomous* focus on attempts to overcome existential fear through technology. They view the human body, ruled by its physical instincts and base needs, as a barrier to the infinite potential of the human mind. In both books, our bodies and emotions are represented as constraints placed on our rational intellect that inhibit progress. *Walkaway* attempts to overcome the dread of inevitable death by constructing an idealistic techno-utopia, where we overcome these flaws by allowing our rational minds of infinite potential to be freed from the bonds of our emotional, needy, temporal bodies. The novel also expresses a feeling of being rejected by "the universe" (278) because humans push, but cannot exceed, the limits of entropy. Its techno-utopia is a way of pre-emptively rejecting the natural world before humans can be hurt by the consequences of the Earth system restabilising according to its natural laws.

In contrast, *Autonomous* dismisses the possibility divorcing our bodies and minds through the digitisation of our personalities as a form of virtual resurrection and immortality (220-221). Instead, it presents artificial intelligence as innately superior to limited human existence and sees the development of AI as the next step in the evolution of the mind, but also as impossible for humans to achieve. Nonetheless, like *Walkaway*, this reflects a sense of inadequacy and a fear of insignificance in the context of the universe. These emotions are the consequence of our anthropocentric worldview being shaken, as they are the flipside of arrogance. *Autonomous* idealises artificial life, such as AI housed in robots and biobots, as being the only way humans can create something that overcomes our sense of insignificance in the face of our insecurity about our position in the order of the Earth system and our consequently derailed sense of self. It does not disagree with *Walkaway*'s idealistic vision, but feels that the existential dread at the core of human consciousness makes us too flawed and binds us to perpetually difficult human life in spite of technological advances. *Autonomous* yearns for *Walkaway's* idealism, but it

believes the ideal to be unattainable and the misery of human life therefore impossible to overcome. Its dream of transcendence is depicted as a fantasy, but in *Walkaway* this dream is portrayed as realisable. Both are nonetheless expressing the same desire to escape. The novels thus represent differing escapist positions on the same continuum of attempted transcendence.

On the surface, it seems that the characters in *Autonomous* are trying to escape the patent system or the power of capital. However, I would argue that what the characters truly long for is to escape the restraints of the human body. *Autonomous* assumes that bio-entrapment is the cause of the greed and desperation that drives the plot. To me, bio-entrapment is a problematic concept because it presumes that the physical form is functionally and/or aesthetically inadequate from the outset. It is a harmful and self-limiting position that arrogantly assumes we have already reached a full understanding of the human body and psyche. Humans have learnt much about their own biology in a relatively short period of time, but there is the danger of this achievement dazzling us to the extent that we lose perspective of how much we have yet to discover, especially in the field of neuroscience. As such, this position takes for granted the inferences we make through our limited perspective and judges humankind as lacking, too flawed to progress the way it dreams of doing.

The bio-entrapment position also undervalues the role humans play in creating technology. It argues that the body requires too much but gives too little, thereby holding back the mind. Thus, if we can free the mind from the effort required to maintain the body, we can overcome the existential fear that limits our capacity to act in moral and ethical accord with one another. I would argue, however, that bio-entrapment is a position rooted in the frustration of reality limiting our imagination. Like body dysmorphia, bio-entrapment projects our faults onto our physical being, creating the misanthropic notion that our existence is fundamentally limited by our bodies. Thus this form of misanthropy is an escapist mindset rooted in feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred that denies the potential in imperfection by focusing on what is lacking rather than what is present. A balanced view is required, which acknowledges the limitations of the body, and in

particular as being part of a transcorporeal network. A positive attitude towards our bodies and minds cannot be achieved as long as we reject this aspect.

That said, when not taken to its extreme, there is value in recognising limitations and in seeking to create a way to overcome them. Transcendence is a fascinating, exciting, and worthwhile pursuit, but it should not be confused with escaping imperfection. The characters in *Autonomous* are trapped by their fear of imperfection, death, and the potential smallness of their existence. Thus they are driven by a desire to escape the bonds of their humanity, disguised as a rational search for how to transcend the existential crisis of the moment. Ultimately, the book demonstrates why it is dangerous to attribute all our flaws to our bodies and natural desires. Instead, transcendence requires us to acknowledge our limitations, our humanity, and grow with our imperfections instead of destroying ourselves to achieve an imitation of the ideal. The idea of perfection has a long history in both spiritual and intellectual pursuits, which the books by Passmore and Hyde discuss, and I believe it is rooted in our curiosity about the 'how's' and 'why's' of our existence. As Passmore and Hyde show, we do not have a uniform idea of what would constitute the perfect human, but we can certainly recognise what is imperfect. Defining things by what they are not or do not have, instead of what they are or do have is, I think, a definitive feature of the bio-entrapment mindset because it is deficit-oriented. This is because, compared to a standard of perfection, something will always be lacking. The relationship between fear and desire can be seen as a measure of 'want', that is, of lacking something but desiring to have it. In terms of physical threats, for example, to fear experiencing pain is to desire painlessness. The misanthropy of bio-entrapment views limitations as flaws and therefore deficits of potential perfection. As I have said, identifying flaws or limitations is not inherently negative. It is the fear of what those deficits mean for human existence, and the accompanying negative emotions such as despair, hopelessness, or hatred, that result in a misanthropic response.

Thus the bio-entrapment misanthropy in *Autonomous* shows that identifying fears, and the behaviours and limits derived from those fears, is necessary for addressing them by contrasting how responding to existential dread can either help us positively develop, or entrap us. The world that Newitz creates is an exciting vision of biotechnology and the

potential future where we can improve through innovation. It is limited, though, in the apparent unwillingness to include the human body in its development. This reluctance maintains the anthropocentric divide that artificially separates humans and other organic life. The heavy focus on the perceived shortcomings imposed by ageing and death limits our approach to living life, which is seen in how the characters' psyches are dominated by the desire not to die, instead of the joy of being alive. Additionally, the novel's focus on the fear of ageing and dying limits the application of science and technology to life extension, and to the detriment of the quality of life.

Nevertheless, I find that the novel invites consideration of our relationship with our bodies. The aspects of bodily experience raised in the novel, particularly the connection between the physical and the emotional, stimulate thought on how we can improve. The distinction that I would make, and which I believe takes us a step back from fear, is that we should consider how to live with and within our bodies, instead of without our bodies, in both senses of the word. Simulation and virtuality are ways in which humans can extend their relationship with technology, establishing a type of techno-transcorporeality. This can be a valuable tool for self-extension, self-exploration, and self-improvement. However, this is one facet of human subjectivity needs to be reconstructed to adapt to a non-anthropocentric world, and it is often emphasised too much. I would argue that accepting our embodiment is necessary to establish a transcorporeal relationship with nature, and this relationship is vital to harmonious existence with the Earth system. In my opinion, fostering such a relationship will lead to a much more balanced and less fearful approach to life and, more importantly, living.

The hatred of the human body in *Autonomous* seems to derive from a bitterness about how easily humans can be hurt or killed. The novel contrasts the resilience of an artificial body with one made of flesh. It makes the argument that AI can be transferred from one body to another, its parts upgraded and replaced, while damage to a human body and mind is far more difficult to heal and sometimes impossible to undo (e.g. 270). Unlike AI, the human mind cannot be moved to a new body if the original one is too damaged or becomes too old. This amplifies the underlying strain of grief resulting from violence and death throughout the novel. Yet every directive to hurt or kill in *Autonomous* is given by

a human. Thus the drive to transcend the suffering attributed in the novel to the human body's fragility is warped into a series of ideologies that legitimise violence. As such, envy of an unattainable perfection in the form of artificial bodies and intelligences, and fear of a body constantly on the verge of failure, causes us to create systems that generate suffering instead of alleviating it. These structures become apparent after the first death in the novel, when Jack kills an intruder trying to steal her stash of pharmaceuticals. She then spends the rest of the novel trying to outrun agents who are after her for pirating those pharmaceuticals, stealing intellectual property by copying the chemical composition of the drugs. The novel argues that hypercapitalism and the patent laws in this society are both the cause and product of systemic inequality and the drivers of suffering. I agree with this in some respects, but it seems to me that the root cause of human problems in the novel is the existential fear that comes from and feeds back into systemic violence, and humankind's ability to rationalise it. In this regard, I find *Walkaway* more honest in its misanthropy when it states that human problems come from our ability to rationalise anything and successfully delude ourselves.

Yet I would argue that, because of its idealism, *Walkaway* slips into the process of self-delusion that it critiques. The belief reflected in the novel's ending that an ideal can be attained as an end-point that will thereafter not require maintenance or work is both foolish and dangerous. It assumes the possibility of a state in which whatever changes humans make are always positive for everyone, which is an absurd generalisation even if it is a pleasant fantasy. It is also an arrogant assumption in that it does not take into consideration the multitude of factors outside of human control. Nonetheless, the focus on acting from a place of hope instead of fear is valuable and constructive. I believe this attitude could positively impact interpersonal and even intrapersonal relationships. However, this optimism shifts towards misanthropy as the novel increasingly falls in line with the definition of progress as growth or expansion to reach perfection as an ultimate destination, instead of reconceptualising progress as a continuous process of development as a way to address humankind's struggle with entropy. Thus, the idealised vision in *Walkaway* transforms from a utopian vision of the future to a dystopian foil of the present. I believe that by focusing too much on the innate failure of human nature, the novel undermines its main point: that we as individuals have space to hope and can build a

better future, even when there is cause for fear. There is significant power in acting positively, out of hopefulness, no matter the circumstances. *Walkaway* demonstrates this despite its weaker story-telling effectiveness, logical fallacies, and misanthropy.

Like *Autonomous*, *Walkaway* treats bodies and emotions as impediments to the infinite potential of the human mind. The novel spends time emphasising sensation as an experience linked to our psychological and emotional being (e.g. 97-98), but the ending of the novel shows bodies to be disposable and replaceable. *Walkaway* contains examples of how our experiences affect our bodies and vice versa, yet it belies our bodies' importance in our lived experience. Ultimately, this indicates an insecure relationship with the body, not necessarily one of hatred but certainly rife with existential anxiety. The final utopian vision in *Walkaway* suggests that technology can replace the human body, instead of being viewed as something that might be integrated with it. This feeling of disharmony between humans, our bodies, and the environment pervades the novel, amplifying the misanthropic existentialism used to justify replacing our bodies with machines. Yet, because the ideal in the novel focuses heavily on transcendence being the disassociation of the mind from the body, it never resolves the existential dread that underlies the desire to transcend.

Walkaway's emphasis on transcendence as the dissociation between mind and body showcases the emphasis that simulation places on the mind-body divide, which is in my opinion one of the main downsides to virtuality. The Cartesian division of mind and body is replicated in the worldview that separates humans and nature. The notion that humans are not a part of the greater whole of the Earth system makes it easy to rationalise that the mind is not an inextricable part of the body. Simulation creates the illusion that the mind and the body can be separated. It is important, in the precarious contemporary context, that humankind does not become lost in that illusion. As Baudrillard's theory of simulation and simulacra suggests, when reality has been overcome, a pessimistic sort of nihilism can creep in. Furthermore, as Baudrillard's theory also shows, humans are not always capable of telling the difference between reality and simulation. Therein lies the danger of spending too much time in virtuality, attempting to transcend the physical. In virtuality, reality can be programmed and reset as desired. This creates the illusion of the

sense that if nothing is real, nothing really matters. However, the real world contains more than humans and their meaning-making and symbolism, and the Anthropocene has proven that human activity affects every other sphere on Earth. Here, consequences matter, and they reverberate far beyond ourselves and the present.

This is why the discussions around society and systemic issues in both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* are not to be ignored. While I do not always agree with the conclusions that the characters in *Walkaway* draw, I believe that its discussions about the nature of hypercapitalism and interpersonal relationships are provocative and stimulating. It is vital for us to consider how we came to construct present systems, whether these are still applicable, and how we might improve them. This debate is something that I think *Walkaway* demonstrates more successfully than *Autonomous*. That said, the more character-driven approach of *Autonomous* makes bridging the gap between the theoretical and the real world more accessible than *Walkaway*. As such, the story of *Walkaway* concludes in an idealistic solution that shifts the narrative from a story of growth to largely abstract and philosophical discussions that undermine the thought experiments that drive the plot. Nonetheless, *Walkaway* provides an opportunity to consider what type of society we might build if a positive emotion like hopefulness motivated our behaviour. Additionally, both *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* show how technology has already become an integral part of daily life for humans. Even though both novels are dominated by a misanthropic mindset, they act as a foil to the flaws within our own increasingly techno-centric society and raise questions about how we can use technology to make the world better. While their anthropocentric existentialism places artificial limits on the trajectory of our development, the works highlight how we might use technology to benefit society, uplift the poor, and reduce our negative impact on the environment.

Thus, misanthropy in both novels functions, firstly, to draw attention to the general discontent simmering in our global society, and secondly, to aid in unpacking the reasons for it. Misanthropy in *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* makes clear that the primary problem for humanity lies in our struggle to find a collective identity that overcomes the dissonance between ourselves and the environment caused by trying to address existential fear through attaining a state of perfection. The desire for this ideal and the fear of its

unattainability is projected onto our technological creations, which become the foil for our own perceived deficits. The novels' misanthropy highlights that humans are imperfect, but in the dystopian context of each story, it also showcases the futility of seeking fulfilment in perfection. The sense of not truly having a place in the order of the universe that *Autonomous* and *Walkaway* express is a reflection of the failure of the illusion of anthropocentrism, and the pursuit of human physical and social perfectibility through science and technology will not address the sense of precariousness instilled by this. Understanding the techno-utopian and bio-entrapment misanthropies of the novels shows us that we cannot transcend our imperfection, but we might transcend the limitations that we have placed on ourselves through our existential fear by reconnecting the mind and the body, and cultivating harmony with the greater Earth system of which we are but one part.

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