this question I frame my last few words in the context of a discussion with my daughter, who is eleven years old as of this writing and who is still trying to figure out just what it is that I do. And at the very end, my favorite person puts in an appearance—Anne Rice's fictional antihero the Vampire Lestat, who has mysteriously acquired a Ph.D. in anthropology. In the context of a work on cultural theory, Lestat may have a few pithy things to say about vision between the worlds.

1

Collective Structures

In the 1980s and early 1990s, in an extensive group of texts cutting across disciplines—including the military; big (and small) business; education; computer, social, and cognitive science; and psychology—it was perhaps the most quoted phrase of any new work of fiction: "A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions. . . . Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding." These by-now-familiar lines are from William Gibson's (1984) description of cyberspace in his novel *Neuromancer,* the founding work for the genre of cyberpunk. Cyberspace is not just simulations, or military experimentation, or computer-supported work, but a space of pure communication, the free market of symbolic exchange—and, as it soon developed, of exotic sensuality mediated by exotic technology. The concept of cyberspace, which Gibson pulled from the kinds of electronic networking he saw already in use all around him, interpellated a large and diffuse assortment of workers in a variety of professional, academic, and military pursuits, as well as a considerable number of researchers whose work could not be collapsed into a traditionally identifiable category. They had been doing whatever they were doing for some time, but the arrival of *Neuromancer* was for many of them a signal announcing their existence to a larger audience, and simultaneously naming their subculture for themselves in a spectacular and definitive manner.

Since I began my research on cyberspace, Gibson's book, as well

as those of the other early cyberpunk authors, has faded to backdrop, and cyberspace has gone from an interesting fantasy to a hotly contested financial, cultural, and ethical frontier. Some folks claim it has gone even further, on to ho-hum old business as usual. Newer works of what might be called (Goddess excuse me) postcyberpunk, such as Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash,* have taken their turn at the leading edge of popular culture.

What was so sizzling about the whole thing? Cyberspace as Gibson described it was a physically inhabitable, electronically generated alternate reality. It was entered by means of direct links to the brain; that is, it was inhabited by refigured human "persons" separated from their physical bodies which were parked in "normal" space. In cyberspace, the physical laws of "normal" space did not need to apply, although some experiential rules carried over from normal space; for example, the geometry of cyberspace as Gibson described it was Cartesian. In *Neuromancer* the "original" body was the authenticating source for the refigured person in cyberspace; no "persons" existed whose presence was not warranted by the concomitant existence of a physical body back in "normal" space. But death in either normal space or cyberspace was real, in the sense that if the "person" in cyberspace died, the body in normal space died also, and vice versa.

In later novels in the Neuromancer series, Gibson allowed his concept of cyberspace to evolve. Among other things, he gave up the idea that consciousness in cyberspace had to be warranted in a physical body. This change had interesting consequences, for example, the appearance in cyberspace of orishas and loas, as well as hints of "oversoul" structures that did not manifest as bounded entities.[1] It also helped to both mollify and enflame (take your pick) the hordes of literary critics, cultural theorists, computer scientists, feminist theorists, hackers, and religious fundamentalists who had jumped into the cyberspace fray with gusto and enthusiasm.

As Gibson maintained from the beginning, to a certain extent cyberspace does exist now, as a metaphor for late-twentieth-century

communications technologies, for instance, as data banks, financial systems, computer networks, military simulations, and ATMs. As John Perry Barlow, the Grateful Dead songwriter who is also a founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, says: When you put your card into your automated teller, cyberspace is where your money is. For the rest of Gibson's vision—the dizzying world of the console cowboy—of course, many of us live at least part-time in cyberspace already. We call it computer conferencing, or phone sex, or virtual this or that, but insofar as it involves communicating with other people through narrow-bandwidth media, it is about negotiating the tensions between individual subjects, virtual collectivities, and the physical bodies in which they may or may not be grounded. Although Gibson's cyberspace arrived with the publication of a particular text in 1984, it crystallized certain debates surrounding meaning in connection with particular technological and cultural objects that had themselves been in existence for some time. Thus the cultural ascension of the term *cyberspace* had both positive and negative results. The positive side is perhaps ubiquitous, at least if one is a hacker, but the negative side concerns how cultural debates over beliefs and practices in communications technologies that might have crystallized in different forms were dragged into the cyberspace definition by its immense conceptual/gravitational field. Thus all of the elements of virtuality have come to possess a greater or less association with the idea of cyberspace, including those that do not particularly relate to it. They have all been with us for many years in various forms—visually as dioramas and botanical gardens, aurally as radio dramas, kinesthetically as carnival rides, textually perhaps as novels.

The network of electronic communication prosthetics for which cyberspace is the metaphor has achieved visibility in the context of late capitalism, in the historical moment of biosociality (Paul Rabinow's term for the collapse of the distinctions between biological observation, construction, and control, as in the Human Genome Project) or technosociality (my term, in playful juxtaposition to

Rabinow's and referring to the state in which technology and nature are the same thing, as when one inhabits a network as a social environment). I am interested in cyberspace for a number of reasons. First, because it is a social environment. The networks are elsewheres where we can observe new collective structures risking themselves in novel conditions. These structures take the form of organized and moderated conferences, multiuser groups, anarchic chats, clandestine assignations. Some are trivial, some are definitely not trivial and have real effects outside the nets. Some of the interactions are racially differentiated and gendered, stereotypical and Cartesian, reifying old power differentials whose workings are familiar and whose effects are well understood. But some of the interactions are novel, strange, perhaps transformative, and certainly disruptive of many traditional attempts at categorization.

Second, I am interested in cyberspace because the kinds of interactions we can observe within the spaces of prosthetic communication are for me emblematic of the current state of complex interaction between humans and machines. Third, the identities that emerge from these interactions—fragmented, complex, diffracted through the lenses of technology, culture, and new technocultural formations—seem to me to be, for better or worse, more visible as the critters we ourselves are in process of becoming, here at the close of the mechanical age. I see these identities engaged in a wonderful and awesome struggle, straining to make meaning and to make sense out of the very idea of culture as they know it, swimming for their lives in the powerful currents of high technology, power structures, and market forces beyond their imagination. In this struggle I find certain older structures stubbornly trying to reassert themselves in a technosocial milieu that to them seems to have gone berserk. These are the structures of individual caring, love, and perhaps most poignant, of desire.

While there is an obvious retrogressive danger in posing these cultural formations and collective structures as being in opposition, and thereby of reifying in my analysis the whole ontology of binarism

which so much of cultural theory—including my own—attempts to reframe and deconstruct, I am at heart a novelist . . . a shameless teller of stories. That's why titling this book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* is something I do with considerably mixed emotions, but, in fine, have chosen to do. Mindful of the ontic danger signals implicit in the words *war, close,* and *age,* I still find myself—like my favorite antihero, Anne Rice's Vampire Lestat—doing it anyway. And, as we will see later, Lestat himself plays a larger role in this cultural transformation than we might suppose.

The War of Desire and Technology is about science fiction, in the sense that it is about emergent technologies, shifting boundaries between the living and the nonliving, optional embodiments . . . in other words, about the everyday world as cyborg habitat. But it is only partly about cyberspace. It is also about social systems that arise in phantasmatic spaces enabled by and constituted through communication technologies. To some extent they exist in the cultural milieu suggested by Gibson's cyberspace metaphor. But they also considerably predate *Neuromancer.* Their existence both validates Gibson's dark and dystopic vision, points beyond it to other, perhaps more congenial visions, and also shows how the cyberspace metaphor emerged from cultural processes long under way.

I am not a neutral observer. I live a good part of my life in cyberspace, surfing the nets, frequently feeling like a fast-forward flaneur. I am interested in prosthetic communication for what it shows of the "real" world that might otherwise go unnoticed. And I am interested because of the potential of cyberspace for emergent behavior, for new social forms that arise in a circumstance in which *body, meet, place,* and even *space* mean something quite different from our accustomed understanding. I want to see how tenacious these new social forms are in the face of adversity, and what we can learn from them about social problems outside the worlds of the nets. I want to see how groups of friends evolve when their meeting room exists in a purely symbolic space. I want to see how narrowing the bandwidth—that

is, doing without customary modes of symbolic exchange such as gesture and voice tone—affects sharing and trust, and how inhabitants of virtual systems construct and maintain categories such as gender and race. I want to see how people without bodies make love.[2]

The predominant mode of these emergent forms is what I have called the technosocial, in playful appreciation of Paul Rabinow's theory of the biosocial. Rabinow describes biosociality as the gradual implosion of the categories of nature and culture, exemplified in research into genetics as an extension of structures of civilization over areas formerly considered "natural." Rabinow says that "in biosociality, nature will be modeled on culture understood as practice; it will be known and remade through technique; nature will finally become artificial, just as culture becomes natural. . . . The objectivism of social factors is now giving way to . . . the beginnings of a redefinition and eventual operationalization of nature."[3] When I look for new social forms in cyberspace, it is with this process in mind. I am seeking social structures in circumstances in which the technological is the natural, in which social space is computer code, consensual and hallucinatory.

This trek into the mysterious recesses of technology, which in the case of computer technology is ultimately the binary, in search of the natural is reminiscent of some classical tropes with which we may be familiar. Of course there is an ironic twist to this Conradesque search: I am suggesting a venture not into the heart of "nature" in search of redemption but rather into the heart of "technology" in search of nature. And not nature as object, place, or originary situation, but rather in Haraway's sense nature as Coyote, the Native American trickster-spirit animal—that is, as diversity, flexibility, irruption, playfulness, or put briefly, nature as *actant,* as process, continual reinvention and encounter, that actively resists, disrupts—in sum (in Haraway's words), queers—representation. When I speak of life in the nets as technosocial, I am pointing to what both Rabinow and Haraway imply, with a hopeful eye on the future not of technology but of the social forms within technology-viewed-as-nature—those social

forms to whom technology has become invisible, in no more and no less the same way that the workings of our bodies have become invisible in the face of a burgeoning medical imaging industry whose premise is to make the body thoroughly visible—social beings for whom technology *is* nature, for whom elsewhere *is* geography, for whom the problematic tie between unitary awareness and unitary physical body has *political* consequences. (I want to see if cyberspace is a base camp for some kinds of cyborgs, from which they might stage a coup on the rest of "reality.")

Over the past few years I have written a number of articles about political entities viewed as fixed in place by a hypertrophy of location technologies. The purpose of location technology is to halt or reverse the gradual and pervasive disappearance of the socially and legally constituted individual in a society in which the meanings of terms such as *distance* and *direction* are subject to increasing slippage. And this slippage, of course, does not refer only to the physical or geographic, but to the other, non-Cartesian modes of location. Freud was perhaps the first to perform a kind of codification upon this imaginal territory, in that he produced a detailed and, it was believed, replicable body of knowledge that was concerned with the territory of the unconscious—a territory which, of course, was invented and culturally produced in the act of definition. However, it was not Freud's articulation of the unconscious that concerns us here, but rather the production of diagnostic criteria which accompanied Freud's work—the seeds of what is now called the *DSM,* the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* published by the American Psychiatric Association. The *DSM* is an example of the kinds of location technologies to which I refer, because in the process of defining a psychological disorder it simultaneously produces, organizes, and legitimizes a discursive space that has quasi-Cartesian concomitants. The inhabitant proper to this space is the virtual entity of psychological testing, census taking, legal documentation, telephone numbers, street addresses—in brief, a collection of virtual elements that, taken together, form a *materialized discursivity* of their own

that I refer to as the fiduciary subject.[4] I have found this idea a useful way to articulate the (always political) tie between what society defines as a single physical body and a single awareness of self.

Thus the technology that produces and maintains the fiduciary subject not only produces a discursive landscape, but simultaneously calls into being inhabitants of that landscape who are proper to its geography and character. Such a landscape and such inhabitants might be a trivial exercise; after all, an almost equivalent definition would work for the discursive landscape of the theater or television. The link to its importance, however, is precisely that . . . namely, a link, a coupling between the phantasmic space that the location technology calls into being and the physical space of pain and pleasure that the human body inhabits. This critical element differentiates what is important from what is trivial in virtual space. I refer to the production and maintenance of this link between a discursive space and a physical space as warranting. By means of the process of warranting, for example, the political apparatus of government is able to guarantee the production of what would be called a citizen. Broadly, this citizen is composed of two major elements. One is the collection of physical and performative attributes that Judith Butler and Kobena Mercer in separate works call the culturally intelligible body.[5] The other is the collection of virtual attributes which, taken together, compose a structure of meaning and intention for the first part. Taken together, these two broadly defined elements compose a socially apprehensible citizen.

I want to be careful in making these distinctions that I do not reify dichotomies already in place. There is always a danger in distinguishing the body from some other collection of attributes linked to the body. I want to be quite clear that the physical/virtual distinction is *not* a mind/body distinction. The concept of mind is not part of virtual systems theory, and the virtual component of the socially apprehensible citizen is not a disembodied thinking thing, but rather a different way of conceptualizing a *relationship* to the human body. In this sense virtual systems theory is rather like epistemological feng shui, the Chinese art of placement. With this in mind, let me carry the discussion further.

The socially apprehensible citizen, then, consists of a collection of both physical and discursive elements. Although the physical elements possess a special and bounded order of reality on account of their particular relationship to the social disciplines of pain and pleasure, the remainder of the citizen—by far the greater part, the part which is also concerned with the production of meaning of the physical part—is discursive. By means of warranting, this discursive entity is tied to an association with a particular physical body, and the two together, the physical and the discursive, constitute the socially apprehensible citizen. Within a political framework, the discursive entity—including the meaning associated with the physical body—is produced by means of texts, such as legal, medical, and psychological description. Because so much of such an identity is discursive and is produced through the actions of texts, I have elsewhere referred to it as *legible* body, that is, as textually mediated physicality. The legible body is the social, rather than physical, body; the legible body displays the social meaning of "body" on its surface, presenting a set of cultural codes that organize the ways the body is apprehended and that determine the range of socially appropriate responses.

To my knowledge, William Gibson was the first writer to deal with the issue of warranting. Although he did not specifically refer to the phenomenon, it is implicit in his understanding of the ontology of cyberspace. In *Neuromancer,* a death in cyberspace meant that the physical body in biological space also died—that is, that there is an implied link between the virtual body (or more properly the discursive convergences that constitute and maintain the discursive body in cyberspace), and the convergences of discourses, some of which are of similar nature to the virtual, that constitute the body in physical space—a link which is powerful enough to carry information that the physical (i.e., biological) body interprets or understands as physical (e.g., sickness and death). A rough and inexact analogue to this link is the phenomenon referred to as virtuality sickness, a sensation

of nausea which is caused by the time lag between a physical head movement and the concomitant change in viewpoint or perspective within a virtual simulation. Virtuality sickness is far from death, although it is unpleasant, but it demonstrates the principle to which I refer.

The role of the human sciences in articulating the discursive moves that produce the fiduciary subject has been discussed at length in other contexts by, for example, Foucault. In *The History of Madness,* Foucault discusses the epistemological and social moves by means of which certain people are excluded from normal social intercourse. The result of these moves is the discursive space that simultaneously organizes and calls into being the rational social order. Later, in *The Birth of the Prison,* Foucault describes a method of dividing and organizing physical space so as to make the inhabitants of that space available for observation; this process is accomplished in ways that presage the gradual transformation of the citizen into streams of information, a process that Haraway identifies as part of the production of the cyborg.[6]

In contrast to the relentlessly monistic articulations of physical and virtual space that law and science favor, let us juxtapose the mode of the technosocial, of reinvention and encounter in a technological space viewed as itself a social and physical environment, as a kind of nature. In the idealized view of such a space, the very elements that Foucault saw as being suppressed in the process of "gridding" reassert themselves in novel ways—irruptively constituting identities that are simultaneously technological and social, a catastrophic emergence of the ludic and the unpredictable at the very heart of the ordered mathematical structures that by their nature seek to suppress it. This process is possible, in fact inevitable, because the technosocial, the social mode of the computer nets, evokes unruly multiplicity as an integral part of social identity. There is plenty of precedent for multiplicity as a response to violence, and certainly enough for multiplicity as a response to less overt methods of subjection; in fact, in a pun on Klausewitz's remark that war is politics by other means, it is tempting to describe multiplicity as resistance by other means—keeping in mind that multiplicity alone, of which we have ample evidence, does not in and of itself constitute a *successful* resistance (it is important not to forget the danger of simple responses, of what Leila Cosu-Lughod has called the romance of resistance), but it is still a response that is perspicuous in incidences of psychological abuse and stress.

Some forms of multiple personality are useful examples of such a social mode ready to hand. Further, in the language of the programmers who already inhabit the frontiers of the technosocial, multiple personality is a mode that is already in place, fairly debugged in the current release. Multiples exist around us here and now, and regardless of the bad press accorded to multiple personality "disorder," some remain invisible, living their lives quietly and gracefully. Their situation suggests many of the issues of passing and "outing" that are familiar from other discourses.

I do not want to suggest that there is some magical or redemptive quality to multiple personality, but rather that the way in which multiplicity plays itself out within a physical and psychological frame is highly suggestive of a broader abstraction of human behavior, one that is particularly noticeable in the technosocial framework of virtual systems. The multiple is the enantiomorph, the opposite, of the unitary monistic identity that location technology produces. The multiple is the socializer within the computer networks, a being warranted to, but outside of, a single physical body. The body in question sits at a computer terminal somewhere, but the locus of sociality that would in an older dispensation be associated with this body goes on in a space which is quite irrelevant to it.

The cyborg, the multiple personality, the technosocial subject, Gibson's cyberspace cowboy all suggest a radical rewriting, in the technosocial space (which is largely constituted by textual production, much of which is the computer code by whose prosthetic mediation a significant portion of the space of technosociality exists), of the bounded individual as the standard social unit and validated social actant. For

example, the well-known multiple Truddi Chase, according to her psychologist/author, consists of 92 supposed "functions." In her study of multiple personality and trauma, "The Horror of No Longer Remembering the Reason for Forgetting," Thyrza Goodeve points out:

> Truddi's troops (who, for the most part, significantly, do not go by conventional "names," but by what we might call "functions"—*The Interpreter, The Gate Keeper, The Buffer, The Recorder,* for example)—explain their origin as "an intellectual reproduction system."[7] The individual, imploding under the pressures of her material conditions, disappears, and the emergent construction, developing from the ashes of violence, seems something much closer to the population of a "small town," or an ever flickering series of switching television channels—but never that embattled Cartesian *cogito* so often presumed by the pronoun "I."[8]

Such fractured identities call attention to alternatives, always multiple, always in tension. Just as changes in complex "real-world" political economies presage a radical simplification of biological diversity, the ramification of complex social systems in the *alter* space of communications technologies suggests a war between simplification and multiplicity . . . an explosion of actors and actants that includes the almost-living, the not-living, and the never-living, arising in the boundaries between technology, society, and "nature," in the architectures of multiple embodiments and multiple selves. We already have a considerable industry built around its promise, although we never refer to it in those terms. There is, of course, nothing fortuitous about these developments. Never has so much attention been paid to, so much big money spent on, a phenomenon that originated as science fiction only ten years earlier. A look at the origins of virtual systems may suggest that the effort is driven by more than either defense needs or market forces can explain.

2

Risking Themselves: Identity in Oshkosh

From an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle:*

> On July 23, 1990, a 27-year-old woman filed a complaint in Oshkosh, Wisconsin charging that Mark Peterson, an acquaintance, raped her in her car. The woman had been previously diagnosed as having Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). She claimed that Peterson raped her after deliberately drawing out one of her personalities, a naive young woman who he thought would be willing to have sex with him.

Cut to: the municipal building complex in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.[1] Outside the courthouse, gleaming white media vans lined the street, nose to tail like a pod of refrigerators in rut. A forest of bristling antennas reached skyward, and teenagers in brightly colored fast-food livery came and went bearing boxes and bags; the local pizza joints were doing a land-office business keeping the crews supplied. The sun was very bright, and we blinked as we emerged from the shadows of the courthouse. "Jim Clifford would have loved this," I commented. "I wonder what the Mashpee courthouse looked like during the trial he was researching."

"Where's Mashpee?" my friend asked.

"In New England. The town of Mashpee was originally an Indian village. The Mashpee Indians deeded some land to the settlers, and the settlers eventually took over everything. A few years ago the surviving Mashpee families sued the town of Mashpee to get their land back, claiming that it had been taken from them illegally. When the suit finally came to trial, the government argued that the case