

FUTURE CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE
IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

CAN KOPARAN

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2019

FUTURE CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE
IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
English Literature

by
Can Koparan

Boğaziçi University

2019

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Can Koparan, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature.....
Date 02.05.2019

ABSTRACT

Future Conceptions of Language in Contemporary Science Fiction Novel

This thesis focuses on three contemporary science fiction novels, Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue*, Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and China Miéville's *Embassytown*, in which those who are deprived of self-determination and abandoned to precarity try to cope with the negative effects of biopolitics. Although biopolitics as the intersection of biology and politics claims to be concerned with the health of human population, it ends up marginalizing certain lives as disposable and threatening to the order. This contradiction is sustained by the historical distinction between political life (*bios*) and biological life (*zoe*). Language, being viewed as the apex of a uniquely human political existence, is the site on which bare life is objectified and dominated. Consequently, the science fiction of the twentieth century often viewed language as a prison-house for thought and a tool of social control. However, with the nascent posthuman understanding of human nature as a cultural construct, these novels show the confluence of language and embodiment as an effective means of creating political resistance. In *Native Tongue* (1984), women construct a language to name their experience and to transform an oppressive biopolitics. Similarly, *Snow Crash* (1992) treats multiplicity of languages as a means of resisting power and viral discourses. *Embassytown* (2011) imagines a future when human and non-human beings discover the potential of metaphoric language in realizing the arbitrariness of political constructs and utilize it to resist authority. Representing bare life as a discursive category, these novels ultimately complicate the logic of biopolitics, which rests on the foundational distinction of *bios* from *zoe*.

ÖZET

Çağdaş Bilimkurgu Romanında Geleceğin Dil Kavrayışları

Bu tez, özbelirlenim imkanlarından mahrum bırakılıp güvencesizliğe terkedilen grupların, biyopolitikanın olumsuz etkileriyle mücadelesini ele alan üç çağdaş bilimkurgu romanına, Suzette Haden Elgin'in *Native Tongue*, Neal Stephenson'ın *Snow Crash* ve China Miéville'in *Embassytown* adlı eserlerine odaklanmaktadır. Biyoloji ve siyasetin kesişme noktası olarak insan nüfusunun sağlığını amaçladığı iddia edilse de, biyopolitika en nihayetinde kimi yaşamları elden çıkarılabilir ve düzen için tehlikeli addederek marjinalleştirmektedir. Siyasi yaşam (*bios*) ve biyolojik yaşam (*zoe*) arasındaki tarihsel ayrım bu çelişkiyi idame ettirmektedir. İnsanlığa özgü emsalsiz siyasi varoluşun zirvesi olarak görülen dil, çıplak hayatın nesneleştirilip tahakküm altına alındığı alanı oluşturmaktadır. Öyle ki, yirminci yüzyılda bilimkurgu çoğu zaman dili düşüncenin hapisanesi ve toplumsal kontrolün aracı olarak işlemiştir. Ancak, insan doğasının kültürel kurgusallığını savunarak gelişmekte olan insan sonrası kuramın etkisiyle, söz konusu romanlar dil ve bedenleşmenin birleşikliğini siyasi direnişin etkili bir unsuru olarak ele almaktadırlar. *Native Tongue*'da (1984) kadınlar deneyimlerini ifade etmek ve baskıcı biyopolitik düzeni dönüştürmek için bir dil inşa ederler. Benzer bir anlayışla, *Snow Crash* (1992), dilsel çeşitliliği iktidara ve viral söylemlere karşı bir direniş aracı olarak görmektedir. *Embassytown* (2011), insan ve insandışı varlıkların dilin eğretilme özelliğini siyasi tertiplerin keyfiliğini ortaya çıkarmak ve otoriteye karşı direnmek için kullandığı bir gelecek tahayyül etmektedir. Sonuçta, çıplak hayatın söylemsel bir kategori olarak temsil edilmesi, *bios* ve *zoe* arasındaki temel ayrıma dayanan biyopolitikanın mantığını sorgulatmaktadır.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Can Koparan

DEGREES AWARDED

PhD in English Literature, 2019, Boğaziçi University
MA in English Literature, 2013, Yeditepe University
BA in English Language and Literature, 2009, Yeditepe University
BA in Anthropology, 2008, Yeditepe University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Literary theory, anthropology of religion, political philosophy, science fiction studies, psychoanalysis, contemporary novel

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant, Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Boğaziçi University, 2017 - present
Guest Researcher, Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo, Spring-2017
Erasmus Advisor, Office of International Relations, Boğaziçi University, 2014-2017
Research Assistant, Department of Translation Studies, Okan University, 2012-2014
Ethnographer, Virtual Research, 2010-2012

AWARDS AND HONORS

Highest Honors List, Yeditepe University, 2013
Highest Honors List, Yeditepe University, 2008

COURSES TAUGHT

LIT 212: *Studies in Literature II*, (Teaching Assistant), Boğaziçi University, (Spring) 2017-2018

PUBLICATIONS

Koparan, C. (2013). Occidentalism, Hybridity and Acculturation in *Enchantress of Florence* and *White Castle*. Master's thesis, Yeditepe University.

Conference Proceedings:

“Tanpınar’s A Mind at Peace as a Belatedly Modern Novel” The Mediterranean Studies Association's 17th Annual Congress at University of Malaga at Marbella, Spain, May 28–31, 2014.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACT OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN <i>NATIVE TONGUE</i>	27
2.1 Biopolitics and precarity	27
2.2 Towards a women's tongue	56
2.3 Future bodies and language.....	76
CHAPTER 3: FROM COMMUNITY TO IMMUNITY: LANGUAGE AS VIRAL DISCOURSE IN <i>SNOW CRASH</i>	92
3.1. Hyperreal communities	92
3.2 Language against immunity	113
3.3 Embodied resistance.....	128
CHAPTER 4: TRUTH AND LYING IN AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL SENSE: LANGUAGE AND THE BODY IN <i>EMBASSYTOWN</i>	144
4.1 Language of the hosts.....	144
4.2 Metaphors in unison.....	173
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	187
REFERENCES.....	202

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to examine the ways in which language, politics and the body converge and inform one another in contemporary science fiction novels, to argue that since the nineteen-eighties, rather than merely a tool for controlling the body and consciousness, language has also been designated as an active site of resistance in which those who are denied political representation strive for legal, social, and biological self-determination by utilizing language for performative action. The sheer biological fact of life is included in politics as its main object and objective. Yet, it is also excluded from politics as a category that cannot speak for itself. Bare life, then, does not precede politics as a natural and given entity, but it is the outcome of a metaphysical distinction formed within the language of politics itself. Consequently, the representation of bare life is of political significance because its very exclusion from the political sphere brings biopolitics into being as the dominant regime in modernity, in which power has a firm hold on bare life and it exploits the bodies of anything alive for its own maintenance and profit.

Political power's ever-expanding management of life, the encapsulation of the body in "safe" zones, the rapidly increasing digitalization and disembodiment of the everyday experience, coupled with a growing awareness of the discursivity of politics, have given birth to a non-Cartesian view of the body and language as an interwoven category in the late twentieth century. That the representation of bare life is excluded from political discourse is not only a matter of deliberate coercion, but it is due to the characteristic foundation of modern politics. Tracing the experience of bare life as the disenfranchised body in popular fiction can give us fictional clues as

to how we should politicize life as such and imagine a more ethical world in which life becomes an affirmative category rather than being regarded negatively as disposability. In the depictions of biopolitical futures provided by the science fiction novels analyzed in this thesis, the speaking body as the site of bare life appears as using and creating language to attain self-determination and political agency. The performative use of language and the bodily acts ultimately become a means of complicating the foundational metaphysical oppositions of the Western political and philosophical tradition: political life/bare life, man/woman, mind/body, human/non-human and natural/cultural.

Giorgio Agamben (1998) states that it is bare life of the living body that needs to transform itself into *bios*, into political life, by contesting its exclusion as the constituting metaphysical principle of politics (Agamben, 1998). This thesis suggests that bare life has the potential of making itself appear as a resisting force within politics by transforming voice and the body into language and embodied resistance. In Agamben's historical view, it is only at the expense of the exclusion of bare life from politics, we have come to attain a political existence: "In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men" (1998, p. 7). Referring to Aristotle's distinction in the *Politics* between voice as belonging to all living beings and language as the ability of manifesting the just and the unjust, Agamben reasons that "The link between bare life and politics is the same link that the metaphysical definition of man as 'the living being who has language' seeks in the relation between *phone* and *logos*" (p. 7). Depicting future societies in which power pervades biology and technology alike while producing and subjugating the body, Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984), Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) and China Miéville's *Embassytown* (2011) are

such texts that ultimately attempt to heal this fractured link between *zoe* and *bios*, or voice and language, by representing the precarious experience of bare life as residing within the disposable body with the politically suppressed ability of speech.

These novels thematize linguistic determinism, a recurrent theme in contemporary science fiction, and work out its implications in various ways in order to represent bare life as a form of resistance to its objectification by and exclusion from politics. Linguistic determinism, whose weaker form is referred as linguistic relativity, simply suggests that the properties of a language determine knowledge and thought to a great extent, that different speakers form different worldviews because the languages they speak promote certain ways of perceiving the world, themselves and the others. What science fiction fictionalizes about this theory is the idea that it may be possible to transform politics by constructing new linguistic media, introducing changes into the existing languages or working to protect the multiplicity of languages and thought from being swallowed by grand narratives. In these novels, the politically oppressed characters struggle to attain individual or collective self-determination by recoding their experience in new languages or exploring the ideologically determined aspects of their precarious lives as a source of awareness for political action. Being bioengineered, having encounters with extraterrestrial sentience, or living in simulated environments, imbue the self with an awareness of the potentials of the estranged, hybridized, disembodied and the objectified bodies as resisting forces in these critical dystopias. The individual and collective struggles to appear as speaking bodies in politics is always entangled with the question of what counts as human in a world in which biology and disembodiment of subjectivity exist simultaneously as the two poles of political authority.

Consequently, resistance to political oppression in these novels is performed not only on a discursive level as a struggle for voicing individual or collective concerns, but it is also centered around opening up to the experience of the other as a way of creating solidarity. This thesis devotes three chapters to each of the above novels in order to indicate the ways in which the verbal and bodily manifestations of bare life are combined so that people can appear to demand egalitarian, non-violent, pluralistic participation in the city of men that is founded on the fractured ground between the animalistic, non-language voice of *zoe* and the oppressive, rational and profit-oriented coercion of *bios*. These novels propagate that the representations of the embodied actions of those abandoned to precarious living conditions demonstrate that neither the biological body nor language are essentially given organic and linguistic systems with immutable modes of operation, but they are open to constant change transforming each other in the process. In these novels, various figures with their bodies made vulnerable in precarious conditions, such as the disenfranchised woman, outcast hacker/courier of information and the biotechnologically augmented, cyborgian body, have to live with the awareness that they are easily disposable as far as the political authority is concerned. This pattern of thought should be read with Judith Butler's characterization of embodied resistance as a response to politically induced precarity in the twenty-first century.

Butler (2009) defines precarity as a common life condition "in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, p. ii). The precarious figures I have mentioned above are associated with bare life, voice, animality and alterity in the sense of being less than human in the novels that form the focus of this thesis. I take precarity in a general sense to denote what Butler succinctly describes

as a condition of being “exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection” (p. ii).

Butler also stresses the fact that precarity is not a common denominator of identity but a social and economic condition that cuts across such diverse categories as women, queers, the differently abled, the stateless as well as racial and religious minorities (Butler, 2015, p. 58). I suggest that precarity is closely linked with Agamben’s understanding of bare life with the exclusion of which we get the picture of biopolitical rule and politics. The reduction of people to bare existence is accomplished by abandoning them to precarity so that a sense of political life becomes unattainable. What is important for the purpose of this thesis is that resistance to precarity by those reduced to bare life is performed by language and the body, a process during which the disposable body attempts to realize political agency by performing hitherto unrecognized configurations of language and corporeality. Dismissed as being bereft of a potent language, politically unrecognized and declared as disposable, the various precarious characters in these three novels speak and make their claims for equality under a system obsessed with manipulating living bodies and minds for consumerist profit.

In this sense, the embodied performance of resistance and precarity become linked as what Butler views as “disruption within the field of power” (Butler, 2009, p. xiii). With their emphasis on the subversive potential of language as a performative means of resisting authority, the body as an active surface on which the binary language of authority is made complicated and proven to be arbitrary, these novels stand above the tradition of language-related science fiction novels of the twentieth century. They all go beyond the customary dictum of linguistic

determinism shared in the science fictional hypertext, while bringing to the fore the question of performative resistance against authority, with their take on the relationship between language and oppression as a matter of control.

Science fiction literature of the twentieth century often drew an extremely bleak picture for the future for humanity. While depicting such societies as dominated by strict control, both of the body and mind, science fiction novels treated language as the ultimate tool for indoctrination and extensive social engineering. The last century saw the most devastating global wars in the history of our planet as well as the most fascinating technological innovations and improvements affecting individual and collective life. Politics simultaneously sought to enhance the human body while taking scrupulous measures to limit its freedoms. Politically oriented, futuristically satirical and stylistically straight-forward science fiction novels, from the early decades of the century onwards, often responded to these contradictions by expressing their concerns in anti-utopian sentiments and established a dystopian discourse on the future of democracy.

The Soviet writer Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We* (1924) gives an account of a technocratic regime that uses an oppressive language in which expressing dissent was the worst crime imaginable. In the post-apocalyptic world, people have numbers for names and they are expected to live in buildings made of glass. Influenced by Zamyatin's novel, Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* (1932) in which the bodies of infants are biologically engineered and manipulated in incubators. They are physically and psychologically conditioned to belong to different social castes from infancy. The best-known example of language as mind-control in modern dystopias is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), where the totalitarian government tries to suppress language and is concerned with compiling a dictionary of the

official version of English called Newspeak. The idea behind this excessive linguistic monitoring is to erase the words with which to express any form of resistance.

Language as a means of shaping thought and perception became a recurrent theme in science fiction novels, especially in the second half of the century. The American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf's theory of linguistic relativism, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was an immense influence on the popularity of this theme. Whorf believed that "All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated" (1956, p. 214). Language here determines the ways in which reality is classified; therefore, it is possible to change one's reality by changing the structures of language. Bould notes that, "Sf has often deployed Whorf's linguistic relativism to imagine cultures or species determined (to varying degrees) by their language" (Bould, 2011, p. 231). The hypothesis has been widely debated in the twentieth century. One of its staunch critics, linguist John H. McWhorter (2014) devotes a book-length study to refute Whorf's linguistic relativism as a hoax. His conclusion is that: "A language's structure, and what random aspects of reality it happens to cover or not cover, do not correlate meaningfully with culture" (McWhorter, 2014, p.150). However, his arguments are based on natural languages and do not include science fictional, dystopian scenarios of social control, or resistance to it through language construction and linguistic change. Science fiction utilizes linguistic relativism to work out the potential of language both as social engineering and as a tool to fight with social control via linguistic control. We can trace the political implications of this idea across various language-related science fiction novels.

Jack Vance's *Languages of Pao* (1958) tells the story of a planet where the government imposes on the population three different languages, each being suitable to engineer the minds of warriors, scientists and merchants as distinct social classes. Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) depicts a world of crime dominated by Nadsat, a street slang used by teenagers heavily influenced by Russian. Burgess uses his background in linguistics to reflect the ways in which language promotes violence under corrupt regimes. Frank Herbert, in his widely influential *Dune* (1965) creates a desert planet called Arrakis whose native inhabitants speak Fremen that reads like an ethnography reflecting and shaping the religion and ecological concerns of the natives. Samuel R. Delaney's *Babel-17* (1966) and Ian Watson's *The Embedding* (1973) draw a similar image of language as a prison-house for thought. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) imagines an anarchist society that discourages the use of possessives in its constructed and adopted native language in an attempt to promote collectivism as opposed to private ownership.

Given the fact that language is a prevalent theme in science fiction, it is surprising that there are so few book-length studies on the relationships between science fiction and language. One example is Walter E. Meyers's *Aliens and Linguists: Language Study and Science Fiction* (1980). This dated study certainly has historical merit in tracing the different language-related tropes in science fiction from the early 20th century until the late 1970s, such as neologisms and constructed alien languages in several novels and short stories. However, this study is often confined to pointing out the common features of various novels and does not attempt to find contradictions in their conceptualizations of language and utopian imagination. After emphasizing the centrality of language to science fiction in general and utopia in particular, the writer states that, "We move in a world of language; unless we

become aware of it, it can escape our attention and we notice it no more than a fish notices the water it swims in” (Meyers, 1980, p.194). Yet, he does not further complicate the relation between this all-pervading language and political resistance that is one of the aims of this thesis.

While stressing the importance of science fiction as social commentary, Susan Mandala, in her *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style* (2010), analyses several science fiction novels and films from a stylistic perspective and illustrates how the English language is made strange in narratives of science fiction, for example, by the use of alien contact motif. She attempts to prove that science fiction is as stylistically innovative and experimental as the so-called “literary fiction” by devoting chapter length analyses on the use of archaisms and alienation effects in science fiction and fantasy novels. Another important stylistic study of the science fiction novel is by the renowned writer of the genre, Samuel Delany. In his frequently quoted book, *The Jewel-hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (1977), he stresses the importance of reading conventions and reader-response, and points out the fact that our appreciation of science fiction may stem from our ability to distinguish between events that have not happened and that have not happened yet. Delaney’s positioning of such subjunctive logic to the language of science fiction is in line with one of the early conventional definitions of the genre given by Kingsley Amis that science fiction is “that class of prose narrative treating a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized” (Amis, 1960, p. 3). However, like Mandala’s, Delaney’s book does not make a connection between science fiction’s common thematic concerns based on extrapolation and their political implications.

The critical relevance between the extrapolated, diegetic world and what Kingsley Amis calls “the world we know” is maintained with a cognitive link due to the fact that, “there need to be some similarities between the diegetic world and the reality in which we spend most of our time and whose physical laws we experience on a daily basis.” (Langer, 2013, p. 104) Science fiction achieves the distinction between these two registers of reality by attempting a certain level of cognitive estrangement, which Darko Suvin similarly views as the major distinguishing feature of the genre. Anyone slightly acquainted with the history of the science fiction novel in the twentieth-century realizes that the estranging function has often been attempted through the inclusion of a material novelty, or difference introduced within the diegetic world, rather than through experimenting on the prose style itself. In this sense, the novels analyzed in this thesis, although they are very much shaped and informed by the concerns of a postmodern and increasingly posthuman world, are written in a relatively lucid, prosaic style.

On the other hand, we should also acknowledge the fact that each of the three novels uses a number of estranging and self-reflexive narrative devices to give the reader a sense of critical distance. *Native Tongue* is laden with metafictional snippets inserted in the beginning of its chapters, suggesting postmodern historiography. As the constructed language of women remains largely in the background, despite a number of instances in the form of dictionary entries, the reader can focus on the effects of language transformation as a social and political act, rather than the cognitive estrangement provided by narrative language itself. The prose style and its fast-paced rhythm in *Snow Crash* reflect the diegetic world the story is set in, a world dominated by high-speed computing, artificial intelligence and capitalist competition. We owe the term “avatar” as meaning the audio-visual representation of

a person in cyberspace to this work. *Embassytown* divides its plot into two different timelines: “formerly” and “latterly.” This way the reader is invited to observe the society before and after the major and impactful linguistic transformation. Furthermore, strangeness of the extraterrestrial language that must be articulated with two separate vocal organs is conveyed by the use of fraction lines between the syllables.

Only partially suggested with these particular stylistic features and fictive neologisms used within the narrative prose, language itself as a social and cultural phenomenon forms what Suvin calls the novum of science fictionality, “the vehicle of cognitive estrangement. It is the way in which a science fiction story establishes itself as not just fictionally but functionally separate from the world in which we live.” (Langer, 2013, p. 105) The constructedness of language as a cognitive, corporeal and cultural phenomenon informs and transforms the human and non-human interrelationships within the diegetic worlds in these novels. It is through the open-endedness of language as well as the body that social change is envisioned. Therefore, rather than focusing largely on the stylistics of the form, the present study primarily focuses on language as the novum in the novels by which critical distance is attained.

The language-related science fiction novels imagine dystopian future worlds with extreme thought control imposed by language, and possibilities for resistance are locked up in the same prison-house of language. Although the main object and objective of politics in these novels is human life itself, the question of resistance never incorporates the body as an active site that can defy the inscription of power. As self-expression is never used to go beyond the dominant discourse and power hides its linguistic character from language users, the body also remains as docility

embodied in uniforms and yields to a mechanical existence in designated enclaves of the totalitarian city. It does not refuse to be fed to the state ideology, nor does it perform any significantly subversive act of resistance rather than hiding, or violating the codes of conduct in moments of sheer aggression. The individual seems to be totally immersed in and controlled by the language of authority without a utopian hope in the end. The inclusion of the body as a resisting force in language-related science fiction novels began after the elaborate theorization of biopolitics as the paradigm of power in modernity in the late nineteen-seventies. The theories of biopolitics by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito offer differing yet significantly converging accounts of the biopolitical society that can guide us unveil the relationship between language, body and resistance in the analyzed novels. Although biopolitics is often associated with an understanding of modern politics that is life-affirming and geared to enhance health of a given population, the term is full of contradictions in practice, as the health of a society inevitably entails supposedly unhealthy elements to be disposed from within the system to maintain its health. To put it in other words, rather than promoting the well being of citizens, power in these novels manifests itself in negative acts, by creating non-citizens, less than human bodies, precarious populations that are viewed only on account of their bare life. The individual in biopolitical futures live a precarious existence led with the constant danger of being disposed, for being an obstacle to the operations of the dominant forces within the society.

The term biopolitics as the theoretical model of power in contemporary world is largely attributed to Michel Foucault who gives an historical trajectory of “biopower” in the last part of the first volume of his renowned work, *The History of Sexuality*, entitled “The Right of Death and the Power over Life.” Foucault points to

a rupture in Western politics starting in the seventeenth century, from the *ancien régime* towards modernity: “One might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 2013, p. 43). The sovereign’s power over death in pre-modernity is transformed into a total concern with biological life. The principal aim of power in modernity is to make live, rather than threatening to kill in order to assert itself. According to Foucault, starting in the seventeenth century this power over life evolved in two forms: “an anatomo-politics of the human body” and “a biopolitics of the population” (p. 44). Seeing the human body as a machine, the former practice seeks to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, increase its usefulness and its docility. The police force, mental institutions, jurisdiction apparatuses, universities and other ideological institutions apply this form of biopower by creating the terms for normativity in discourse and embodying these terms as the useful, docile and disciplined citizens through physical force, architecture, sports, education, law and psychology. It is important to note that this concept of the human body as a machine suggests its character as something that is produced as a cultural product, therefore open to change. On the other hand, within the biopolitics of the population the subject is seen as the basis of biological processes, such as “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (p. 44). This two-leveled application of biopower creates the body in society as belonging to an acculturated and subdued population that is defined as a living organism. The objective of power is to proliferate life on the basis of normality and health. Although this discourse claims to be affirmative of life, science fiction makes it clear that the contradictions within such an ideology cause it to be potentially totalitarian.

Native Tongue, *Snow Crash* and *Embassytown* depict future societies in which biopower is applied in such extreme forms as to foster and control life at once, yet various groups of precarious bodies in each novel seek to perform resistance to oppression by using language with an awareness of its linguistically relativist, truth-making character. The formulization of language as a means of transforming reality in also points towards an understanding of the body as an active site of resistance. The bodies in these novels are physically influenced by the changes in language. Such biopolitical interventions within the body, such as biogenetic engineering, technological enhancements, prostheses and viruses, change the ways speakers use language with dramatic political implications. Power in these novels are predominantly concerned with the body and life itself. It aims to produce the body in the most effective way as to flourish the utilitarian functioning of its intellectual capacity as well as its market value as labor in the economy. Technology is used to reconfigure the human brain in order to affect its linguistic-processing abilities, so that it performs obedience and normativity while putting its language faculty at the disposal of the hegemonic power. Although biopower should be productive in theory, in these dystopian futures it ends up becoming a destructive and segregating force, fostering precarity for the majority, rather than striving to abolish it.

The first chapter deals with Suzette Haden Elgin's thought experiment of language construction of an exclusive language for women in *Native Tongue* as a means of representing their experience and concerns to transform the patriarchal society. By creating a new linguistic system women attempt to appear as political agents before authority and demand the right to have rights within a system that does not recognize women as qualified for self-determination. The novel is set in a twenty-second century North America where women are stripped of their political

rights and live in total dependence on men. They are not allowed to have any meaningful occupation or control their own finances. The women in this society are valued merely for their reproductive functions and physical properties such as sexual appeal to the male gaze. The global economy is based on trading with extraterrestrial civilizations that have contacted the Earth in the previous century. The contact with the aliens have resulted in the emergence of a distinct class of families called the Linguists whose job is to train their children in alien languages from infancy and employ them to work as interpreters in trade negotiations with other planets. This economic function has led the Linguists to have a monopoly on alien communication. In order to break this monopoly, the government decides to experiment on the bodies of human infants to make them able to incorporate non-humanoid alien languages. These experiments fail and kill the human babies after deforming their bodies. The political organization can be described as a biopolitical one on account of the fact that power comes into being from the foundational distinction of *zoe* and *bios*.

While the domestic sphere and women are associated with *zoe*; voice, animality, corporeality, reproduction, and legal/social dependency on men, *bios*, or qualified life is depicted as being elusive, both from the women characters and from the reader's perspective. The qualified life refers to the scientific, rational and all-structuring language of power. The global government structure operates with the total exclusion of women as merely living matter unable to lead a political existence in the practical sense. As the government attempts to take the total control of the alien language operation from the Linguists' household structure, and even experiment on infants for that purpose, a feminist resistance movement soon ensues

from within the Linguist families, a resistance by women against their precarious existence.

A group of Linguist women use their technical knowledge of languages to construct Láadan, a language specifically created to speak of the experience of women. In the context of this dystopian future, the fact that women can become linguists does not mean that they lead the life of a scientist or an academic. The scientific knowledge is monopolized exclusively by men, and the knowledge of linguistics is solely used by the state in order to maintain the consumerist, interspecies trade, as a means of conducting trade negotiations. Linguistics as a profession does not afford women any political agency or independence from men because they are merely expected to translate from one linguistic medium into another. Furthermore, linguistics is more of an ideological state institution as embodied in the household structure of the Linguists. Yet, defying their disenfranchised status, women counter-utilize their knowledge of linguistics to construct a language of their own from scratch. They believe that if all women adopt Láadan as their native tongue this will enable them to change their living conditions and create an egalitarian society. The novel can be read as a feminist thought experiment to test linguistic relativism. The women attempt to name their experience in a new medium, because they believe that the English language already at their disposal is a phallogentric one, meaning that it only serves the interests of the patriarchal dominance. After they begin to use Láadan among themselves, the male household members cannot stand living with the Linguist women anymore, because women now do not conform to the men's established ways of perceiving them. The adoption of the constructed language makes the women realize they can utilize language as a way of performing silence as well. They stop striving for "being right"

before men in the phallogentric language that reflects women as irrational and nagging. Women disrupt the power field by their embodied performance of being silent as a way of pacifying the male verbal violence. This new performance by women results in the physical separation of them from the living quarters of men, upon the decision by the latter.

The authority in *Native Tongue* operates on the basis of excluding all women from power as they are viewed as being in opposition to what politics is: a reasoned, utilitarian speech act that is conducted amongst men outside the household, away from the presence of women. It is possible only with the reduction of women to their biological bodies on which their identity informations are tattooed. Láadan is a reaction to this inscription and reduction to biological existence. The patriarchal biopolitics in the novel has to recognize and include bare human life as its basis only to exclude it to declare itself as legitimate, qualified political authority. It is this patriarchal form of power that does not view women as a constituting part of itself but only as a living entity to be tamed, coerced, kept in check, subjugated and extracted labor from. The politically qualified self-characterization of male authority rests on this exclusion. *Zoe* stands at the center of politics as its object, yet it must be constantly excluded as the opposite of what male political authority must attain, namely the anthropocentric, rational, profit-oriented, utilitarian life. At the expense of this formation, the female, animalistic, machinic (as opposed to self-willing) and corporeal element of the crude fact of being alive must be given a secondary status.

Giorgio Agamben, builds his idea of biopolitics on this inclusionary exclusion. Agamben, in his seminal work titled *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), notes the fact that the Greeks did not have a single term to denote what we commonly call "life." They instead used two terms that refer to two distinct

experiences: “*zoe*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group” (Agamben, 1998, p. 5). Agamben claims that the tradition in Western political tradition is based on this very distinction between qualified life and bare life. The male power in the novel represents *bios* while the women are included/excluded as *zoe*. We can say that other central binary oppositions in Western thought can be linked to this foundational pair of *zoe* and *bios*: voice/language, animal/human and body/mind. While the authority is subverted in various ways, such binary oppositions at the center of politics are also proven to be standing on contingent historical formulizations. Since the distinctions between voice and language, or animal and human are what gives us politics, the resistance is performed on this axis as well, as the attempt of the body to claim for freedom of thought and movement in an egalitarian society that is affirmative of life, rather than destructive of it. Language and the body stand at the center of embodied resistance because the relationship between the two reveals that *zoe* and *bios* are indistinct. Language stemming from the body as illegitimate voice tries to represent its precarious exclusion from a safe life, but it is not the only means of expression there is. The body performs itself by blurring the boundaries between nature and culture as well as physical and virtual. The body is the objective of politics and it is also the site where resistance is enacted.

The focus of the second chapter of this thesis, Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* (1992) combines the importance of the body with that of language as a means of performing resistance against authority. Language is not only producing new codes for experience, but it is seen as equivalent to computer language. While human language and the images it produces simulate reality, computer language is a

medium of building virtual realities based on that already simulated reality. What the body is capable of doing is to use technology and language in order to make itself appear. This appearance itself is a performance, a performance that rejects any logocentric language that has a claim to absolutes of truth and power. The posthuman configurations of the body in the novel enable all who are abandoned into precarious lives to take action against a virus of language. The technologically augmented body makes it possible to appear in virtual space and it also blurs the boundaries between human and non-human as well as men and women.

Snow Crash views language both as a virus transmitted by the ruling classes to subdue the masses, and as the only antidote to the viral infection it causes. The novel is set in a near future Los Angeles where the federal government has dissolved into franchise microstates called franchulates. These states are structured as gated communities, and access to safe life is sold as citizenship. Membership opportunities of the states are advertised in the commercial language of late capitalism as the cityscape is dominated by omnipresent and ever-glowing billboards. The inhabitants of these city-states carry their citizenship information on electronic cards on their bodies, and trespassers across different states can be killed with impunity. This society that is saturated with advanced communication technologies is structured on the tension between granting and denying individual access to information as well as a sense of membership; a tension between a form of interiority embodied as the encapsulation of community and a view of the outside as the threatening other against which community needs to become immune.

This logic of exclusion, which builds on paranoia promoted by consumerism and the lack of an egalitarian social organization in the depicted future, can be understood in terms of Roberto Esposito's theory of biopolitics. Building on

Agamben's concept of the exclusionary inclusion of bare life, his compatriot, Italian political philosopher Roberto Esposito develops his own model of biopower as a system of immunization. According to Esposito (2008), power in modernity is based on a negative form of the protection of life. Immunization "subjects the organism to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand" (p. 46). The concepts of community and immunity are complementary in biopolitics for Esposito. While community is what opens the individual up to an encounter with the other, immunity is what excludes the other as bare life, as an imagined threat. In this sense, these communities in the form of microstates are formed with excessive immunity. This reduces the individual to bare life because such an encapsulation cuts the ties with the outside, thereby killing any sense of democracy. In order to protect the life on the inside, immunization destroys a political existence for the inside as well. The result is a chaotic world that is defined with access and denial of entry for all those abandoned to precarity. This promotes equality neither for the privileged, nor the disadvantaged mass of the population. The privileged individual exchanges his money for a sense of security without any political participation other than paying.

In line with this formulation, the individual as well as collective bodies in *Snow Crash* are confined to micro-nationalities locked up within gated communities with high-technology systems of strict surveillance against outside threats. This extreme segregation is characterized with and reflected by the unilateral language of late capitalism whose *raison d'être* is profit. The novel brings a critique of this excessive immunization to its own depiction of the near future in the form of a language virus that turns this obsession with immunization into an immune system failure. The virus can be seen as the moment when the system starts attacking its own body in order to protect itself. This contamination is of such character that it would

destroy all political life within the communities and turn the society into an unthinking mass of biological material for capitalism. A media corporation develops the virus called snow crash that affects the human brain and makes it unable to process any other language but the pre-Babel, single language of the Sumerians in which there is no possibility to think or act against the authority's commands. The affected person becomes "biomass", a living entity that can be coded with language like a computer program. The virus is biological as well as digital. It also spreads in the virtual reality in which people spend more time than they do in real life.

Metaverse is a platform of simulated reality to which people connect as their avatars, or their digital embodiments. It is larger than the actual world in size and similarly commercialized. Hackers who are proficient in computer language are able to write new parts of Metaverse into being, or alter the existing structures. They are also the ones who create avatars and modify them. As the language virus affects the hackers in Metaverse and begins to destroy their avatars, a group of hackers join forces to find the antidote to the viral infection. With the help of a computer program embodied in the appearance of a man, the protagonists of the story realize that the virus disables the part of the human brain that makes it impossible to speak or understand any language but the purely performative Ur-language in which a word made what it said, a concept explained with the original performative: Let there be light. The program named Lagos tells the hackers that the human civilization became possible in the first place because thought diversified along with languages after the demolition of the Tower of Babel. The virus needs to be eliminated by the hackers who know how language creates discourse and embodiment in reality and virtual reality alike. They need to make language diversify again so that counter-discourses

can exist. On the other hand, the act of resistance is never complete without the use of bodies against oppression.

While the subversive force of language rests on language construction in *Native Tongue* as a means of representing the otherwise unrepresented and excluded experience of the disposable female body, the lived reality itself is structured like a linguistic/corporeal composition in *Snow Crash*. Language is seen as the software to the biological hardware that is the human body. Different languages make it possible to have a plural society because each language represents a different way of looking at the world, as well as different ways of embodying the world. In addition to the reality-constitutive character of language, an analogy between human and computer language is drawn so that the linguistic nature of virtual reality is also emphasized.

As language determines thought, computer language also determines thought by creating the virtual reality out of ones and zeroes. Both the avatars in virtual space and the technologically augmented human bodies are tools of making statements and performing identities in the novel. The characters integrate technological devices into their bodies to enhance their physical mobility, cross-dress, and they are able to appear across real and virtual environments simultaneously. In subversive ways they perform their bodily hexis which Pierre Bourdieu (1990) defines as “political mythology realised, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and thinking” (p. 69). The hacker/outcast figure in the novel is the one who contests and blurs the boundaries between machine-human, man-woman and artificial-natural, thus questioning the validity of the exclusion of life from politics when it should be at its well deserved center. In a world paradoxically characterized by the disembodiment of the human subject and the biopolitics’s reduction of the human body to its biological being, the

characters create concerted action and prove that their bodies are not passive organisms waiting to be contaminated and they can join forces based on their shared status of bare life. This shared fact empowers them in their demand for freedom from the society of control where biopower is obsessed with objectifying life as profit.

Significantly, the language virus is eliminated in the end with the help of a cyborg dog made of animal and cybernetic components. As the human characters give care to the wounded creature that got shot by a human, the cyborg dog responds with affect. This image points towards an egalitarianism on the basis of *zoe*. Language and the body are shown to be single, unified site of resistance. The creative and material aspect of this language/body is what needs to be politicized in the novel because our ontology can no longer claim for an original, unalienated unity between the body and mind, or nature and culture. Instead, what we are as embodied beings is our own construction. In this sense, the cyborgism in the novel is a metaphor for our political situation. *Zoe* is not the natural equivalent of *bios*, but they are both cultural and discursive constructions. Any emancipatory politics aiming for a way out of precarity must deal with the fact that there is no natural state to go back to. As Donna Haraway (2004) defines in her well-known *Manifesto*: “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (p. 8). Historical transformation is possible only when it is understood that the subject now is a hybrid being who is defined by material as well as fictional means, such as the political discourse. The novel stresses the cyborg quality of the living being as the meeting point of fact and fiction. This confluence stands as the basis of political agency because biopolitics is very much susceptible to being seen as essential. Viewing the body and political discourse as constructed together gives one possibilities to create

resistance to biopolitics that deals with both. Language and the body as the unified site for an embodied resistance cannot isolate a human being untouched by technology. Human nature is a discursive and technological construct just like language and the body. We perform our humanness as well as our constructedness, therefore resistance to power is a fictional and creative enterprise in the novel, and it aims to promote plurality against monologism.

Such entwinement of the body and language as a site of performing *zoe*-egalitarian resistance to the dominant political discourse is also a prevalent theme in China Miéville's *Embassytown*. (2011) The third chapter of this thesis is concerned with the ways in which language and the body mutually shape and inform each other. The story takes place on the planet Arieka where human beings and the indigenous, intelligent alien species coexist. The human community lives within the confines of an artificial ecosystem built as a town. The survival of the humans on the planet depends on the "biorigging" technology of the aliens, who use solely living material in their production of technology. Communication between the two species is of paramount importance to maintain the human presence on the planet. The indigenous species of the planet are called the Arieke and the humans refer to them as their Hosts. In the Arieke language, the relationship between the signifier and the signified cannot be arbitrary. Their speech must represent the presence of its referent. Therefore, it is not possible to tell lies, form metaphors or speak of fantasies. This language can only be articulated by the two vocal organs of the Arieke simultaneously. So the human government needs to bioengineer identical pairs of human beings, the Ambassadors, so they can communicate with the aliens in this language. The minds and bodies of these constructed doppelgängers have to be perfectly synchronized so that the aliens can perceive their minds as a unified

presence. The Arieke mind registers false statements as hallucinogenic and their bodies go into an intoxicating trance when they hear lies told in their language.

As the human rule exploits this phenomenon and tries to subdue the aliens by addicting them to their lies, the Arieke try to go beyond their bodily and linguistic limits to resist the colonialist biopolitics of the humans. The novel ends with the Arieke learning how to use metaphors and become a community for the first time. They now can speak metaphorically and envisage a coexistence with the humans on their own terms. Throughout the novel the interrelationships between the body and language are emphasized in concrete ways. For example, initially the Arieke need the human bodies perform ordeals in order to be able to form similes by referring to their concrete actions. When the aliens become addicted to human lies and susceptible to humans' commands as a result of their withdrawal symptoms, the reaction of some of them is to pluck off their hearing organs as to avoid enslavement. The breeding of the Ambassadors as a biopolitical apparatus is also an example to the fusion of the body and language in the novel. The body is that from which language originates as a means of producing, articulating and manipulating realities whereas language is where truths and lies are built as discourses.

Like in *Native Tongue* and *Snow Crash*, bare life is the object and main objective of politics in *Embassytown*. Political struggles against oppression always end up with the realization of the necessity to represent bare life and acknowledge the experience of the other in these novels. The living body is not a biological given but always opened up to new possibilities of resistance. It always eludes the hold on its life to some extent because it is a posthuman, cyborg formation of fact and fiction, both material and culturally constructed. It defies the boundaries separating itself from other humans as well as the other, non-human, sentient beings. Power in the

imagined societies in each novel is based on the exclusionary inclusion of the biological, living bodies of those who do not or cannot speak for it. Christopher Breu (2014) characterizes our historical moment as “simultaneously an era preoccupied with immateriality and one defined by biopolitics” (pp. 1-2). He also claims that “Both the privileging of the so-called immaterial or virtual and the idea of complete biopolitical control imagine a material world that is a passive site of inscription and unproblematic manipulation” (pp. 1-2). The ultimate aim of this thesis is to show that neither the material world we inhabit, nor our bodies that are linguistically and biologically embedded in it, are passive sites of inscription because the speaking bodies always respond to power in creative ways while representing their experience as *zoe*, changing and challenging themselves in the process. Apart from the other canonical contemporary science fiction novels that unproblematically assume social control via linguistic control, these novels show that language and the body can be performed to challenge the metaphysical oppositions that structure the language of biopolitics as a potentially oppressive configuration of power. Language in these novels is not the prison house of human life and thought, but the medium through which the body claims freedom within the precarious life into which it is pushed, and they achieve this by pointing towards its experience as yet another fiction.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACT OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN NATIVE TONGUE

2.1 Biopolitics and precarity

Native Tongue (1984) is a feminist science fiction novel in which a group of women attempt to construct an exclusively female language in order to resist the patriarchal society that oppresses them. This attempt of language creation itself is the end result of biopolitical oppression of the female body by power. The performance of resistance by the women is mediated through their constructing new names and grammatical features to speak of their unrecognized experience within the patriarchal world. The adoption of the new “native tongue” brings about a new set of performances of their femaleness and resistive attitude towards men. The conceptualization of political power in the novel is in accordance with the account of biopolitics as the mode of political organization in modernity. The women are confined to the household because they are seen as incapable of a political existence. The patriarchs apply the household rule despotically and women at home are associated with animality, labor (mental as well as procreative), sex and irrational voice. Men gather in meeting rooms to discuss politics, business, while any decision regarding the female body must be approved by the politically qualified, rational councils of men. Politics excludes women as the biologically and intellectually inferior sex. As the scientific discourse is key to the maintenance of such an order, women are forbidden to pursue higher education and become scientists themselves.

The political power in the novel is divided into the political scene of men and the biosphere of anything alive as its main object, as structured with a dual conception of life as *bios* and *zoe*, the world of social relations depicted in the novel

lends itself to an analysis in terms of Michel Foucault's theory of sovereignty and biopolitics, which was later elaborated by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. While Foucault sees the historical transformation from sovereignty into biopolitics as a process in which life as such, as the life of the human species being viewed as an organism, became the object of politics, Agamben finds Foucault's thesis incomplete and argues that bare life has always been the "exception" within the rule, which finds the sphere of politics itself (Agamben, 1998). Although the management of all aspects of biological and social life of human beings is the main aim of politics, the inclusionary exclusion of the living body as something to be control and shaped according to the needs of consumerism and profit reveal the violent aspects of the system. Power's inscription on the female body complicates biopolitics's definition of its object because the body is shown to be not an extension of the mind, but it is what structures language, therefore the lived experience in the novel.

This chapter discusses the validity of an exclusively female language as a strategic tool to perform linguistic and bodily resistance. It also questions the meaning of such language construction as a way of representing the experience of the unrepresented, precarious lives of women. The attempts of naming the experience anew create the experience itself in novel ways and this performative aspect of resistance helps women appear and demand for rights. Ultimately, resistance should not reproduce the language of biopolitics and humanism, but it should include the experience of the posthuman bodies that complicate the boundaries between nature and culture. The realization of the performative character of both gender and political action reveal that the emerging configurations of the posthuman, *zoe*-egalitarian bodies are not a wholeness to be strived for but the ideal

conceptualization of an open-ended subjectivity on the way of claiming non-precarious living conditions.

The novel is set in the twenty-second century in which women have to face a sexually specific form of potential precarity, as they are neither legally nor socially recognized as independent subjects. It is precarious for women because even though they can have relatively “secure” lives with access to healthcare and shelter, they are only granted these as long as they have the status of being wards to their men folk. This extremely sexist stratification within the depicted society inevitably creates a dystopian reality where women are expected to willingly conform to the decisions taken by men on their behalf. We find that in the previous century, women lost their civil rights and banned from political life of any sort. It is not mentioned in any installment of the trilogy as to why this particular historical transformation might have occurred. They now depend on their fathers, husbands or other close male family members as their legal guardians in public life. Women are solely valued for their domestic labor and reproductive functions. The story in the novel takes place in a consumerist future where the state is a global mega-structure whose capital is Washington D.C. and the Earth has colonized a few other planets in the galaxy. The global economy is based on interplanetary trade with technologically more advanced extraterrestrials that have contacted the Earth in the twenty-first century.

The greater political apparatus of this global and consumerist state is always in the background throughout the story. However, the state ideology can be largely inferred from its attitude towards language and economy. As the intergalactic exchange of goods is essential for the sustainability of the global economy, a distinct class of people have emerged over time: the Linguists, or as they are often referred in the novel, “the Lines.” These Linguists are specialized in learning various Alien

languages so that humanity can keep negotiating new trade agreements with them. As there have been an increasing number of new planets willing to trade with the Earth, the Lines have secured their place in business and grown rich and powerful. The Linguists are shown to be secluded elites organized as extended families and a greater part of the novel is centered on the leading family among them. The Lines do not have a presence in the government but it is implied that their so-called “monopoly” on the business of extraterrestrial language acquisition and interpretation give them a certain political clout. Like the institution of higher education, the Lines work as an ideological apparatus of the state.

The specialized knowledge on language in general renders them indispensable, yet the government also wants to break this monopoly so that there will be no intermediary institution between itself and the alien trade partners of the earth. On his work on ideological state apparatuses, Althusser explains: “As St Paul admirably put it, it is in the ‘Logos’, meaning in ideology, that we ‘live, move and have our being’ ... It follows that, for you and for me, the category of the subject is a primary ‘obviousness’” (Althusser, 2014, p. 262). This “obviousness”, or call for submission is created by “interpellating” bodies as subjects, in other words, hailing them: “Hey, you there!” (p. 264). This is how each and every new child born to the Lines is transformed into obvious members of this apparatus. The women in the novel are interpellated and recruited into the dominant ideology as less than human subjects and they are reduced to their biological functions through this interpellation. This reduction to bare life is negotiated in terms of their bodies.

There are thirteen families of Linguists in the world and one of them has an authoritative power over the others: The Chornyak Household that is based in North America. This large family forms the basis of the reader’s insight into the social

organization of the Lines. The Chornyaks are a large family whose members live, for security reasons, in the same, secluded compound in an unnamed location in the countryside. The household includes three generations of Chornyaks. The family members live together under the authority of their patriarch and also head of all Linguist families, Thomas Blair Chornyak who rules the household in a misogynist and despotic manner. The events in *Native Tongue* begin in the year 2205 when it has just been found out that the main female character, Nazareth Chornyak who is nearly forty years old, has uterine and breast cancer. Nazareth is the daughter of Thomas Chornyak. Even though she is the daughter of the most powerful Linguist in the world, Nazareth, because she is a woman, is not treated as privileged in the least because all women are inferior in the eyes of men. Lives and bodies of women are controlled down to the minutest detail by decisions made by the male members of the Lines. It is quite notable that the first chapter of the novel begins with such a male decision-making scene at work as the male Linguists sit around a table in the Chornyak compound to discuss Nazareth's illness, and what is at stake here is her body. Biopolitics is a large-scale endeavor because it includes a set of operations on the level of the population, varying from census, reproductive measures and healthcare systems to agricultural technologies. In this sense, biopolitics, or modernity's paradigm of political power, should be taken as a unified whole of state practice and ideology. On the other hand, since it is the dominant way of looking at politics one cannot confine the biopolitical logic to the state apparatus itself. The attitude towards women and the utilitarian, economy-based ethics are omnipresent, both within the family and also the government's plan of counter-monopolizing the function of the Lines. As the novel favors the position of women and the subversive potentiality of language in relation to biopower as its imaginative center, the

Chornyak family perfectly represents biopolitics in the household as the state induced ideology, which is also always patriarchal in the novel.

Discussing in a general way that the female body can be objectified and regarded as property within patriarchy is beyond the scope of this study. However, the actions taken by the male members of the family link together patriarchy as the total male hegemony and coercion of women, with biopolitics as the system of maximizing the efficacy of the human body on the level of human population as the object of politics. Bare life is associated with the household rule in antiquity so it is not coincidental that we have the household as the site where power relations become crystallized. *Bios* as the state politics, in this sense, is invading the household, and laying bare the patriarchal character of the state and the family. The female body is the discussion topic of an all-male meeting of the household. That the decision-maker men gather around a table in the shape of the letter “A” is worth of remark:

The table’s shape, the standard blunt-tipped A without a crossbar, was ideal for the Semi-Annuals; you could really pack the men around it, and still have ample space for threedies and holograms in the solid area at the top of the A. But when you had only half a dozen, you either rattled around with each of you established at some arbitrary point to fill out the geometry or you huddled in a little knot at one end and felt dwarfed. Today they had opted for the rattling around. (*Native Tongue*¹, p. 9)

The men possess the languages they use and derive their power on their ability to command them. Their decisions are literally made on the first letter of the alphabet and the men have the first and the final saying in all matters relating to the women they likewise possess. The letter A may also stand for authority, emphasizing the authority of men in shaping a discourse that control the female body. The men

¹ Elgin, S. H. (2000). *Native tongue*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. (Original work published 1984) All future in-text citations from this novel will include the abbreviation “NT” to denote the same work, in order to eliminate confusion and excessive repetition.

swarm around the letter “A” and take their positions: they either “fill out the geometry”, or they “huddle in a little knot at one end and feel dwarfed”, this second position probably being taken to discuss more urgent matters. Women’s lives depend on the positions taken by men. On this particular occasion they “rattle around” the A-shaped table, to discuss the fate of Nazareth Chornyak, the remarkably talented Linguist woman who works very hard for her family and interprets alien languages in business negotiations on a daily basis. As I have clarified in the introductory chapter that the profession of linguistics itself should not be confused with a source of political agency. The reason is that in the depicted future women do not have any legal rights as self-determining citizens. Their job as linguists function within the household economy and they are not expected to contribute to science, but merely conduct translation activity and train their children in alien languages. The men at the table discuss the details of Nazareth’s cancer treatment. In a cold-blooded manner they reach a consensus on that the family should pay only for a surgery that will remove Nazareth’s uterus and breasts, but not for the breast regeneration surgery that she needs and demands. There is only one instant in the entire novel where a man finds the way women are treated too harsh. During the meeting, a member of the Lines called Kenneth, who is a recruit to the Chornyak family via marriage, expresses his concern about refusing the breast regeneration surgery to Nazareth. After all Nazareth is a hard-working Linguist (an obligation more than a virtue in the family) and a great asset to the family business as a Linguist. Kenneth’s opinion meets fierce opposition. Nazareth’s own megalomaniac husband Aaron makes fun of Kenneth and accuses him of being ignorant about the most recent scientific knowledge that posits the inferior nature of women clearly:

“It isn’t the woman,” Aaron said pleasantly, “who adds the Alien languages to the Household assets. It is the MAN. The man goes to the trouble of

impregnating the woman – who is then coddled and waited upon and indulged sickeningly, to ensure the welfare of his child. To attribute any credit to the woman who plays the role of a receptacle is primitive romanticism, Kenneth, and entirely unscientific. Re-read your biology texts.” (NT, p. 11)

This is the only reference to the so-called biology texts, but it can be inferred from the above discussion that the scientific discourse in the society establishes the category of female as carriers for the authoritarian-patriarchal knowledge as well as the future generations as offspring within their bodies. As far as Aaron is concerned, Nazareth is merely a “receptacle,” a hollow object used to contain men and their offspring. Thinking women otherwise is on a par with praising “primitive,” indigenous people as “noble savages.” Neither women nor savages are equal to man. It is “the MAN” who troubles himself in impregnating this whimsical, spoiled container called a woman. The passage also implies the kinds of biology texts that Nazareth’s husband refers to: a male-centered canon of scientific literature that presents “empirical proofs” for the inferiority of women, thus legitimizing the disfranchised status in which they are carefully kept. Another family member laughs at the discussion topic and reasons that Nazareth is “nearly forty years old, and she was no beauty even when she was young. What earthly need has she got for *breasts?*” (NT, p. 12). The men also anticipate her becoming barren after the cancer surgery. Infertile and sexually unappealing to her husband now, Nazareth is in no position in the eyes of men to demand new breasts after their removal.

The patriarchal power as it manifests itself in this kind of language has a direct control on the female body and sexuality. Clearly despotic and limitless, this instance reflects the general logic of power described in the novel. The power of men is not solely concerned with submitting women to their authority and killing them when necessary; but also with manipulating their bodies as they please, shaping them

into receptacles for male discourse. Putting this case into the theoretical perspective provided by Foucault's work on sovereignty and biopolitics will enable us to elucidate the women's strategic resistance, which is central to the story.

In his lecture in 1976, entitled "Society Must Be Defended" at College de France, Michel Foucault attempts to define the scope of his concept of biopolitics. Foucault detects a certain historical rupture concerned with the conception of politics in the West after the French Revolution. The innovation in agricultural technology and the new medical technologies with the resulting population growth began to place life over death in governance and political philosophy, beginning in the eighteenth century. This is a change in the conception of sovereign power and how political rule worked. While the power in *ancien régime* was mainly perceived as the power of death, meaning the sovereign's power of putting his subjects to death, from the eighteenth century onwards, the sovereignty increasingly began to be concerned with the management and categorization of all that is alive. "The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). The new focus areas for power were longevity, health, sanitation, reproduction, the physical proximity and the discursive categorization of the sexes and the types of mental and physical illnesses.

The question of Nazareth's cancer treatment connects with the historical transition from the sovereign right of death into the modern power's prerogative of objectifying the life and death of its citizen, formulized as biopolitics. In "Right of Death and Power over Life" from his introduction to *The History of Sexuality* Foucault makes a connection between this new, modern concept of power and the body. In modern governmentality, power would not be dealing with legal subjects who lived with a constant fear of death, but with living beings. Power's mastery over

living beings “would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body” (Foucault, 2013, pp. 46-47). Foucault makes this distinction between life and death as the two phenomena against which the historical direction of power can be measured. The modern power in the Western democracies is synonymous with biopolitics because the state is aware of the fact that it is both necessary and “rational” that it should engineer and produce life for its various ends in order to control it at the optimum level. Although the state cannot be present at all times with its administrative and judicial apparatuses, the male subjectivities it has created carry on its operations through the male citizens. Discourse on the body makes it possible that the body is treated in a specific way. Biopower creates a specific discourse on the body and legitimize its view of it as a scientific (thus inevitably political) entity. It produces the scientific knowledge of the body in order to take charge of it as life, and those biology textbooks are used for justifying the male decisions on the female body. Nazareth is not simply let die from cancer, but she is made live only in the mutilated, utilized form of body seen fit for her functions within the household. Language and the body are closely connected in this specific operation of power. Biopolitics regards the female body both as a receptacle for “his” language and as a passive surface to inscribe “his” knowledge. The meeting itself is the epitome of this authoritarian, male language in which the female body becomes an object to be shaped by male discourse that is the dominant one. Economic considerations also pay their part in this operation of power. These two unify as a misogynist and utilitarian tool of oppression.

Another justification made by the gathered men regarding Nazareth’s body is that paying money for such an operation is against the household rule conveyed in

capital letters by Nazareth's father, Thomas Chornyak: "NO LINGUIST SPENDS ONE CENT THAT THE PUBLIC MIGHT VIEW AS CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION" (NT, p. 14). The mentality of power here is feeling quite at ease with mutilating a female body at the expense of the public image of the household. Furthermore, the capitalist tendency of maximizing profits and discrimination against women as a lesser species complement each other here as justification for violence. The utilitarian value of women as products is coupled with their reduction to less than human entities. Since what is politically significant is the management of all aspects of life in the biopolitical era in which we live, the conception of people as a living species is prevalent. Humanism has always been concerned with defining human in exclusive terms, through the exclusion of what is deemed non-human. Women in the novel fall into the category of politically non-functional and non-human. Nazareth's own father is the staunchest supporter of the decision and while countering Kenneth's weak objection, the language of Thomas sounds as an example of hate speech towards women as less and other than human:

Do you want us to be the Household responsible for another round of anti-linguist riots, son? For the sake of one foolish woman, already overindulged her whole life long and now making the usual feminine mountain out of a pair of thoroughly worn out mole hills? Surely you don't want that, Kenneth, however sympathetic you may be toward Nazareth's demands." (NT, p. 14)

Faced with a moral choice, it is common practice to fall into "speciesism" as justification for inequality between sexes and species. Thomas does exactly the same to the extent of insulting and debasing his own daughter's physiognomy. These men are able to surgically alter the female body, put it to work for profit and decide when a woman ceases to be sexual. The men decide what part of a body to make live and what part to let die. It is also implied that if it had been a man's body that is at stake, a similar operation would have been approved promptly, without a need to discuss it

at length. It is possible to argue that biopower is essentially misogynistic in character; it is always shown as a force that shapes the female body and keeps it under total subjection. Since politics anywhere and anytime in the world has been disproportionately male-dominated, it is not surprising that the female body is more objectified in that endeavor as well. The question of abortion as a practice can be illustrative of the sexual character of biopolitics as it often opens up debates about who owns the female body and self-autonomy.

Since biopolitics is mainly concerned with the human body, the question of what is considered human is problematic. Power in the novel excludes women from politics by essentializing their behavior as feminine and also by associating supposedly female traits as non-human. According to the excerpt above, to nag and to exaggerate are essentially feminine actions. Her father, husband and the other family members see Nazareth as making mountains out of her “worn out mole hills.” This metaphor combines the mental and biological aspects of misogyny in the form of the female body. That her breasts are linked to “worn out mole hills,” the very place animality resides, also means attributing a non-human appearance to a supposedly feminine physical attribute. She is partly incorporated by the men into the realm of the non-human. Due to belonging to “the second sex,” it is also justified that Nazareth, or any other woman is less than a human being.

Nazareth in the end is denied the breast regeneration surgery *in absentia*. Clearly, the misogynistic biopolitics portrayed in the novel is fairly overt and direct. This decision-making process is not only crucial to understand what women are preparing to fight against, but also significant due to the posthuman connotations it implies, which will also inform their resistance movement. Here, the language of Nazareth’s husband clarifies that it would be better if women could only speak upon

men's request, much like android operators. He resents the existence of women altogether because they have voices they can raise, even though it is always to no avail in a society that views them as machines. Since they have voices, they can attain for political agency by turning voice into language, a response that will be given to the male oppression in the form of their constructed language. Upon hearing the male council's verdict, Aaron's thoughts are conveyed in the typical third-person, omniscient narrator of the novel and the narrative voice aligns itself with Aaron's hatred for his sick wife:

If anything could have tempted Aaron William Adiness-Chornyak to such black blasphemy as the concept of a Creatress, it was the seemingly irrational creation of females. Surely the Almighty could have had the simple gentlemanly courtesy to make women mute? Or to see to it that they had some biological equivalent of an OFF/On switch for the use of the men obliged to deal with them? If he hadn't had the ingenuity to do without them altogether? (NT, pp. 17)

With this rhetorical question Aaron invokes a more ancient repressive mechanism, which is the source for one of the most remarkable gender aspects in the Judeo-Christian Biblical language: that the Creator is represented by the first person singular pronoun which is always masculine. The role of religion in the novel is not very overt, yet the Church as an ideological state apparatus is one of the themes in the sequel novel, *The Judas Rose* (1987) in which the women try to overturn the sexist Biblical language on its head and translate the Bible into their new, gynocentric language, in an attempt to end the Church's perpetuation of masculine dominance. Women's secondary position in the language of religion is concomitant with the non-human imagery used to imagine them. Nazareth's husband wishes women to be robots with "OFF/On" switches or entirely silenced beings. This is one of the instances where an analogy between women and machines is suggested. Men desire women to be like robots so they can silence them when they choose. They

should listen to what men have to say and remain silent before the decisions made by them. This is what is expected of Nazareth after she hears about the verdict. This question of silence versus speech structures a significant portion of the story.

Initially, Nazareth is portrayed as often silent and silenced. In the chapters following the meeting about her surgery, the focus switches back to Nazareth's earlier life as a young girl. We witness the time when she is forced by Thomas Chornyak to marry Aaron whom she deeply hates for being extremely arrogant and who is verbally abusive to her. Nazareth tries to object to this arranged marriage at first, but she is immediately silenced, as she has no saying in the matter. Thomas seems to derive almost a sadistic pleasure in marrying his daughter off to someone extremely obnoxious to her. Right after they get married, Aaron begins to humiliate her for being stupid on every occasion, while also secretly feeling inferior to her, as Nazareth is a better linguist, suggesting that she is more intelligent than he is. So, early on in the story, this general tone of extreme misogyny is set. However, this is done in a very essentialist manner as the women are all victimized and portrayed either as suffering, or showing affect to one another in solidarity while men are portrayed as violent, self-obsessed, hateful, cruel and despotic.

In two hundred years into the future, women only matter to men in terms of their sexual and reproductive value; they are seen to be domestic animals that need to be kept tamed, or robots that need to be put to work, switched on or off at men's will. If the term dystopia is supposed to describe a world where things are worse than it is now, it becomes ambiguous whether we can use this label for *Native Tongue*. Elgin states that living in the rural Arkansas, she does not find anything in her novels particularly fantastic. (176) However, one thing is clear that, along with Margaret Atwood's well-known novel, *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Native Tongue* addresses

the feminist debate of the 1970s and 1980s that patriarchy renders women languageless and speechless.

The idea of the need for an exclusively female language derives from what is often referred as the French feminism. While the patriarchal discourse defines women in terms of a lack (psychoanalytic, biological...etc), a number of influential French feminists reject this claim for male superiority and defines women on the basis of sexual difference. The idea of a feminist language is, therefore, based on this equally essentialist sexual difference. Luce Irigaray, in her article titled *This Sex Which is not One* (1977), makes a vigorous attempt to refute the Freudian theory of “women’s sexuality as lacking” and goes on to comment on the plurality of women’s sex and identity. Criticizing the common conceptualization of the female as substandard where the male is the standard, she speaks on behalf of women and say: “What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather, it is contiguous. It touches (upon). And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at ‘zero’: her body-sex” (Irigaray, 1977/1985, p. 29). The woman whom Irigaray talks about is any woman dominated by the men’s speech. The traces of male oppression are discernible not only in her silence but on her body as well. She attempts to speak but whatever sentence she produces is no more than a meaningless sound to men. She is reduced to her species being, to her body.

Having experienced that speaking to men is of no use, Nazareth finds it hard even to comment on the decision about her surgery. After the meeting a young woman from the family, Clara, is given the task of telling Nazareth the horrendous news. Clara has to suppress her shock of seeing Nazareth in such a condition; because even admitting the violence inflicted upon Nazareth’s body is against the ideological programming dictated by the the Chornyak Household. After all, this is

normalized as how things should be and it can always get worse. To Clara, Nazareth looks non-human, a “servomechanism,” which is a word meaning a serving machine, a household robot in the story. Nazareth is a worn-out machine bearing the traces of hard work and motherhood on her body:

Nazareth Joanna Chornyak Adiness, (...) eldest daughter in this Household, mother of nine, looked like nothing so much as a battered servomechanism at that moment. Ready to be traded in. Ready for scrap. The unsavory image struck the woman Aaron had sent to deliver his message, struck with a force that she hastily suppressed. (NT, pp. 17-18)

Clara also thinks that Nazareth looks even worse than a “a noble wreck of a woman, or even a tortured animal” (p. 18), and wonders whether someone can “torment any machine into a state like Nazareth’s?” (p. 18). Such references to animals and machines complicate the picture in terms of biopolitics. As I have mentioned, Foucault’s theory of biopolitics is essentially concerned with human life, and he does not theorize the non-human in his account of power in modern society. One can assume that the non-human animals are also an intrinsic part of the general term “life” in Foucault’s conception of biopolitics. Roberto Esposito finds the concept of life too little problematized in Foucault’s studies, and in his own work titled *The Enigma of Biopolitics* (2013), he asks regarding Foucault’s theory: “What is life in its essence and even before that, does life have an essence - a recognizable and describable designation outside of the relation with other lives and with what is not life?” (p. 381). However, looking for an essence for life outside social relations would be to fall back into humanism that tries to keep humanity outside of all that is not human. Foucault again famously contends in “Right of Death and Power over Life”, that “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, 2013, pp. 46-

47). The biopolitics in the novel, in the form of this violent patriarchy puts Nazareth's life as a human being into question, as Clara keeps comparing her either to a suffering animal or to a machine. She finds Nazareth "repulsive" like an animal: "Something about the gaunt body, the graying hair drawn viciously back and skewered to the head with cruel pins, something about the posture that was the reaction of a dogged pride to intolerable exhaustion and strain" (NT, 18).

The women work everyday from dawn till dusk, learning and interpreting languages as well as training their children to work in the family business. Although they possess these languages as assets signifying their own indispensability in the eyes of men, translation ultimately does not grant women safe lives independent of men. The same level of state-induced precarity is applicable to all women. Although they speak languages, these languages are not capable of voicing their own concerns as speaking subjects. Nazareth has been put to work all her life like a machine or an animal. The language describing her state after the meeting is suggestive of her less than human (and less than men) status. This humanity should be understood as that belonging to the decision-making, qualified men of politics, and not to the species life we all share. Sensing her own distorted consciousness about the women's condition, a distortion caused by the misogynistic hold on the female body, Clara is reminded of the fact that Nazareth is a living being who can feel pain. Women and non-human animals share the fact that they both suffer and they are harmed by "political animals" called men. Furthermore, neither women nor animals have a language to speak of their pain. After watching her for a minute, Clara remembers that Nazareth is a living organism, not a machine:

This is a living woman before me, she told herself sternly, not one of those skinny cylinders with a round knob atop that scuttles silently through the houses and workplaces of nonlinguists doing the dirty work. This is a living

woman, to whom harm can be done, and I will speak to her without distorted perceptions. (NT, p. 18)

The robots in the novel have no language and Nazareth is silent just like a household robot, a servomechanism. However, unlike a robot she is able to suffer. Nazareth's physical appearance at that moment is made bare in order to stress her status as bare life. She is nothing but her body. Right before she goes on her own to the hospital to have her surgery, she has "no ornament. A plain tunic with modest sleeves to the elbow, in a color that was no color ... No one could have looked at her and thought 'There goes a bitch linguist!'" (p. 21). Just as she has no language to speak of her torment she also has nothing remarkable on her to speak of her identity. Clara and Nazareth can only exchange their silences and Clara's internalized, oppressed logic speaks and yields to the ideology: "It was the way of the world, however. And as Clara had pointed out, it could have been worse. They could have refused to authorize the surgery" (p. 19). This instance epitomizes the duality between bare life and politics as Nazareth, whose very name evokes the torment and suffering Jesus Christ goes through in the Judeo-Christian tradition, appears as the ultimately passive, bare body thrown into a precarious existence. Nazareth's reproductive barrenness is coupled with her speechlessness and her plain appearance. She is unable to appear as a recognizable political agent under these circumstances. Speechlessness as the main component of bare, precarious life is significant because the resistance to the terms of oppression excluding Nazareth along with the whole of female sex is envisaged as an attempt to attain speech as a resistive tool towards oppression.

Hannah Arendt points out in her seminal work, *The Human Condition* (1958), regarding Aristotle's definition of man in his *Politics*, "In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were prepolitical

ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the polis, of home and family life” (Arendt, 1958/1998, pp. 26-27). It should not mean that Aristotle condones domestic violence towards women and slaves within the Greek household with which *zoe* is associated. It means the good life is only possible with the exclusion of *zoe* from *bios*. Arendt also notes that this exclusion, Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon politikon* (political animal) “was not only unrelated and even opposed to the natural association experienced in household life; it can be fully understood only if one adds his second famous definition of man as a *zoon logon ekhon* (a living being capable of speech)” (p 115). This also should not mean that women, slaves and barbarians were deprived of the faculty of speech “but of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other” (p. 115). The women are not considered as equal citizens with no civil rights and they are excluded from political life without exception. They have the faculty of speech but it does not give them any political agency, just like artificially intelligent machines and animals. Like animals, women’s lives are considered only as *zoe*, and they have only voice but not language.

After Clara gives her the news, Nazareth insists on going to the hospital alone for the surgery that will cure the cancer but leave her without breasts. The information about her medical records and her identity details are tattooed on her body. This corporeal image of the body as a literal surface to be inscribed is linked to the idea of ideological inscription, the living body as an entity to be inscribed, thus shaped and produced by biopower. Foucault (2013) defines the historical development of biopower as it has evolved in two conjoining forms since the *ancien régime* towards modernity. Foucault characterizes the first formation of biopolitics as “an anatomo-politics of the human body” (p. 44). for it is centered on the body as a

machine: “its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines” (p. 44). Power here is applied by the police force, mental institutions, jurisdiction apparatuses, universities and other ideological institutions.

The second historical formation of power is concerned with biological life of the human body as belonging to a species and it is characterized as a “biopolitics of the population.” Here the subject is seen as the basis of the biological processes, such as “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (Foucault, 2013, p. 44). Political power is no longer solely measured according to the sovereign’s right of death or his right of killing any subject, but to a more impersonal form of power’s operation of fostering the population by improving the life conditions of the human body. Thus, sovereign’s power was gradually transformed into “biopower” which, according to Foucault, was “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (p. 47). With the advent of biopower, it was possible in modernity to interpellate the consciousness of the masses and to control their life processes effectively, a process of creating docile bodies that internalize the legitimacy of political formations and accept their places in the biopolitical order of modern capitalism.

Nazareth’s body is the site of biopower on which it reproduces itself by inscribing on the body as a passive surface. While the medical authorities of the hospital represent the biopolitics of the human body, Nazareth, as the object of

discussion by the men of her household embodies the anatomo-politics of the human body: the dominant conceptualization of women as bare life in the novel. This two-fold application causes Nazareth to become alienated toward her own body. She loses her self-recognition and it is dramatized by the fact that she cannot touch her breasts again. While going to the hospital, she feels that she does not need to carry anything with her because she is already inscribed by biopower as an object of knowledge, a bare body that is excluded from a sense of self-worth and political agency, but at the same time structuring the very center of such politics through her being a passive surface. Numbers and medical information are tattooed in her armpits to be scanned by the medical authorities. Biopower reads what it can recognize as legible on the body for the sole fact that it is the body it inscribes in the first place. Bare life is a script written in the language of power. This very script is what produced the life of Nazareth as deserving nothing but precariousness and an unequal treatment for being less than qualified for taking an active part in shaping her own life and body:

I am all right as I am, she thought. Ready for any street. And any data that the hospital might want from her was easily available from the tattoos in her armpits ... She did not bother to get anything at all from the room she shared with Aaron. She did not touch her breasts again. (NT, p. 21)

It is as if Nazareth is not going to the hospital but to an extermination camp as a Jew. The extermination camp analogy is apt here and this is also how Agamben positions the precarity of bare life in regard to Western history. Agamben reminds us of the fact that Jews, homosexuals, the Roma people as well as those old and invalid bodies that were deemed as “vermin” in the Nazi Germany had to be stripped of their legal status first. They were thus declared *homines sacri*, meaning “sacred men,” so that they could be exterminated without any legal consideration whatsoever. Agamben explains that *Homo Sacer* is an “obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which

human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)” (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). *Homo Sacer*, or sacred man, cannot be sacrificed in religious rituals but he can be killed by anyone with impunity. Since the state power is able to strip anyone of his or her rights, Agamben surmises that we all are potentially *Homo Sacer*. Consequently, he draws an analogy between the camp and life as both biopolitically controlled. The Nazi state structures the camp as the embodiment of the ultimate biological control. It is where biology meets politics as the living body and the health of the pure race is seen as the sole objective of politics. *Homo Sacer* is the body that is forcibly reduced to its bare life status, meaning an existence without any rights and defined by its capacity to be killed. The sacredness here does not refer to an untouchable divinity, but to the fact that what is sacred exists on a margin of social life, or *bios*, as belonging to the class of those that can be sacrificed so that biopower can be mobilized and applied. But if the *modus operandi* of the current political order is based on the disposability of bodies, how can bare life become a resisting force within biopolitics? Judith Butler’s understanding of a concerted, subversive performative action attempts to answer that question. Although she does not theorize the biopolitical formation of power *per se*, Butler views what she calls precaritization as its critical consequence. This process refers to the state induced process that

acclimatizes populations over time to insecurity and hopelessness; it is structured into the institutions of temporary labor and decimated and the general attrition of the active remnants of social democracy in favor of entrepreneurial modalities supported by fierce ideologies of individual responsibility and the obligation to maximize one’s market value as the ultimate aim in life. (Butler, 2015, p. 15)

Butler’s conceptualization of precarity as the abandonment of certain people to a sense of helplessness and a state of solitary existence with no guaranteed basic needs for survival corresponds to Agamben’s bare life as included within politics by of its

exclusion. The women in the novel find themselves in this situation where they are obliged to conform to the gender roles and labor practices conditioned by men. They are abandoned to precarity and bear the traces of their potential status as *homo sacer*, both on their bodies as marked and inscribed by power, and also by the silence they are forced into. They are mistreated as animals and machines, or at best, they are merely unrepresented as non-existent within power dynamics with no right to participate in decisions concerning their lives. In the face of this utter precarity, what power women can have to resist authority that is embodied as the exclusionary biopower of men? Butler rightfully asks in her work on precarity: “What if the gender that establishes the norms that required in order for us to be recognizable also does violence to us, imperils our very survival?” (Butler, 2015, p. 59). Does bare life of women have any possibility of resistance against such a totalitarian force that is holding the very life of the body in its hands by way of law, economy, education, jurisdiction, brute force of various kinds and the scientific discourse? This is the point where Butler criticizes Agamben for not theorizing the resistive aspects of precarious, bare life, or the body abandoned to precarity.

Butler notes that we cannot explain the modes of resistance by the oppressed in terms of Agamben’s inclusionary exclusion because, “since even the life stripped of its rights is still within the sphere of the political and is thus not reduced to mere being, but is, more often than not, angered, indignant, rising up, and resisting.” (Ibid, 80) However, nowhere in his account of bare life in *Homo Sacer* (1998) does Agamben claim that bare life is “mere being” or that it cannot rise up against authority for being outside its sphere of influence, that is the totality of life itself. What Butler misunderstands is that bare life is not equated to a prepolitical, or prelinguistic “mere being”, whatever it might mean. Bare life is as metaphysical as

the performativity of gender, which is enacted, according to Butler, in discursive and corporeal acts by any human agent. Thinking bare life to be powerless due to being stripped of rights or having the potential of losing them that is marked by its capacity to be killed, Butler suggests Hannah Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" as an ethical category to be aimed, a category that stands outside a previously existing and established law and authority. Butler sees the groundlessness of Arendt's assertion of the right to have rights as "a kind of performative exercise" because the latter "is establishing through her writing the right to have rights, and there is no ground for this claim outside of the claim itself" (Butler, 2009, p. vi). Just like there is no gender without it being performed to become recognizable or misrecognized, similarly, there is "no freedom that is not its exercise; freedom is not a potential that waits for its exercise. It comes into being through its exercise" (p. vi).

Butler also asserts that only when it is acted out in concert and alliance, the right to have rights comes into being as an act of resistance for those who are "excluded from existing polities, who belong to no nation-state or other contemporary state formation" because they are unreal (here bare life's exclusion is, in Butler, refers to a state of un-reality on account of being pushed into precarity) only for "those who seek to monopolize the terms of reality" (Butler, 2015, p. 81). It is clear that Butler emphasizes "reality" because she means by concerted and allied action the embodied acts of appearing, assembling and becoming recognizable while claiming a public space within the political sphere. These acts become resistive when those whose public appearance itself is deemed marginal perform them, such as the Linguist women in the novel. Thrown into potential and constant threat of precarity, these women exercise their right to appear and show resistance against their condition by preparing to perform new forms of subjectivities in a self-constructed

linguistic medium, because language in the novel is the main parameter of setting the terms of any reality.

If resistance against a precarious life is an embodied, concerted and performative action, this brings Butler closer to Agamben in the sense that the foundational exclusion of bare life from the social/political sphere is a metaphysical distinction, meaning that it is enacted in thought. It is the thought of the political animal who has language and therefore a claim to the just and the unjust. The modern state can create and perpetuate the conditions for states of exceptions in which law ceases to apply to certain people for the health of the collective body. By declaring states of emergencies the state uses language as performatively. The very reality of emergency is performed by the declaration: "This is an emergency." Therefore, the very ability to perform the state of exception turns any democracy into totalitarianism.

While defining *zoe* as voice and *bios* as language, Agamben says: "There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion" (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). If this separation between voice and language is what structures biopolitics as a regime of death, then it must be overcome by a new ethics of happiness in which the concept of nation-state and sovereignty must be jettisoned as terms of reference. After all, Butler and Agamben's accounts of bare life and performativity function within the same dichotomy as they correspond to voice and language respectively. Therefore, bare life can be politicized as an act of resistance only by being seen as the possibility for performative and concerted action. In the case of *Native Tongue*, this movement

from voice to language for women finds its place as the point of origin for their resistance.

Before the women's concerted project of language construction is revealed, a second storyline is used to distinguish the performativity of resistance from the faulty line of emulating the right of letting die in biopower that uses life as its capacity to be killed to come into being. While it is not performed in alliance, the performative resistance to male oppression only ends up replicating the very logic of power that enslaves women. Being reduced to an objectification as the female body and a capacity for being a vessel to be filled up with man's body and language, Michaela's agency is constituted as responding aggression with further aggression, which is not constructive in this case. Michaela is said to have attended a "marriage academy" where women are trained to be perfect housewives. She is valued for her physical attractiveness, her efficiency in household duties, and most importantly, for being a receptacle for male speech. Her husband, Ned, finds Michaela in a "marriage agency" where men pay for a service to find desirable wives. "Michaela was worth every credit and penny she cost him. Michaela was a thoroughbred, and superbly trained, just as the agency had guaranteed that she would be" (NT, p. 36). She is praised for her being "thoroughbred" and "trained." Ned highlights the desirable characteristic in a woman: "What really mattered to him, the one service that he could not have simply purchased, was Michaela's role as listener. Listener! That was beyond price, and had come as a surprise to him" (NT, p. 36). She is and must stay as a vessel for Ned's speech and never verbalizes herself in her own language.

Under these conditions, like Nazareth, Michaela too is naturally thrown into the role of the expressionless machine: "If Michaela thought he was boring and pompous and interminable and a windballoon, no tiniest flicker of that judgment had

ever showed on her face or in her body or in her words” (NT, p. 37). She is not supposed to express her personal opinion of men, even by her body language. She is depicted as a performer who has to hide the fact of her own judgment. She is supposed to perform the role she is given by Ned and the society. In the beginning of the chapter covering her story, Michaela fulfills the role of perfect wife and angel in the house. She does everything in her power to satisfy Ned. However, soon after she gives birth to a baby boy things begin to change. Ned becomes extremely jealous of the attention and care Michaela gives the baby. Michaela cannot listen to Ned and cater to his needs anymore because she needs to devote considerable time to the baby:

It was that particular thing that the baby ruined for him, when it came. He could have put up with all the other stuff. Having Michaela look tired in the morning instead of showing her usual fresh perfection was annoying; having her attention distracted during lovemaking because the baby was crying was irritating; twice he'd had to point out to her that the vases of flowers needed to be seen to, and once she had even let him run out of Scotch. (NT, p. 38)

While the woman being depicted as a perfect performer, the evilness of the man is essentially natural, deriving from the fact that he is male. When Michaela cannot listen to Ned as attentively as before and fails to satisfy his slave-master needs, Ned decides to give away his own son for adoption without even telling the mother.

When she finds out, Michaela is unable to speak as petrified in shock. She is shown to be on her own in dealing with this indescribable trauma. She cannot fight him or object to the adoption. Soon after the incident, Michaela devises an action plan and lets Ned die after locking him up in a room with bees to which Ned has lethal allergy. Although the monstrous Ned dies horribly by being stung, it is Michaela who is sacrificed after losing her baby and her essentially feminine goodness. Her very name comes from the question “Who is like God?” in Hebrew: *Micha-el*? She indeed is like the Hebrew God in her rage and her sovereign right to kill or letting die

at once: the two modalities of death from the ancient to the modern. Without being tied with the other similarly precarious lives, Michaela reproduces the violence inflicted upon her.

Except for Michaela's murdering of Ned and later on Thomas Chornyak, the novel follows a very strict essentialist persuasion about the differences between men and women. While the male characters are always indifferent to feelings, the women are essentially emotional, caring and hardworking. In this sense, the novel reflects the second-wave feminism's idea of the essentially different femininity. However, the strength of the novel goes beyond its conception of gender, sex or male violence. It is important to remember that besides being a feminist work, *Native Tongue* is generically a science fiction novel and follows up to science fictional conventions. About the lack of detailed characterization in the novel, a commentator explains that "It is embedded in the 'literature of ideas' concept ... character development consisted of action in the context of these ideas" (Dorsey, 2000, p. 37). She also reminds the reader of the fact that: "When all your characters exist to serve the thought experiment, it's hard to find a fully developed woman character. What we forget is that it's hard to find a fully developed male character either" (p. 37). Although this is rather too simplistic an explanation for a tendency in science fiction literature in general, it is valid for *Native Tongue* when we consider the fact that this lack of character development is concomitant with the essentialist gender categories. The clearly cut boundaries between the two sexes make it possible to experiment on the idea whether or not an exclusively female language can empower women and transform society into an egalitarian one.

The thought experiment of the novel is the language project that women create to fight against the male violence described so far. *Native Tongue* should not

be read merely as social commentary on the present but also on the future society it depicts. It voices the anxieties about an even more segregated society at sight. The society in the novel without literary scholars, poets or any non-utilitarian use of language that is not immediately profitable in capitalism. A metafictional note is inserted in the novel's preface in which a future commentator talks about the book itself. We are told that a scholar has found the novel as a manuscript. It is stated that what matters is that *Native Tongue* is a novel and not a scientific treatise because it is the "the only work of fiction ever written by a member of the Lines ... It is not a work of scholarship, or a teaching grammar, or a book of science for the general public; it is a NOVEL" (NT, p. 5). This generic difference is emphasized because fictionality is preferred over scientific fact. Women have no right to be scientist and science itself is only a means of justifying the inferiority of women in the novel as biology dictates that women have no role in life other than being carrier for male offspring. Their future achievement will be in creating counter-fictions as it is retold in the medium of the novel. This reflects the fictional content of their performance, which is to call things into being in language as a means of shaping the reality.

Although there are supposedly many "scientific" documents from the year 2205, we gather that only *Native Tongue* mentions women's achievements. It can be inferred from this metafictional frame that Nazareth and the other women from the Lines have achieved to mobilize against the depicted political order. It tells us that the society changes for the better and someone writes a novel about the feminist struggle of the women against the status quo. It is the proof that the women achieved in one way or another to say no to their condition as *Homo Sacer* and tried to heal the fracture between voice and language, or *zoe* and *bios*: "It is a miracle that this document was not lost; we are grateful for the miracle" (NT, p. 5). Voice refers to

the physical sound as well as to the essentialized feminine attitudes, opinions, ideas and concerns. Then, it is creating the linguistic medium in the form of lexical encodings that the women's voice become contained and expressed as the representation of their status within the society. Without the language project, then, voice remains without a vessel and cannot mobilize to create change. While voice is associated with life as such outside of political life, language is the institutionalized medium of expression that structures itself as well as the society. Therefore, it is through the construction of a women's language that social change is anticipated. The women will realize that the exclusion of their lives from the politics is where their emancipation from it begins because the very language and practice of exclusion in biopolitics will shape the language that they strive to create and base their resistance.

2.2 Towards a women's tongue

In this society where all women are reduced by the power holders to their biological functions and to whatever profitable labor they can produce, the women in the story come up with the idea of creating a new language system using their knowledge of linguistics and adopt it as their "native tongue." The biopolitical practices with their dehumanizing effects on the body and mind shapes the female language that aims to resist those very practices. The language construction can be looked at as a thought experiment in this feminist science fiction. The construction itself functions as a kind of excess that forms a means of resisting patriarchy across real life and fiction. It flows out of the text because the fictionally constructed language is also a real, constructed language presented to women for their use as a feminist political act. The primary aim of this chapter is to locate the political meanings of this act of resistance

not only in the properties of the language itself, but as an act of solidarity and freedom that aims at performing resistance while aiming for a utopian, better, safer and less violent society that attempts to eliminate precarity. I will discuss the implications of this embodied act of resistance in the form of linguistic excess by linking it with Helene Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* in particular.

Cixous builds on her ideal of a feminine writing on Freudian and Lacanian versions of psychoanalysis that define woman as a lack. Freud believed that the female's lack of a penis means that the female unconscious is less repressed because the fear of castration is not in question. Cixous thinks that since the female unconscious is less controlled by the phallus, and it is also on the margin of Lacan's symbolic order (Cixous, 1976). This gives the female psyche the ability to move more freely in signification because she is always already decentered and marginalized in the phallic language as being in a position of otherness. Consequently, Cixous idealizes *écriture féminine* as a potential for a female expression to express the female experience and resist phallic authority. The language construction in the novel reproduces this inherently essentialist idea of female otherness implied by Cixous's theorization by viewing the female experience as fundamentally different than that of the male, yet the very attempt of constructing the language itself is imbued with possibilities for embodied action for women, as it reorganizes their terms of performing their bodies and gender in novel ways. The new language is excessive in the sense that it is seen as subversive and dangerous by men because it is an attack on the already established male language, trying to supersede it so as to foreground the female experience and women's concerns. On a metafictional level it exceeds the text by suggesting itself for its use in real life by women.

After Nazareth's surgery, we find out about the so-called "encoding project" of the women Linguists, a project for constructing an exclusively female language, a women's "native tongue" to speak and write specifically of women's perceptions of their own life experiences. Being a professor of linguistics herself, Suzette Haden Elgin actually creates a fully functioning artificial language called Láadan² for women's use in real life as well and tries to encourage its learning and use as a feminist act of resistance by creating study groups. She claims the novel also to be a thought experiment in which one can observe the effects of that language on women and the society in general. Elgin's main hypothesis is that the native language of any linguistic community is constitutive of its reality, and that the properties of one's language determine the way one classifies and makes sense of one's world.

Wittgenstein famously declares in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922): "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (p. 74). This not only means that different languages express different worldviews and experiences but also that changing the properties of language should necessarily correspond to changes in the limits of what meaning can be conveyed through a given language system. In line with this idea, Elgin imagines a society where women try to go beyond the limits of the dominant discourse by rejecting its language. Therefore, besides being a feminist social commentary, *Native Tongue* should also be seen as a thought experiment in which Elgin tries to prove that language determines reality.

The first two books of the trilogy, namely *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose* never deviate from the idea that language provides the sole means by which social change towards a non-violent society is possible. During the 1970s, feminist linguists and scholars began to emphasize the role that language played in reproducing the

² Detailed linguistic information on Láadan can be found in various online sources, such as: <https://laadanlanguage.wordpress.com>

patriarchal values. Following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which I shall discuss in more detail below, they claimed that language does not only depict reality, but also structures the ways it is conceptualized. Feminist linguists consequently argued the need either to transform English so that it was no longer androcentric, or to invent new languages that would allow women to be free and equal (Bruce 2008, p. 44). Elgin seems to belong to that group of feminist linguists/writers who favored the idea of inventing a new language for her female characters as well as for her readers. Ildney Cavalcanti claims that contemporary feminist dystopias overtly thematize the linguistic construction of gender domination by telling stories about language as “instrument of both (men’s) domination and (women’s) liberation.” (152) In her reading of *Native Tongue*, Cavalcanti (2000) proposes a symbolic reading of Láadan. She believes that the language should not be seen as “a *literal* representation of empirical women’s search for a perfectly true language, of perfectly naming of experience” (p. 164). She suggests that instead of the plausible picture of a group of “real” women working on the construction of a common language for themselves, “Láadan is better understood as a metaphor for one version of a feminist ‘elsewhere’, which serves as a source of inspiration for transformative action and without which feminism loses its *raison d’être*” (p. 164). On the other hand, the construction of this women’s language starts off as an attempt to perfectly express their essentially female experience.

This essentialism is crystallized in the women’s resistance that is centered on language construction. From the outset, a distinction is emphasized between mere “word-making” and “world-making.” While the former refers to the construction of new lexical units to replace already existing ones, the latter is granted subversive potential for it refers to name previously unrepresented “chunks” of experience.

In the beginning of the second chapter we come across an excerpt from a “manual” for Láadan, which is supposed to have been written after the events of the novel. This implies that the women’s language succeeds and language-learning materials for Láadan become a reality in the future. In *Native Tongue* Elgin uses the terminology of linguistics to describe her attitude towards reality making, which is significant for the proposed women’s language. For example, in the excerpt below, the linguistic term “lexical encoding” is defined as “the way that human beings choose a particular chunk of their world, external or internal, and assign that chunk a surface shape that will be its name; it refers to the process of word-making” (NT, p. 22). That “chunk” of reality corresponds to “the signified” in Saussure’s terminology, and it is always already named. Since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary one is able to refer to a signified with a new signifier or signifiers so that it may exist for language speakers to be perceived in the form of a sign. This sort of encoding is not of political significance for the female characters in the novel because it is a mere act of renaming. They need to engage in “world-making” rather than mere “word-making” for their political purposes. Therefore comes a second version of lexical encoding which is of socially transformative significance:

When we women say ‘Encoding’ with a capital ‘E,’ we mean something a little bit different. We mean the making of a name for a chunk of the world that so far as we know has never been chosen for naming before in any human language, and that has not just suddenly been made or found or dumped upon your culture. We mean naming a chunk that has been around a long time but has never before impressed anyone as sufficiently important to deserve its own name. (Chornyak Barren House, Manual for Beginners, page 71) (NT, p. 22)

It is important to note that a new lexical item is constitutive of reality as long as it refers to a hitherto unnamed “chunk” of culture. Turning silence, non-existence into language is what makes encoding revolutionary for women. Encoding with a “capital

E” must be especially relevant to women’s concerns. Encoding here is not a free-play of language but a purposeful attempt for voicing the unvoiced, and revealing what has been so far deemed unimportant, therefore concealed, or possibly dangerous and repressed by the authority. Women’s encoding must deserve its place by being urgent but not brought forth *yet*. The deserving word is opposed to what is dictated upon women from the outside, from what is supposedly external and oppressive to them, what comes from men’s ideological control mechanisms. Ordinary lexical encoding is the basis of all translation work between languages for it presupposes an already existing, visible and living signified to be lexicalized. It is a systematic work like the alien language translation with which the women are already occupied full-time. As translators, Nazareth and the other women are expected to recreate one medium in another for practical reasons, mainly for the interspecies trade. Although translation itself is a creative act, it does not entail a political meaning in the novel. It is rather used to emphasize that the women are forced to work as vessels and operate for the sake of men, in the male language, representing the male point of view. On the other hand, “the capital E Encodings” are different. In the case of the women’s language project, these concepts must come “naturally” and only to women, because they derive only from women’s own unique experiences. These encodings reveal themselves as descriptions in the dominant of language of men and they call to be lexicalized and brought into being:

But there is no way at all to search systematically for capital-E Encodings. They come to you out of nowhere and you realize that you have always needed them; but you can’t go looking for them, and they don’t turn up as concrete entities neatly marked off for you and flashing NAME ME. They are therefore very precious. (Chornyak Barren House, Manual for Beginners, page 71) (NT, p. 22)

When language is seen as such coding, as exemplified with the regular encodings that the women come up with, the construction of a new language denotes just

another linguistic medium with a different appearance for an already existing world-view. This refers to an idea of language as a mere communication tool. The construction itself is then equal to the labor of women as translators. As translators, they are expected to change one medium into another in a utilitarian ideology that accepts each language is an expression of the culture from which it stems, yet there must always be a common, rational juncture in which all languages make sense to one another. After all, the importance given to inter-species communication is based on trade and profit. On the other hand, the so-called capital E encodings rest on a performative premise. By imagining an essentialized feminine experience in need of being named, the women claim to the right to have rights, as Judith Butler understands the concept, that is a meeting point between performative action and resistance to precarity. By calling hitherto unnamed experience into being, the women foreground their unrepresented, underrepresented or misrepresented, bare life status into the sphere of appearance. Since they now can appear, at least to themselves, with their experience visible and legible in language, they have a claim to have the right to have rights in a society that denies them such a right. Although the foundational binary logic of the language corresponds perfectly to *écriture féminine*'s essentialism, this performative premise of the act of construction itself works as a means of creating a site of performance for the women.

Language's "magical" function of making things appear is a recurrent image in the novel. However, the word appearance here should not mean the look of a person, but rather the act of performing, like stage appearance, or appearing in public. Indeed, Butler contests the dichotomy between an inner truth of identity and the ways in which psyche manifests itself in physicality. She contends that the appearance of gender, for example, "is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or

inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other” (Butler, 2009, i). However, when identity or gender is seen as performative, it is always constituted by a negotiation with power, therefore, it can be reproduced in such ways as to risk “undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines.” (Ibid; I) In her seminal book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler puts the greater emphasis on the bodily acts as constitutive of gender as they are what give the impression and the appearance that there is an “internal” gender waiting to be expressed. She tries to show that this inner essence is manufactured through a sustained set of acts and posited through the gendered stylization of the body (Butler; 1990, xv). Consequently, she reaches the conclusion that, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (p, 34). This conclusion suggests that an internal or inherent truth of gender is a false metaphor (p, xv).

My suggestion is that the women treat those lexical encodings as performatives, meaning that the encodings facilitate change in reality simply by being constructed and used. The idea of a women’s language as a resistance tool is inherently performative because a language has to be founded on the principle of repetitiveness in order function. In the constructed language of the Linguist women, the female gender consistently “appears” as emotional and caring while men are rational and violent. The very idea of constructing a female language and writing suggests that there are clearly drawn inherent truths of being male and female. In this sense, the language falls into the essentialist idea of gender in Cixous’s *écriture féminine* that bases its emancipatory potential on the relative freedom stemming from the female ego’s proximity to the id, or the more permeable boundary between the

female unconscious and consciousness. However, the female language as performative action here creates the essentialisms that it tries to subvert. Yet, it is still imbued with subversive effects because the very attempt of representing the unrepresented political centrality of women and their exclusion from political life is a performance of resistance, an act of transforming voice into language that calls for solidarity on the basis of women's shared status of bare life that is constitutive of biopolitical power itself.

By creating a new linguistic medium in which their precarious lives appear as demanding recognition and the right to have rights, the Linguist women perform resistance to an order that includes them as their capacity to be killed while excluding the female population as outside of the political sphere of men. As we shall see below, language construction affects the ways in which the women's resistance is embodied, opening up new possibilities for change. We can rightfully claim that language indeed changes reality as the women in the novel envision it, because when seen as performative in the way that the bodily acts are, language is a means of creating the very reality it purports to change. In this sense, Láadan is not just a new language to translate the age-old precarity of women's lives into, but it is a performance that is constructed to bring all women together so that they can recognize their exclusion and appear as embodied, political agents.

The construction of Láadan begins in secrecy throughout the first chapters as we are brought back to thirty years before the time of the men's meeting described in the beginning. In the Linguists' compounds, those women who are barren or those who have passed reproductive age are supposed to live separately from men, children and fertile women, in what are called the "Barren Houses" located next to the Linguists' main houses. Consequently, the women who live in the Barren Houses are

grandmothers, middle-aged wives, and the barren daughters of the Linguists. Reproductive functions of women are valued so highly because it is through procreation that the household maintains its profits as new alien languages require of new infants acquiring alien languages. Since the household machinery is based on optimal productivity and strict work ethics, even in old age these women are expected to assist the younger, more active women with conference interpretation, business meetings and language training sessions for the infants.

This time we encounter Nazareth as a young child. She has already been working in the family business all her life and she is already fluent in a couple of alien languages and a few foreign human languages as it is expected of any Linguist child. Nazareth's grandmother Aquina, who lives in the Barren House, helps her during an important business meeting with a group of aliens and in the course of the meeting, Aquina notices a writing pad on which Nazareth scribbles something. When Nazareth is away for a short while, the grandmother checks out the writing pad and realizes that what Nazareth has been writing down is actually a series of lexical encodings in the form of dictionary entries. Right after the business meeting, quite surprised and excited, Aquina rushes to the other old women in the Barren House and shows them a sample of Nazareth's writing which she copied earlier without Nazareth noticing:

And she showed them a sample of what had been on Nazareth's tablet.
To refrain from asking, with evil intentions; especially when it's clear that someone badly wants you to ask – for example, when someone wants to be asked about their state of mind or health and clearly wants to talk about it.
(NT, p. 28)

Nazareth here describes a supposedly female experience lacking lexicalization, or naming. The urgency or originality of the description is questionable from a feminist viewpoint. However, the point is that the novel assumes that there are things in a

woman's life that the English language has no clear way of expressing, and enabling women to speak of these will empower them and change the social reality they have to face. With this act we realize that there is a secret movement among the women of the Barren House: a language project for which these elderly Linguist women have been creating new words and concepts for decades in secrecy. Based on the encoding above, the women decide that Nazareth has exceptional talent in pinpointing the unnamed female experience.

The previously unnamed "chunk" of the world is concerned with a lived social encounter during which men deliberately refrain from letting women speak about how they think and feel about themselves. At this point, the young Nazareth does not have a signifier yet for the signified she tries to convey with the words she has at her disposal: the already existing English, or "Panglish" as it is called in the novel, a reference to the lingua franca status of the language. This version of future English is not exemplified in the novel, but we have a few word samples from which we can infer that Panglish enacts a sexist and anti-intellectual worldview. For example, in Panglish, women are often insulted as "bitches" (*The Judas Rose*, 86), while effeminate men are known as "wimpoes" (NT, p. 39). Linguists and doctors who are hated as elite groups are called "lingoes" and "medicos" respectively (Bruce, 2008, p. 55). Academics are also called "eggdomes" in a pejorative way. "Consequently, Panglish may be described as a language that divides society up into what is culturally acceptable and what is culturally unacceptable, and what is normative and what is deviant" (Bruce, 2008, p. 52). This definition is valid for any language. What is striking about Panglish is not only its hateful tone towards women, homosexuals and intellectuals. The situation would not be much different if one compiled a list of the pejorative words in English for those groups. What motivates

the creation of the female tongue is the supposed lack in Panglish of a vocabulary with which women can express their opinions, concerns, feelings and attitudes towards the society that oppresses them.

Nazareth comes up with a concept and expresses it in Panglish and this concept, although possible to try and describe, did not deserve to be given lexicality before. The main objective of the Barren House women is to find such unnamed concepts and give them names, thus calling them into existence. Since creating a new language to speak of the experience of the disadvantaged also means creating a new discourse, it is seen as politically subversive. That is why the women keep this activity as a secret. The Linguist women hide their subversive language behind a seemingly harmless activity: creating another constructed language called Langlish. They tell the Linguist men that Langlish is just a brain exercise to pass their free time. By hiding language creation behind another language creation, the women try to keep their new “native tongue” going unnoticed and untouched by the men. They believe that if the men see their encodings they will immediately see how dangerous it is. Langlish is just a “decoy to keep the men from discovering the real language” (NT, p. 160). We are told that Nazareth has a remarkable talent in languages and she would make a perfect recruit for the women’s movement. She functions as a long-awaited heroine figure, the chosen one, who would accelerate the project and help the other women in their pursuit by creating even better semantic concepts for Láadan as she grows older. This is why Aquina is so excited about Nazareth’s talent:

“Well, hellfire and heavengates, woman, Nazareth doesn’t know that there’s any other woman-language but Langlish! Naturally that’s what she tried to do. But can’t you see? If she can formulate semantic concepts like these, we know what to do with them!” (NT, p. 29)

The name of the character suggests an affinity with Thomas Aquinas, who refers to a mental concept as a *verbum* or word, and measures the complexity of thought with

that of language. He believes that one can only understand something by conceiving it as a word in one's mind; it may suggest that Aquinas understands conceptual thought as language-like (Pasnau, 1997, p. 558). Similarly, Nazareth's grandmother, the Linguist Aquina believes in the correspondence between thought itself and one's language. If Nazareth can come up with words for semantic concepts that are not expressed in the language of men, it means that by constructing a language, one can construct new ways of thinking. Her excitement stems from the fact that such an endeavor is pregnant with subversive potential because language construction becomes a principle of their concerted action against the system.

At this stage, Láadan is confined to the Chornyaks' Barren House. Therefore, Nazareth cannot work actively in secrecy with the males around all the time. If she stays in the main house of the Chornyaks, she has to work all day and produce as many babies as possible until she passes beyond her reproductive years. The Barren House women think that Nazareth must be included in the project as soon as possible and start helping them with the development of Láadan. For the sake of their cause, the women decide to poison Nazareth in a way that will make her barren, so that she will be transferred to the Barren House immediately. However, when Nazareth becomes sick, she is sent to hospital right away and she does not become barren. Now Nazareth will have to live the regular life of a Linguist woman, with an arranged marriage to Aaron whom she hates. After this incident, she works and lives in the main house until nearing her forties and develops cancer. She is sent to the Barren House after the surgery that removes her breasts and uterus. Although she cannot fully participate in the project during most of her life, after the surgery Nazareth quickly becomes the leading figure in the Láadan movement. As she is dumped into the Barren House as "scrap" she is now only expected to assist the

younger generation in business negotiations as a “back-up” translator when necessary or to take care of the elderly as a nurse. In the relatively secluded space provided by the Barren House, she will devote all her remaining energy to the women’s language from now on.

Although Láadan is a constructed language with a grammar and lexicon created by the author, it rarely appears in the novel. This can be seen as a strategy on the author’s part to direct the reader’s attention to the feminist movement itself rather than the cognitive estrangement that Láadan would likely cause. We are given an appendix at the end of *Native Tongue* titled “Appendix, From: A First Dictionary and Grammar of Láadan ” and it lists a number of Láadan words for the reader to have an idea of the language. The Encodings follow the same logic of belonging specifically to women’s experience. A few examples are as follows:

raheena: non-heart-sibling, one so entirely incompatible with another that there is no hope of ever achieving any kind of understanding or anything more than a truce, and no hope of ever making such a one understand why... does not mean “enemy” (NT, p. 303)

rarih: to deliberately refrain from recording; for example, the failure throughout history to record the accomplishments of women. (p. 303)

wohosheni: a word meaning the opposite of alienation; to feel joined to, part of someone or something without reservations and barriers. (p. 304)

As can be seen, these random examples of encodings are often about emotions and interpersonal relationships. It is often implied that the language aims at looking at the world from women’s perspective. The political value of constructing a gynocentric language to replace an androcentric one is, of course, questionable. Whereas in the English language the male is normative, in Láadan the feminine is always normative. For example, the word “with” refers to a person or a woman in general whereas one must say “withid” while referring specifically to a man because “-id” acts as the masculine suffix (Bruce, 2008, 55). The construction of Láadan is also in line with

French feminism's preoccupation with *écriture féminine*, or "feminine writing." In her well-known essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), Helene Cixous, a major French theoretician for *écriture féminine*, claims "woman must write her self, must write about women and thus bring women to writing." This is because "women have been driven away from writing as well as from their bodies" (p. 875). Cixous also points out the fact that "until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy" (p. 879). Women and their writing have been repressed, and this repression has been perpetuated over the centuries. This repression is usually represented in fiction with its mystifying charms. The libidinal writing of men, Cixous claims, always foregrounds the differences between men and women in antagonistic terms, by exaggerating them as sexual oppositions, and never as sexual differences (p. 879). Therefore, women's writing is "the very possibility of change, the space that can serve a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (p. 879). *Native Tongue* tries to explore the ways in which how this transformation can be brought about by women's feminine language and writing. Just as the women's language itself is often hidden in the narrative, and is only revealed in the form of certain terms describing a number of allegedly feminine experiences, Cixous's feminine writing also stays largely on a theoretical level as a potential for feminine writing.

For Cixous, there is a close link between female sexuality and feminine writing and they are both multiple and function excessively as opposed to the hegemonic male discourse which is always calculated, economic and based on exchange value. In *Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays* (1975), Cixous locates excess in language and feminine writing. She contends that: "Rare are the

men able to venture onto the brink where writing, freed from law, unencumbered by moderation, exceeds phallic authority, and where the subjectivity inscribing its effects becomes feminine” (Cixous, 1975/2003, p. 43). However, we witness an attempt to create new political agencies, new possibilities for attaining political life with this enactment of the female experience as excessive of the already established male language. It is excessive for two reasons. First, it is uncalled for as far as the authority is concerned. It is also deemed subversive because the men are aware of the fact that a given language may incorporate a novel way of looking at the world, a lesson learnt from their experience with the non-human entities. Second, the women’s language is excessive because it exceeds the text in a metafictional leap, and presents itself to the real as a non-sexist alternative for the supposedly sexist languages that are imposed upon the female audience by men. Excess is represented in *Native Tongue* as a form of flowing out into the real life, as the readers are encouraged to learn and speak Láadan among themselves just as the fictional women. As Halliwell and Mousley point out, “Cixous externalizes excess by thinking about it less in terms of the unseen depths of the self, than in terms of language and its effects” (Halliwell & Mousley, 2013, p. 35). Here lies the political potential of the women’s language project in the novel. By creating a fictional language and extending its presence to the real world, Elgin invites the reader to think of a link between their own potential disposability in relation to authority and the phallogocentric language of the late twentieth century. As Cixous says: “To write is always to make allowances for superabundance and uselessness ... Whereas (masculine) reason is driven by such utilitarian goals as the will to truth or power, (feminine) emotion is spendthrift” (Cixous, 1975/2003, p. 36). The women

characters in the novel make excess of writing by inscribing new codes for their experience, thereby aiming to resist the already existing regime of truth.

But is it possible to break the existing regime of truth by constructing a new language of experience out of the dominant one? Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explain in their *Biopolitics as Event* (2013), that resistance to biopolitics that represses certain subjectivities comes as an event emerging from within: “The biopolitical event comes from the outside insofar as it ruptures the continuity of history and the existing order, but it should be understood not only negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges, so to speak, from the inside” (p. 240). Láadan reverses the power logic of the existing language by making the feminine linguistic properties normative in place of the male ones. As Hardt and Negri tell us: “the event marked by the innovative disruption of *la parole* beyond *la langue* translates to an intervention in the field of subjectivity, with its accumulation of norms and modes of life, by a force of subjectification, a new production of subjectivity” (p. 240). This idea of producing new subjectivities by disrupting the existing language forms the main argument of the novel. It is common knowledge that any culture is reflected in its language. But is it possible to change a culture by reconfiguring its language?

Láadan definitely replicates the binary pattern in language by its reversal of gender categories, instead of foregrounding the exclusion of bare life from politics as a general problem. On the other hand, the novel has the undeniable merit of viewing language as constitutive of thought. Although the women’s language reproduces the patriarchal gender essentialisms, because of the central thesis of the novel that claims language as the basis of social reality, the construction of Láadan allows the women to perform their embodied subject positions in new ways, such as appearing to listen

to men but refusing to argue with them to disrupt their expectations of women, or hiding their language material behind stereotypically female activities such as knitting in order to keep their political agenda undiscovered. *Native Tongue* is presented as a thought experiment as Elgin claims in various interviews. She says that she “decided to do it as a science fiction novel and the novel would take up the hypothesis that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is true in its weak form, which means that language does become a social change” (Elgin, 1987, p. 178). As I have pointed out earlier, the strength of language construction in the novel derives from the fact that it becomes a claim to the right to have rights when there are none. Language itself appears as the expression of precarity that needs to be eliminated. Encoding the experience of disenfranchisement and male violence as perceived by women becomes an act of resistance.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also called Linguistic Relativity in anthropology and linguistics, proposes that the language you have been raised in and learnt to experience the world with, structures the ways in which you classify and perceive the world. Benjamin Lee Whorf argued during the 1930s that “the differences between languages mean that different ethnic groups have different views of the world” (Bruce, 2008, p. 47). This relativity hypothesis also means that one’s native language subscribes to an already established way of perceiving the world through the lens of its linguistic features. Whorf famously claims that “We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language” (Whorf, 1956, p. 213). Largely disputed in contemporary social sciences, this popular hypothesis assumes that a language with its specificities provides us with descriptions about its speakers.

It follows from this hypothesis, then, you can significantly affect the ways in which a person or a community perceives reality by changing their language. Since science fiction novel as a genre often problematizes its various language related themes such as, space travel, alien communication, virtual reality, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, first encounter stories with extraterrestrials and various mind control methods in future societies, we can find a significant number of canonical science fiction novels that speculate about Linguistic Relativity. Preceding *Native Tongue*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Samuel Delaney's *Babel-17* (1966) and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), dealt with the same idea in their arguments about the relationships between politics and language. In these novels, various forms of political organizations try to restrict and shape language for mind control.

However, *Native Tongue* deals with the idea of language construction as a subversive act to bring social change. Organizing against the exploitation of languages and people by the state, the women Linguists see language change as so powerful that it is hard to distinguish it from magic. In another metafictional note, this magical quality of language is elaborated with an example and it equates Linguistic Relativity hypothesis with magical creation. The anonymous female writer of the excerpt titled "Discourse of the Three Marys" asks: "To make something 'appear' is called magic, is it not?" (NT, p. 242). She goes on to locate a body part: "Now, there is a continuous surface of the body, a space that begins with the inside flesh of the fingers and continues over the palm of the hand and up the inner side of the arm to the bend of the elbow." She names that body part "the 'athad' of the person." The author finally says that "Where there was no athad before, there will always be one now, because you will perceive the athad of every person you look at, as you perceive their nose and their hair." Now, athad exists for perception and

therefore magic “is not something mysterious, not something for witches and sorcerers... magic is quite ordinary and simple. It is simply language” (p. 242). By reclassifying the world through linguistic innovation and by unifying in the Barren House to form their act of resistance, Aquina, Nazareth and many others attempt to reconfigure their world through language as if shaking up a kaleidoscope.

The women try to spread this means of “magical” world building so that all women in the world can use it for resistance. The dissemination of Láadan is more problematic than constructing the language itself. The Barren House women hesitate to launch the project for decades, thinking they do not have enough encodings. Nazareth’s moving to the Barren House accelerates the process. Nazareth assures the reluctant elderly women that “It’s not complicated ... Word should go out to all the Barren Houses as quickly as can be managed, using the recipe-codes” (p. 253). Thereafter, those women who can speak Láadan well enough are “to begin using Láadan and only Láadan with the female infants of the Lines whenever there are no men about” (p. 253). This is how they begin to disrupt the language-learning machine, the Ideological State Apparatus, namely the Lines, from within.

Soon after the female members of the Lines begin to speak Láadan among themselves, Thomas Chornyak realizes something is different about the women and decides to investigate the matter. After a while he begins to suspect that the women might be doing something “dangerous” with their silly language hobby, Langlish. When he is with Michaela, now his mistress after murdering her husband, Thomas tells her: “... if they’ve actually pulled it together sufficiently for children to use it, it would be as dangerous as any plague (...) it represents danger, and it represents corruption – and it shall not happen” (NT, p. 281). After living among the Linguist women as a nurse for a period of time, Michaela now sympathizes with their cause

and therefore she kills Thomas in his sleep, in order to save the women's language from immediate destruction and save them some time for action. Soon, not only the female members of the Chornyak Household, but women from the other twelve households begin to speak the language. Noticing a dramatic change in the behavior of women, the Chornyak men organize a meeting for all Linguist men and everyone complains about the changes they have been noticing. As a result of this meeting, the linguist men decide to build up separate houses for women close to their own mansions and begin to live apart from them. They simply cannot bear living with women under the same roof anymore. The construction of language results in concrete changes in the relationship of men and women, causing new embodied experiences that enable the women to further resist oppression while also pointing towards the posthuman configurations of subjectivity.

2.3 Future bodies and language

After working on their subversive plan for decades, Nazareth and the other Barren House women finally start teaching the language. In this section I will analyze the implications of Láadan in terms of the posthuman identity politics that reject gender and species essentialisms as theorized by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, while also giving references to the sequels of the novel. In a posthuman future where the boundaries between what is human and non-human are increasingly blurred due to high technology and biopolitical reduction of bodies virtually to living objects, any form of humanist language based on essentialist categories, such as male/female, natural/cultural and human/non-human are inevitably doomed to failure as a strategic basis for resistance. Although being a critique of humanism as a patriarchal project of human domination over nature, the

novel stays within that same humanist binary logic structuring language and it creates a barrier on the way to social change. I will address the novel's ending in light of this statement and demonstrate the ways in which the women reproduce the very discourse that dehumanize them as machines and animalistic, speechless beings. Although Láadan is an attempt on Cixous's *écriture féminine* that is in excess of the supposedly rational male discourse and it strives to voice the concerns of women as that part of the population abandoned to precarity, it is ultimately based on the idea of gender as an inner truth. With the emerging configurations of a posthuman existence, even the identity of an essentially unique and transcendent human subject largely became a contested notion in the 1980s. It can be said that *Native Tongue* is a science fiction that demonstrates the instability of human identity as defined in discourse, yet at the same time it cannot go beyond gender essentialism in its attempt of calling only for female emancipation. After all what is rendered speechless is not just the female subject, but also the whole concept of bare life as the disposable political object of the biopolitical society.

Towards the end of *Native Tongue*, Láadan is spread among the female Linguists and the young female infants from the other households. The effects of Láadan have already begun to be felt by the men. Although Michaela has killed the suspicious patriarch in his sleep, a sacrifice she made for the women's cause, the other family members soon realize that something is different about their women. Alarmed by the emergency of the perceived change in the Linguist women, the Linguist males decide to have a meeting in order to assess the situation and discuss what actions must be taken. To the utter discontent of their husbands, fathers, brothers and male cousins, the Chornyak women now do not interact with them the way they did until they began to speak Láadan among themselves.

During the meeting the Linguist council members express their unease and contempt for this new sort of women: “They look right at you, and they don’t interrupt or fidget – they fold their hands in their laps and give you what is supposed to be their full attention, right? More attention, God knows, than they ever used to give” (NT, 289). The reformed women do not look outright rebellious or indifferent to their patriarchs, but they do quite the opposite. They give them their full attention and just watch what they have to say in uninterrupted silence. The acts traditionally associated with women are no longer visible. The women do not raise objections or “nag” the men; neither do they “demand” things from them. The women remained silent before because what they had to say had no corresponding place in the male discourse. They had only voice but not language. Being regarded only as *zoe*, bare life and bare bodies, their voice was only empty utterance and made no sense in the political community of men. Their new silence after the adoption of the new native language is different in that they now refuse to participate in the language of power whose rules of operation are set by men only.

This way it is suggested that Láadan creates a space in which women feel they can return the male gaze without the necessity of speaking in vain the language of men. As a result, they do not try to argue with men in a discourse structured by men’s dominance and shaped according to their needs. Luce Irigaray gives one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the situation of women in relation to the men’s language. According to Irigaray, women are always other in themselves, because they are ultimately other in the languages made by men. Irigaray’s explanation sheds light on the reactions of the Linguist men to the new women around them as well as their traditional expectations from them in terms of how women use language.

"She" is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious... not to mention her language, in which "she" sets off in all directions leaving "him" unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. (Iragaray, 1977/1985, p. 29)

After leaving the reasonableness altogether, the women choose a total unresponsiveness, which drives the men furious: "But somehow you know, you know, that their minds are a thousand miles away. They're not really looking at you – and not really listening!" (NT, p. 289). We only know the women are different due to Láadan but we are not given their own thoughts about this change and how they feel about themselves. The reader is made to look at the change from the perspective of men. The women now seem to be extremely boring as well as non-human to the men: "They might as well be androids, for all the good they are; androids would at least be uniformly attractive (...) They are so goddam cursed boring!" (p. 289). Another elderly household head informs Thomas Chornyak that his female relatives do not complain at all. "They do not get sick – can you believe that, Thomas? No more headaches, no more monthlies, no more hysterics... or if there still are such things, at least they are never mentioned" (p. 275). The men uniformly raise their voices and express the same thing, that is, the Linguist women are so alien now and it is unbearable.

The separation of the women's language from that of men results in their physical separation as well. In addition to the Barren Houses, the men decide to build "Women Houses" in for the women to live permanently. Now they will only have sex with their wives but otherwise will not share their living space with them. After the death of Thomas Chornyak, his son succeeds him as the household head. The new leader of the Linguists gives the final verdict about the separation of the sexes.

The reason for the physical separation is that the women have become “multilingual robots” and the men even think that the physical proximity is something not desired for women:

“Very well, then. The women have only themselves to blame for this, my friends. They have decided, in some incomprehensible female way, to turn themselves into multilingual robots – it was not we men who set them on that course. They’ve made their beds, as the saying goes; let them lie in them. They have no money, they are legally not even of age... what can they do to stop us?” (NT, p. 294)

My suggestion is that the separation of the sexes here is an expression of the men’s anthropocentric anxieties. The women were already reduced to their biological functions as “less than human” beings. The fact that they attempted to rewire their consciousness by changing their language has resulted in their being viewed by the men as more distant and alien. The men are still not aware of the existence of the women’s new native language, which they have begun to speak among themselves. Seemingly, language is seen on a par with mind-programming as the novel’s central thesis of linguistic relativity suggests. What is most confusing for the men is that the women do not act “like women” anymore. There is something outside of the accustomed, essentialized ways of performing gender on the women’s part. Yet, this difference is not explicated in terms of the “inner” changes happening to women as a result of the language. We as the readers are expected to see the change but not the ways in which the female language causes the changes themselves.

While Nazareth’s husband complaining that women have no on/off switches earlier, now the Linguist men complain that women act like machines. The creation of the women’s new language comes as a disruption into the life they share with the men within the household. Resembling the silence of machines, the women’s silence unsettles the men and estranges their human-centered worldview. As David Roden explains in his *Posthuman Life* (2015), “A philosopher is a humanist if she believes

that humans are importantly distinct from non-humans” (p. 10). Traditionally, humanism in the West has also been anthropocentric. Roden also generalizes that “A humanist philosophy is anthropocentric if it accords humans a superlative status that all or most nonhumans lack” (p. 10). In line with this definition, we can say that the novel is a critique of the kind of humanism that is both male and human-centered.

The transformation of the Linguist women should be thought with the social construction of cyborg as famously theorized by Donna Haraway in 1980s. Haraway rejects any branch of feminism based on the essentialisms of men/women, man/animal as well as Marxist alienation versus an unalienated, “natural” conception of labor. Instead, in her well-known *Manifesto* of 1985, she celebrated the hybridity of the subject as a social construct made unstable by information as well as biotechnological developments. Haraway uses the myth of cyborg to explain this shift from the binary essentialisms to an open-ended becoming of the hybridized, partial, localized and fluid configurations of the subject. She defines a cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction” (Haraway, 1985/2004, p. 7). The new social reality is structured by the transmission of data and the power of simulation. This model is coterminous with the novel’s thesis that language is constitutive of reality.

That cyborg is a hybrid of machine and organism does not necessarily mean that the women characters are literally fused with machines. It rather implies that the women have come to a realization that they are able to self-create their subject positions and realize themselves with an awareness that both language and their embodied actions are open to becoming different in potent ways. In Haraway’s

concept of the cyborg, representation is replaced with simulation while the category of human is complicated as life is more and more defined by technology and artificial intelligence. Therefore, as Haraway contends: “The cyborg is not subject to Foucault's biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations” (Haraway, 1985/2004, p. 22). The emergent post-human creature is not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics because it is not human in the traditional, humanist sense as the master of its rationality. Since the cyborg being has no claim to a totalizing language to redeem itself, or to a retreat into a mythical time before capitalism caused the alienation of the human psyche, language cannot represent such a dream of going back but it can only simulate the operations of the existing political discourses.

By creating new fictions within the fiction to which they are subjected, the women simulate the language of biopolitics. They turn the male normative language upside down, reshuffle the gender categories in their new language and end up being thrown out of the men’s political sphere to live in the Women Houses. They are sent away to live separately because their new presence as non-human beings disturb the operation of the male rule that is based on the clear distinctions between men and women as well as machine and human. Their reorganization of their embodied responses to men in the form of silence and a dissociated attention to their speech disrupt the order. In order to understand the critique of patriarchal/anthropocentric humanism in the novel, we need to look at the further examples of the cyborg and hybrid figures in the near-future society.

The technology in the society is not only used to control bodies in a disciplinary way but also to build them. A subplot deals with the attempts of the government to overthrow the monopoly of the Lines as the intermediaries between

the extraterrestrials and the humans. The government itself is largely absent from the narrative. However, it is manifested by its attempt of gaining the total control of the interaction between the humans and extraterrestrials by discarding the intermediary position of the Lines. We also know that it is the world government that took away the women's civil rights in order to reduce them to their biological and maternal functions such as procreation and raising their infants. If the biopolitical analysis is valid as I support throughout this thesis, then the absence of the government is understandable because in the age of biopolitics power is virtually everywhere. Since life itself is the object of biopolitics, then it can mean that the legislative function of the government is infused with the total management of life. It is telling that while traditional utopias describes the workings of a government in minute detail, the government structures in contemporary dystopias tend to be rather concealed. One can compare the socialist utopias of the nineteenth century to the dystopias of the twentieth, such as Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). While utopias describe various political institutions to explain why they are better, the dystopian work revolves around the images of an invisible yet pervasive political rule's total control of the human mind and body with biotechnological means such as strict eugenics.

The government in the novel does not trust the Linguists, fearing they might be hiding information from them. The Linguists learn and translate the languages of "humanoid" aliens and for that purpose their houses have built-in special environments called the Interfaces. An interface is "the simulated and sealed-off environment you had built for it within your house, and that it was delighted to visit for a while and share its language with your offspring. God knew the Lines had offspring to spare; the Lingoies bred like rats" (NT, p. 47). The "it" here refers to the "Alien in Residence," an alien being from another planet, who has been sent to live

in the Interface for a period of time in order to interact with a Linguist infant so that the infant will pick up the alien language and grow up using it.

There is a repeated distinction between humanoid and non-humanoid aliens. The Linguists claim that it is not possible for humans to learn the languages of non-humanoid aliens, because, as Thomas explains: “no human mind can view the universe as it is perceived by a non-humanoid extraterrestrial and not self-destruct. It is as simple as that” (NT, p. 66). He gives this explanation to the government agents who resolutely believe that the Linguists are secretly learning non-humanoid languages as well, but hide the fact from the state for their own benefit. The government wants to break the monopoly of the Lines and start learning non-humanoid languages. Believing only a linguist infant can be “interfaced” with a non-humanoid alien, they steal a newborn baby from the Linguists. However, the government’s plan goes terribly wrong as Thomas pointed out earlier and the baby literally gets turned inside out after interacting with the non-humanoid alien. The non-humanoid aliens, we learn, are radically different than both humans and the humanoid aliens. As a Linguist says: “When you examine a humanoid body it is possible “at least assign labels roughly to its parts. That thing was a limb, say. That little lump there might well be a nose” (p. 47). Consequently, we are led to believe that language and the body are closely linked. The utter strangeness of the non-humanoid’s body is reflected in its language as the expression and determinant of unthinkable, destructive alterity. The non-human is so alien in body and mind that the human brain cannot incorporate its language because such incorporation would require changing one’s embodied humanness.

Lacking the Linguists’ insight and knowledge on alien languages, the government uses biotechnology to produce altered human beings to make them

“naturally” suitable for acquiring alien languages. From the government agent Dolbe, we learn that “the test-tube babies” is a common thing in the society. The government “harvest” test-tube babies: “‘You have here,’ Dolbe said in the requisite monotone, ‘numbers 20 through 30 of the test-tube babies, popularly referred to as ‘tubies,’ temporarily in custody of my unit’” (NT, p. 165). We learn that these “tubies” are “decanted, provided standard health and social care, and are all in satisfactory physical condition” (p. 165). The government biologically manipulates these babies in order to “crack the language” of a non-humanoid race called Beta-2, which the government thinks will be a great source of profit. They give the tubies “small amounts of hallucinogenic drugs, in gradually increasing doses”, “from their initial day of life” (p. 165). As we can see, the government manipulates physiognomy and tries to biologically alter these harvested infants. The point is that these babies are not seen as fully human but mere vessels for new information just like women.

The question of embodiment is prevalent in all three novels that form the focus of this thesis. Does information exist independent of the body that produces it? The biopolitical era coincides with the age of information in the late twentieth century. Biopolitics has a paradoxical relationship with embodiment because it aims the production, manipulation and control of the living matter. On the other hand, technology has progressed in such a way that information is given primacy over the living body. This explains how the female body is objectified in *Native Tongue* and it is seen as a vessel of translated information from one code into the other in their exploited labor as translators. In Haraway’s words, “No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common

language” (1985/2004, p. 22) It is easy to see the connection between this “sacredness” and Agamben’s figure of *Homo Sacer*. Any human body can be killed and is disposable because the human biology is open to endless manipulation and exploitation within contemporary biopolitics, as is made clear with the test-tube babies and women. Haraway means the positive connotation of the adjective sacred, yet she is opposed to such sacredness because it suggests the humanist essentialism, the sacredness of human life. She rejects this idea, because she opposes any grand narrative or language that can redeem a supposedly innocent, natural and unified human subject. Haraway’s politics is in support of strategic affinities between individuals rather than identity politics based on essentialisms. However, the information technology is not necessarily redeeming when the body is discarded as mere vessel for thought.

The experience of women and test-tube babies in the novel can be read as an erasure of their embodiment in the age of technology. Katherine Hayles in her seminal work, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) puts the emphasis on embodiment while theorizing her branch of the posthuman. She claims that “Here, at the inaugural moment of the computer age, the erasure of embodiment is performed so that ‘intelligence’ becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human lifeworld” (Hayles, 1999, p. xi). Subjectivities are embodied in language, and less than human bodies are erased within this system as Hayles warns. The power is after the manipulation of bodies that are capable of using symbols the way it needs them to. Disembodied, estranged, passive and muted beings are the result. The experiment of the government fails horribly with those hallucinogenic-fed babies ending up completely speechless and inarticulate. Exposed to the ultimate alterity in the form of the Beta-2 non-humanoid alien language, they

lose their capacity to speak and process human languages. The interference with and manipulation of their “natural” human embodiment backfires at the very forces that have tried to shape them for profit. These subjects cannot really be interpellated anymore and they also cannot be considered fully human in such a society where being subjected to the status quo is the only way out, especially for women. They are legally and practically disposable.

Native Tongue ends with the idea that although it is possible to change reality by new constructions within language, one cannot ultimately resist the authority in the world of the posthuman by creating counter-subjectivities only at the level of discourse. Marking themselves as self-constructed aliens in the eyes of men, the women blur the boundaries between what is human and non-human. Rosi Bradiotti (2013) claims that in our contemporary world “the binary opposition between the given and the constructed is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction” (p. 3). In the case of the Linguist women, putting into operation a constructed native language to speak of their experience and replicating the binary logic of the existing, dominant language does not solve their problems and transform the society into a non-violent one. Bradiotti also notes that the current system is incapable of giving recognition to any adequate representation of the posthuman because neither postmodernism nor poststructuralism grasp the natural-cultural hybridism that is the end-product, the new subjectivity in the age of technology:

The posthuman subject is not postmodern, because it does not rely on any anti-foundationalist premises. Nor is it poststructuralist, because it does not function within the linguistic turn or other forms of deconstruction. Not being framed by the ineluctable powers of signification, it is consequently not condemned to seek adequate representation of its existence within a system that is constitutionally incapable of granting due recognition. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 188)

The discourse of power in *Native Tongue* is poststructuralist in the sense that those reduced to bare life as the others; sexualized and objectified women try to gain political agency by linguistic means. Their language is based on differences between gender categories and clearly distinguishes between human and non-human lives in an essentialist manner. In a technologically saturated society in which the living matter is open to all kinds of manipulation, such a language falls into the trap of replicating what it opposes in the first place. It does not address the issues of biogenetics, queer sexualities, non-human animals and other sources of sexualized, alienated and naturalized *zoe*. The women-only language cannot go beyond sexual boundaries, but create even more clearly defined ones. While discussing the erasure of embodiment as the result of the age of information, Hayles questions the idea of wholeness enacted in a common language for feminism. She rejects the idea of a common feminist language as a means of embodying the female subject as a political category, because similar to Haraway, she too rejects a sex-based identity politics. Any totality, for Hayles, is another form of humanism that essentializes across human/animal as well as men/women as naturalized categories.

The Linguist women attempt to reach a totality, a wholeness of an all-women multitude without considering that such an idea of wholeness is the very humanist and anthropocentric premise with which the men operate. Hayles (1999) asserts that: “We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one” (p. 31). Therefore, such an aim falls short on resolving any contradictions because such a total language does not take into account the experience of the other forms of posthuman life as exemplified by aliens and biotechnologically produced infants in the novel. In this sense, the

women's language project misses the fact that bare life and precarity are not confined to feminism, but they are the conditions for the whole biopolitics.

While we do not encounter any Alien characterized in *Native Tongue*, and led to thinking that the aliens possess the same kind of materialistic ideology as the Earth, the sequel novel, *The Judas Rose* (1987) ends with a report from a united federation of the aliens, titled "The problem of Earth". We find out that the real reason why the Aliens have contacted the Earth in the first place was not interplanetary trade. They have made contact with humanity as a form of intervention: "Whatever the explanation, however, by 11,302 one thing was certain: the females of Earth (together with the more advanced males viewed by their peers as effeminate and weak) were literally in danger from their male counterparts" (p. 358). After closely observing that humanity does not become any less violent, but instead spread their violent culture further to the colonies they found in the galaxy with the help of new technologies they get from them, the Aliens now reach a consensus to leave the Earth in quarantine and cut off all contacts with the human society.

In the third book of the series, *Earthsong* (1993), we encounter the Earth as it has been left to its own devices for a few decades. The Aliens have disappeared completely without a trace and the world government is in crisis. Nazareth is now dead and she is addressing humanity as a voice from the unknown. She tells the reader that she needs "trancers" or intermediaries to convey her messages to her successors. Nazareth's embodiment has been erased as she has no body anymore, and she relies on the living to continue the women's movement. While her body was the main object of biopolitics in the beginning, she now exists only as a narrative voice without a body. This image is significant as an ending of a series of novels on

the idea of a women's language as a tool of resistance because the concept of women's writing stems from the essentialized notion of the sexual and corporeal difference of the female. The posthuman world erases the body yet its biopolitical logic of power tries to possess life itself at all costs. This contradiction is worked out as Nazareth's demand from the women that they should renew their relationship with nature and their own bodies by reproducing only with Native Americans, and not with their husbands anymore. This suggests a reactionary attitude towards technology as men's attempt of dominating and destroying the planet. The disembodied image of Nazareth is important also because it suggests a unified understanding of the body and language as an indistinct category as opposed to the primary concept of the Cartesian split. As the use of Láadan has been abandoned since it did not make it to the wider public of women, Nazareth admits that language as a socially transformative act can only be thought with the body as a unified category. On the other hand, this embodied language spoken in words and body is not sufficient as a totality because the perfect expression of feminist concerns in language is a dream:

The real problem is the language. Not the words I say... and that's wrong, I don't use "words" anymore (...) the problem is the words and the body language that are generated at the other end of the language transaction. They're almost never the right words and body language. (Earthsong, p. 8)

Under these circumstances, the female resistance must find new ways of existing and being embodied agents so that they can change the society. Language is never the adequate as long as embodiment is disregarded and erased by power. Now the Aliens have left and Láadan not in popular use, Nazareth declares that the solution is to exit the system in a more radical way by denying its problematic, exploitative treatment of nature. She thinks a non-violent society can only be attained if the women physically abandon the world of men. They instead should start creating a new

generation of people by reproducing with the men from the indigenous tribes of America. They should get married to Native Americans to make a more peaceful humanity. Although this anti-Western and ecological undertone is not elaborated further, it is important to emphasize that the resistance points towards a non-Cartesian unity of the body and language, nature and culture.

On the other hand, as the novel cannot go beyond the gender system embedded in its essentialist discourse, it cannot help but gets caught up in “a binary machine that privileges heterosexual family formations and literally steals all other possible bodies from us, we no longer know what sexed bodies can do” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 99). Thought-provoking on multiple levels with its problematic of language as constitutive of reality, language construction as a feminist act of resistance, the reduction of the other to bare life and the erasure of embodiment as the dual predicament of the late capitalist, technologically saturated society, the resisting forces in *Native Tongue* are ultimately shaped by the language of biopolitics out of which it has emerged. Building on Hayles’ account of the posthuman, Ferrando (2014) asks whether the posthuman body will be shaped in terms of gender, race, age, class, (dis)ability and sexuality among others (p. 219). *Native Tongue* as a science fictional tale of language brings us to that same question. The other two novels that are the focus of this study will bring us closer to its answers.

CHAPTER 3

FROM COMMUNITY TO IMMUNITY:

LANGUAGE AS VIRAL DISCOURSE IN *SNOW CRASH*

3.1. Hyperreal communities

Like in *Native Tongue*, the discourse and practices of biopolitics shape the resistance built around language in Neal Stephenson's cyber-punk novel, *Snow Crash* (1992).

The novel is set in a near-future North America where the private sector has dismantled the federal government almost entirely. Life is partly lived in real world and in Metaverse, the latter being a virtual platform on which people "materialize" in a digitally generated environment simulating an urban landscape, through their personal representations called avatars. Life in the novel is structured around real-virtual and human-machine elements. In this dual world, a media mogul called L. Bob Rife who owns the network infrastructure of Metaverse, carries his plot of gaining the total control of people's minds by affecting their language abilities. Rife intends to control the society by introducing a virus into people's bodies, a virus that affects people both in reality and in virtual reality. As this capitalist, evil one-man figure is seemingly not connected to any political authority, his function within the narrative can be read on an allegorical plane, parodying and criticizing the tragic reality of a society in which consumerism and paranoia harbored for the other have replaced any democratically structured political organization. Rife's whole project lays bare the fact that there is no more legitimate political authority than what he symbolizes, which is the financial power as well as the power of media in contemporary society.

Rife plans to spread the virus called snow crash which works by destroying the immunization system of the body and turning the human brain back to its pre-Babel status, in which the human mind was susceptible to being programmed by the ur-language, the logocentric Sumerian in which the word was the manifestation of the single truth. The virus is disseminated by an addictive drug and by infected blood. There is also a digital version of the virus and it affects the minds and bodies of hackers since their brains are used to thinking in the binary logic of computer languages. The novel revolves around the story of how a group of hackers and a female courier join their efforts to make people immune to the virus with the help of an artificial intelligence and a cyborg-animal. While the hacker, Hiro Protagonist and the courier, Y.T. try to destroy the virus, they realize that both are exploited and marginalized as vessels for information in the capitalist system. Only when they learn to collaborate with each other as well as other marginalized characters, they succeed and prevent Rife's movement of turning people into biological machines.

The image of the society in the novel is in line with the Italian political philosopher Roberto Esposito's idea of biopolitics in which he defines the biopolitical order as the failure of political agency and democratic institutions at the expense of shutting the individual up in a pseudo-protective shell against a paranoid and manufactured idea of outside threat embodied as the dangerous other. For Esposito, community cannot be understood without its negative double, immunity. While the former represents a shared life and duties but also the vulnerability that this openness entails, the latter is what sends the individual back to a state where he is not obliged to care for the other. Esposito believes that our current society of control is characterized by the process of immunization gone extreme, therefore, it leads to the immune-system failure where the individual loses any political agency or

freedom, and become reduced to bare life in which he succumbs to a baseless fear of and hatred towards the other. Whereas biopolitics is supposed to enhance life and health of the body politic, it ends up killing all meaningful participation in political life in order to supposedly maintain the health and integrity of the society viewed as an organism.

The language virus in the novel aims at reducing the community to a total biomass, a living, corporeal entity comprised of unthinking, non-critical individuals who cannot care or understand each other. It can be said that the image of total mind-control via the virus is a critique brought upon the society with the immune system-failure characterized by Esposito. Following Esposito's definition of the biopolitical society as characterized by a tension between community and immunity, I define the central social conflict in the novel as being based not on positive values but on a general concern and fear of the outside characterized with the figure of the intruder. Foucault's distinction between the disciplinary society and the society of control sheds light on this excessive concern for security. In the disciplinary society, power is concentrated in the disciplinary and ideological state apparatuses. It rules by "structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviours" (Negri & Hardt, 2000, p. 23). Here, the obedience to the rule and the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion are produced in the prison, the factory, the university...etc. Foucault characterizes the early stages of capitalism in the West with this kind of logic of power. On the other hand, Negri and Hardt state that the society of control opens toward the postmodern and it should be understood as "more immanent to the social field," where the mechanisms of command are "distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens," as "interiorized within the subjects themselves" (p. 23). As there is no visible

disciplinary, central state structure defining the rule of exclusion in terms of the self's position to the other, the society in the novel is characterized with a paranoid fear and hatred towards an unstable and changing presence of the outsider. When power is diffused to such a great extent, it becomes invisible as well. Negri and Hardt rightly locate power in the society of control within flexible and fluctuating networks, the networks of information and money in the context of the novel.

Power is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity. The society of control might thus be characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks. (Negri, et al., p. 23)

Such a view of the society of control as a diffuse and omnipresent network of power leads to a rather dystopian image of the future. Heller states that the commonly accepted belief about Foucault concerning his view of power is that in his theory, "Subjects do not consciously exercise power; they are merely power's passive objects" (Heller, 1996, p. 78). Furthermore, "Because all power-relations, for Foucault, necessarily involve domination, liberated power-relations cannot exist. Foucault's conception of modernity, therefore, is inherently dystopian" (p. 79). If it is possible, as language-related science fiction of the twentieth century tries to convey, to produce docile subjects within language, by way of controlling and limiting language, then power is everywhere as creator of political reality. Therefore, the language of power takes precedence over the actual state apparatuses in the analyzed novels. As there are no visible, disciplinary apparatuses or social institutions, the inclusionary exclusion of bare life, therefore, must be viewed on the level of discourse in the text. In *Native Tongue*, it is the language of the male

Linguists in which the female body is seen as vessel for information and excluded from power as less than human. In *Snow Crash*, the language of consumerist capitalism provides us with clues as to what and who is the other to be reduced to bare life in the society.

The society in the novel is largely dominated and reproduced within the imagery and language of advertisement. It is not possible to escape being exposed to the image. The language of capitalism dictates how life should be lived and who the other is, it often being those who cannot afford to buy a prestigious citizenship and the safe life that comes with it. At times it takes up ethnic character as the non-whites or immigrants are denied entry to certain states. The advertisements for a safe life blocked to the outside dominate the physical environment in the form of glowing billboards. On the other hand, the system is based on a fast and constant movement of information. The main characters in the novel respond to this conflict between community and immunity by mobilizing their bodies and consciousnesses along the networks of power and information afforded by the technological society. They attempt to do this in two ways. First, they use computer language to create a subculture within virtual reality in which they can communicate and share information while moving their avatars that are not restricted to physical obstacles. Second, they realize the importance of self-expression and diversity in human languages so that difference in opinion can exist among people, an idea that is seen as the basis of a political life in the novel. I will discuss the significance of bodily forms of resistance, such as the fusion with machines (another complication of the self/other dualism) and the bodily hexis as defined by Pierre Bourdieu as the embodied expression of politics on the human body. The bodily hexis refers to the ways in which the dominant ideology within a given society is embodied in the

bodies of its subjects. The way one moves in space including gestures, manners, style, attire, language and speech are read as often unconscious indicators of the politics embodied. It can be argued that the emphasis given on speed, movement and the image in the society make bodily hexis into a more consciously performed series of statements whereby the body itself can become a subversive site of expression. For example, cross-dressing and high-tech body suits are deliberately employed as to complicate the boundaries between such oppositions between man/woman and natural/artificial, ultimately giving the characters a freedom of movement along the channels where information and bodies travel in the novel.

Since its publication in the early 1990s, *Snow Crash* has become a canonical novel in the science fiction genre, inspiring many other novels that tackle the issues of information technology, virtual reality and political agency in a world dominated by computers and digital platforms. With the digitalization of everyday life in the society of control, the individual becomes a function within the flow of information, money and power. What is the status of bare life, itself being characterized by its corporeal presence and biological value to the system, when the information technology disembodies the subject and make the human consciousness exist as a function without a body? By foregrounding the experience of bare life in a text without representations of such traditional disciplinary institutions as the prison or nation states, the novel juxtaposes the present and absent, or the embodied and disembodied subject in an age simultaneously characterized by the virtual reality and the objectification of biological life. Access rather than physical property gain importance in such a society as power begins to exist more as disembodied information stored in computers as the disembodied subject becomes equal to its value as information and consumer choices easily manipulated by the science and

language of advertisement. The experience of the underrepresented bare life, in such a society, must find a way of materializing itself and open up to possibilities of joint action against a corporate power trying to erase and exploit human embodiment at once. As a contributor to the book *Tomorrow through the Past: Neal Stephenson and the Project of Global Modernization* (2006), a collection of articles on Neal Stephenson's fiction, Shane A. Shukis informs us that the novel is often lauded for the strength of its speculations:

It presciently articulated the Metaverse, a virtual world of avatars that very closely predicted the actual expansion of the Internet as a space for virtual identity and interaction . . . It also predicted a decentralized American future in which the federal government largely ceded social policy and civic organization to corporations. (p. 57)

Snow Crash depicts a late 1980s and early 1990s North America, in which privatization, advertisement industry, and computer technology rule supreme. The federal government has left all of its functions to capitalist enterprises and has largely dissolved. People live in what are called "Burbclaves": gated city-states with their own laws and police forces. These microstates are obsessed with surveillance and keeping trespassers out. These units also overlap with "franchulates", or franchised nations. A franchulate or a FOQNE is "A Franchise-Organized Quasi-National Entity" (SC, p.15). These states are not based on certain geographies but function like multinational corporations. Therefore, the meaning of a citizen is different in this society. A citizen is a customer rather than a legal, natural part of the state system. She buys citizenship and pays for the services she gets.

Consequently, population growth equals financial success for a franchulate. Each new citizen means new tax revenue. With this critique of citizenship and the logic of governance, the novel makes us question the relationship of power and citizenships in the later twentieth century. In this world of capital-accumulation

frenzy, people live in paranoia concerning their physical security and they are always suspicious of outsiders, or those who have no money to be able to belong to a good franchulate. While the money and wealth are concentrated within the burbclaves (a wordplay on enclave and suburb), those who cannot afford to buy citizenship are destined to live in the chaotic big cities swarmed by gangs and criminals. In short, there is a clear boundary between safety and precarity drawn by financial prowess in this future world, a fact that connects the narrative with the global political realities of the twenty-first century. Not only consumer goods but also the political immunity to precarity is bought and sold. If life is the object of biopolitics in modernity, one can argue that life itself is a manufactured and consumed in the novel.

As it is a product, life in the novel is unsurprisingly envisioned as dominated by the image of advertisement industry. It is the common practice for a city-state to advertise on billboards on highways, calling for new “citizens.” The novel is set in Los Angeles where the franchulate of “The Greater Hong Kong” is owned and run by Mr. Lee. It is inspired by Hong-Kong and China and uses Southeast Asian imagery in its advertisements but is legally independent from China. On a huge billboard in Los Angeles, there is a picture of Mr. Lee and it advertises his state:

“WELCOME! ... The potentials of all ethnic races and anthropologies to merge under a banner of the Three Principles to follow: 1. Information, information, information! 2. Totally fair marketeering. 3. Strict ecology! ... Who would disdain to subscribe under this flowing banner? If you have not attained your Hong Kong citizenship, apply for a passport now! In this month, the usual fee of HK\$100 will be kindly neglected. Fill out a coupon (below) now. If coupons are lacking, dial 1-800-HONG KONG instantly to apply from the help of our wizened operators. (*Snow Crash*³, p. 117)

Different ethnicities and cultures are expected to melt in the extraterritorial pot of the Greater Hong Kong as long as the principles of the primacy of the free flow of

³ Stephenson, N. (2008). *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam Dell. (Original work published 1992). All future in-text citations from this novel will include the abbreviation “SC” to denote the same work, in order to eliminate confusion and excessive repetition.

information, money, fair play in marketing which is an oxymoron in capitalism, and “strict ecology” are followed. Strict ecology here refers not to environmentalism but to banning all who do not possess citizenship to the supposedly safe life provided by the citizenship. Being the true capitalist that he is, Mr. Lee expects any person to join his franchised country: “Join us instantly! Your enterprising partner, Mr. Lee” (SC, p. 117). The shared enterprise of capitalism, then, grants the citizen certain privileges like access to important data and also it creates a supposedly safe living space in gated communities. Buying the citizenship here means conforming to such an ideology in which money and information should not meet any obstacle in their movement yet the physical space should be strictly regulated. The other of the system, then, is the one who does not or cannot subscribe to this capitalist culture of information and consumption. The world is comprised of millions of microstates that contain such communities of shareholders.

Esposito’s understanding of community is a binary one, consisting of community and its negative double, immunity. Tracing the etymology of the Latin term, *communitas*, he finds that the term derives from *munus*, which means gift and obligation toward the other. This original meaning is in accordance with the fact that what is common (as in communal) refers to what is not one’s own and what the other cannot appropriate (Esposito, 2013b, p. 49). Therefore, community appears when property, what is proper to the self vanishes. On the other hand, the citizenship in the novel, belonging to a franchulate and burbclave are sold as service and a promise for indifference to anyone outside of one’s property (strict ecology). They do not refer to a shared life but a common tendency to exclude those deemed unworthy of a good life. Then what is it that the idea of duty toward the other includes in the context of the novel?

Esposito defines community in our current era in a negative way.

Community now is defined less as a selfless duty toward the other but a sense of exclusion of the otherness. The other for him is who is threatening to the health of the community. It can be an ethnic minority, foreign elements, or internal enemies, those declared to be sacred men, in Agamben's terminology, those whose lives must be excluded from the system with no rights so that the sovereignty can exert its power. His conception of community is a negative one because it can only be understood with immunity, which refers to the person who has no obligation toward the other. As a result, community comes to be defined as a process of excluding the other. Any outsider can be killed with impunity, like Agamben's sacred man. The ideal immunity is a point of no contact with the threatening other. Similarly, in the novel's context, the community is no longer defined as sharing of common values (except for having money), but as a reactionary self-defense of the system against the contaminating outside. *Snow Crash* presents an urban landscape in which one is always in danger of getting arrested for being the citizen of another community unless he or she has a business duty or sufficient amount of money to be able to step into another microstate.

The novel puts a greater emphasis on access to services based on money rather than territorial property. These microstates are configured more like a network of financial and informational relations rather than territorial countries with a sense of communal life. The immunization gone extreme prisons the individual in a small, well-defined space of safe living and the outsiders are defined in terms of their financial stature. The whole story revolves around the dichotomy of inside/outside as the characters seek passage into different communities, gain access or denied entry. This image of community resembles online communities where the access of entry

does not involve physical movement but credentials, qualities and purchasing power. Although the sense of the outsider is physical in the novel, community is protected as a database, as something that must be guarded against unauthorized users. This is one of the defining characteristic of the posthuman world theorized by Katherine Hayles. She emphasizes the prominence of access rather than ownership in the contemporary world. This changing conception of community's relationship of what lies outside reflects a change in the technological society. Patterns of data are deemed more important than material presence in the world. Hayles (1999) thinks that the development of information technologies radically reconfigures the distinctions of private and public. As the subject becomes disembodied, he begins to be treated as data and can be seen as a virus to be cleaned off from one's system. This way the other is dehumanized and without the physicality of entry, the criteria in regulating whom to give access and whom to deny entry into one's living space can be altered instantly:

When the emphasis falls on access rather than ownership, the private/public distinction that was so important in the formation of the novel is radically reconfigured. Whereas possession implies the existence of private life based on physical exclusion or inclusion, access implies the existence of credentialing practices that use patterns rather than presences to distinguish between those who do and those who do not have the right to enter. Moreover, entering is itself constituted as access to data rather than as a change in physical location. (p. 41)

This emphasis on access is prevalent and reflected in the novel by the occupations of the main characters. One of the two main characters is named Hiro Protagonist. The narrative focuses on Hiro's adventures of fleeing his Italian-American mafia bosses, uncovering the origin and character of the language virus, and organizing a group of people who likewise want to eliminate the virus. He consults the oracle in the form of a computer program because a woman guides him. He does not save the damsel in distress but is saved by a teenage girl from being murdered by the mafia. In the end,

Hiro does not destroy the monster/virus, but a cyborg/robot literally does that. Therefore the name “Hiro” possesses an ironic note. The heroic individual, a common figure in genre fiction, is jettisoned here in favor of plurality of living beings, assembling on the basis of affinities rather than total identities, non-essential gender roles and on the ambiguously disembodied and embodied experience of the individual. Hiro is able to help the destruction of the virus when he assembles with diverse others on the basis of being denied political agency and the awareness of the importance of concerted action to save language from becoming monological, hence totalitarian. What is deemed important is how one acts out his or her identity in a world marked by the hybrid configurations of the posthuman that renders the Cartesian splits and traditional ethnic or gender identities obsolete. The hero in the novel is that who acts against these by performing in such a way as to emphasize plurality. “Protagonist” comes from the Greek *protos* (first in importance) and *agonistes* (actor). It can be said that the name protagonist, when applied to Hiro comes to mean that living in the society of control in the age of high technology, being an actor/performer is of primary importance because the inscription of power is only subverted in the bodily and linguistic performance as long as the self opens up to the other as to create concerted resistance against authority. Resistance is geared towards saving the plurality of language and self-expression for each, and to leaving behind individual differences empowered by totalizing identities.

We meet Hiro in the beginning as a pizza delivery person but soon find out that he is also a hacker. As a hacker his job is to gain unauthorized access to various data and sell them to others to make a living. Being half African-American and half Korean, living both in Metaverse and Reality, and having two different jobs, he admits that he often does not know where he stands. However, he finds his sense of

identity more in being a hacker. Hiro thinks he belongs to a group of people who thinks outside the box. Hackers share an important ability: they are fluent in computer language. With computer language, hackers “write” and “build” in Metaverse as well as their audio-visual embodiments in it in the form of avatars, or digitally generated bodies. As a pizza delivery guy in Reality, Hiro is supposed to drive a high- technology, fast and armored car. He goes back and forth between different franchises and gated communities feeling nowhere quite at home but in the virtual reality where he finds a sense of identity because he is able to create and express himself through his avatar. Although the emphasis is shifted to access than physical presence, and disembodiment rather than embodiment in the society, the constitutive function of computer language gives Hiro a sense of choice in virtual reality. He can be where he wants to be and what he wants to look like at least in Metaverse.

The freedom Metaverse gives as a platform of self-expression and conscious world building in the form of computer language can be contrasted with the passive consumerism in the case of advertisement. Advertising images dominate the scenery wherever one goes. The totality of the advertisements in the form of billboards creates a permanent, omnipresent halo in Los Angeles where the plot is mainly set. The massive advertising lights are visible to and felt by everyone like a panoptic gaze from which there is no escape, even in Metaverse. This form of billboard is called a “loglo” in the novel, unifying logo and halo in a fictive neologism denoting the glowing images of consumerism in the city. The *raison d’être* of the individual within the society is to consume what these loglos represent: “The imageers in Manhattan design all the loglos and thus reproduce life: “The loglo, overhead, marking out CSV-5 in twin contrails, is a body of electrical light made of

innumerable cells, each cell designed in Manhattan by imageers who make more for designing a single logo than a Deliverator will make in his entire lifetime” (SC, p.10). Those who create the images rule the world and Hiro’s menial job leaves him marginal and powerless. He is the one who is supposed to consume but his life is consumed in the process.

“The Deliverator” mentioned in the excerpt is Hiro himself. This is what a pizza delivery guy is called. Hiro Protagonist is supposed to deliver pizzas in Reality and information or “intel” in Metaverse. In both occupations, he is expected to be as quick as possible because in such a fast-moving world of information and late capitalist economics, speed dominates the human transactions. Hiro has to make any delivery in maximum thirty minutes or else his life is put in danger. The pizza company for which he works is called CosaNostra and it is run by the mafia. “Cosa nostra” means “our thing,” an expression used by the Sicilian mafia while introducing mafia members to one another, signifying membership. If Hiro is even a second late when he reaches at the doorsteps of a customer with the pizza, then the mafia has a right to kill him with impunity. He becomes a *homo sacer* in Agamben’s words, someone without a legal right to exist in relation to power. The mafia is not mafia in the traditional sense as their practice of killing is not exclusive to them as an unlawful practice. The practice is a part of the particular business and legally recognized as just. This is a critique of the contemporary corporate life that dehumanizes workers for profit. America in the novel, or the conglomeration of all the franchise states that comprise the North American political geography is a post-industrial place. These communities are only good at contributing a few products to the global economy: pizzas, cinematic entertainment and music. In a satirical fashion, the pizza company for which Hiro works has its own university. The

workers are supposed to study pizza business on undergraduate level. This is a criticism of higher education that more and more serves the interests of a service-based economy:

Pizza delivery a major industry. A managed industry. People went to CosaNostra Pizza University four years just to learn it. Came in its doors unable to write an English sentence, from Abkhazia, Rwanda, Guanajuato, South Jersey, and came out knowing more about pizza than a Bedouin knows about sand. And they had studied this problem. Graphed the frequency of doorway delivery-time disputes. (SC, p. 5)

Although people do not share a common language they are united in their exploitation under the rule of capitalist enterprises. Hiro constantly emphasizes the fact that he is a hacker, meaning he is not a passive deliverer, or vessel for pizzas and “intel”, (short for intelligence) but an active creator in virtual reality. Metaverse is made up of computer language and Hiro as a “speaker” of this language, is able to take active part in its ongoing becoming. Creativity here is related to one’s ability to use computer languages and create audio-visual representations in Metaverse, ranging from buildings and roads to facial expressions and bodies of avatars. Metaverse gives a sense of agency and freedom to its users. Hiro, like many others are able to become free of materiality in the real world and gain a sense of movement. We should remember that *Snow Crash* was written before the World Wide Web became a global phenomenon, the first major technological innovation hugely impacting life in the twenty-first century.

Hiro’s life suggests a dual existence and two different ways of being embodied (or disembodied) but the novel also complicates the supposed boundaries between Metaverse and Reality. As a mixed race, low-income pizza delivery person, Hiro feels alienated in Reality. His looks are described as a patchwork of many things, a made-up image of distinct parts. He looks both Asian and African-American. He carries high-tech gadgets on himself as well as traditional Japanese

swords called katana. He is a pizza delivery guy, a fighter and a tech savvy geek.

Whereas Hiro lives in a big house he himself wrote in Metaverse, in Reality he lives in a claustrophobically small storage unit with his roommate, a Ukrainian immigrant called Vitaly Chernobyl. Only when he connects into Metaverse and “materializes” in it as his self-created avatar, Hiro experiences a sense of fulfillment, and a sense of community with other outcast hackers in Metaverse. This sense of community is different than the negative one in Reality because it is based on a shared culture of occupation and always refers to positive qualities such as self-expression, creativity and helping one’s fellow hackers. While his physical body is encapsulated in a storage unit, Hiro is able to put on his “goggles” and “materialize” in the simulated world as a being able to move freely:

The goggles throw a light, smoky haze across his eyes and reflect a distorted wide-angle view of a brilliantly lit boulevard that stretches off into an infinite blackness. This boulevard does not really exist, it is a computer-rendered view of an imaginary place. (SC, p. 26)

The third-person, omniscient narrator repeatedly states that Metaverse does not physically exist. This recursive explanation is understandable given the fact that the novel was written in the early 1990s when virtual reality was yet to be a household phenomenon. It is not concrete but made of electronic transmissions coded as a simulation. However, such a distinction is very problematic for several reasons. First of all, what is called Reality of which Metaverse is a simulation, is already very much of a simulation: with the massive light of advertisements reflected on the cityscape, the franchised nations that are actually multinational corporations, a pervasive culture of consumption run by greedy marketers along with the mafia that simulates a loving family, and an empty sense of community based on a propagated xenophobia. Reality is already hyperreality. By the same logic it could be possible to say that Metaverse also simulates the society of surveillance and control from which

it originates. When a new world is simulated in Metaverse, it is already based on the simulacra that dominate the real world. In this sense, our World Wide Web is not a simulation simulating the information network of the real world existing out there, but it is the very mechanism by which our sense of reality is manufactured. The major theorist and critique of the postmodern society, Jean Baudrillard defines the reality of the late twentieth century as a hyperreal, constructed simulation of copies without existing originals. The representations in the novel, such as the advertised microstates bearing names like Greater Hong Kong, Pizza universities owned by corporations and Metaverse itself do not refer to really existing phenomena but to representations of non-existing originals. In this sense, a country does not precede its map, but vice versa, as in Borges's fable *On the Exactitude of Science* (1946); the map precedes its territory. Baudrillard defines hyperreality as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality":

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself.
(Baudrillard, 1981/2006, p. 1)

In this sense, virtual reality does not simulate reality but generates it. Reality is indeed a desert in the novel as embodied within the speculative version of Los Angeles. It is a desert illuminated by billboards and motor vehicles. Information diversifies, changes and gets updated constantly. Hiro must keep track of all this data flow. He has to be very fast and constantly on the move. Reality and Metaverse only reflect and inform each other. The main part of Metaverse frequented by Hiro is even "bigger" than the Earth itself. The map genuinely precedes and exceeds the territory:

“The Street seems to be a grand boulevard going all the way around the equator of a black sphere with a radius of a bit more than ten thousand kilometers. That makes it 65,536 kilometers around, which is considerably bigger than Earth” (SC, p. 30).

Both the negative idea of community in the form of immunizing microstates and the conception of reality divided into “given” (Reality) and the constructed (Metaverse) are apparently hyperreal, meaning they are based on the simulations of simulations. Capitalism operates within Metaverse like it does in Reality, by paying people to obtain and carry information valuable to its operations. The simulated reality hides the fact that there is nothing real about America. In this sense, the virtual reality in the novel can be likened to Disneyland. Baudrillard (1981/2006) contends that Disneyland is not a simulation of America, but a dissimulation of it, meaning that it hides the fact that there is no real America to be a model for it:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. (p. 13)

As the novel complicates the boundaries between embodied and disembodied existence, it also attempts to blur the boundaries between human beings and computers. In her reading of the novel, Hayles suggests that “The world that *Snow Crash* depicts-part virtual, part real-is driven by a single overpowering metaphor: humans are computers” (Hayles, 1999, p. 272). However, I claim that the word reality should be understood in the sense of hyperreal that I have pointed out earlier. This way, the distinction between real and virtual becomes unstable. Hayles goes on to claim that this metaphor/analogy “underwrites the novel's central premise: that a computer virus can also infect humans, acting at once as an infection, a hallucinogen, and a religion” (p. 272). The reason behind this analogy is that both humans and

computers are programmed by language. Computer language is made of ones and zeros while human languages are similarly based on presence and absence.

According to logocentric, binary logic, they call previously non-existent phenomena into being. Both machines and human beings are determined linguistically in this equation because language is equaled to thought and reality itself.

L. Bob Rife owns the cable infrastructure of Metaverse. This is how the system operates: it is pure information transmitted by cables. Rife also pays certain people to spread the virus among hackers in Metaverse. Since hackers are those who are fluent in computer languages, it is the way for Rife to control Metaverse. A computer virus in the Metaverse can affect not only the avatars but also the biological bodies of hackers because their brains are more used to reading binary language. Not only hackers but also regular people are susceptible to Rife's virus in Reality. The biological counterpart of the virus is a blood serum that makes people forget their languages and speak only in tongues in ecstasy. Bereft of any speech ability, the infected person is reduced to a bare body that can be loaded with instructions like a machine. Rife's aim is to reduce all people to a "biomass." He tries to turn people into organic automata by destroying the multiplicity of language, opinion, thought, and consequently any resistance. The infected people are called the "falabala" for the way they sound. The reduction of people to bare life leads to their being mere clones of one another. When we lose our political agency, we are no more than clones of each other. Baudrillard thinks that this is what happens to the human body when it begins to be understood as nothing other than a message in the age of information and late capitalism, that the human body is conceived "as a stockpile of information and of messages, as fodder for data processing. Thus nothing is opposed to the body being serially reproduced in the same way Benjamin

describes the reproduction of industrial objects and the images of the mass media” (Baudrillard, 1981/2006, p. 100). If the human body is a mere vessel for information, then it is disposable as bare life from a sense of political life. On the other hand, the industry still lives on human life as the consumer and consumed, as biomass. The body is always closely monitored in the novel. When the deliverer of intel, the teenager Y.T, goes to a white, middle class community called “White Columns,” a barcode on her body is scanned automatically at the gate. Human bodies bear barcodes just like products do. So our bodies are all products, constantly scanned and reproduced in the society of control and biopolitics:

Very southern, traditional, one of the Apartheid Burbclaves. Big ornate sign above the main gate: WHITE PEOPLE ONLY. NON CAUCASIANS MUST BE PROCESSED. She's got a White Columns visa. Y.T. has a visa to everywhere. It's right there on her chest, a little barcode. A laser scans it as she careens toward the entrance and the immigration gate swings open for her. (SC, p. 40)

Since the capitalist-biopolitical system lives on the exploitation of human labor and the body, it needs to include bare life into itself. The system needs bare life and not thinking, reasoning individuals. In line with the hyperreal character of the society described so far, L. Bob Rife does not inform news in his media kingdom, but he creates them. Here is an instance in which Rife, the embodiment of power as media in the novel, brings the biological aspect of biopolitics and the reality-making function of language together in an interview he gives to a journalist. Embodied as the voice of the consumerist society, Rife thinks that “biomass” is the lifeblood for the system. He plans to bring a mass of immigrants from the third-world countries into America and infect them all with the virus. This way there will be more and more infected babies and the whole society will be turned into biological material without political agency. The journalist asks him whether Rife is making money off the information flow that he creates. Rife answers that:

"Partly. But that's only a very crude explanation. It really goes a lot deeper than that. You've probably heard the expression that the Industry feeds off of biomass, like a whale straining krill from the ocean." "I've heard the expression, yes." "That's my expression. I made it up. An expression like that is just like a virus, you know-it's a piece of information, data that spreads from one person to the next. Well, the function of the Raft is to bring more biomass. To renew America. Most countries are static, all they need to do is keep having babies. But America's like this big old clanking, smoking machine that just lumbers across the landscape scooping up and eating everything in sight. Leaves behind a trail of garbage a mile wide. (SC, p. 138)

Rife's view of politics is a chimerical, monstrous image of biopolitics and decay. His sense of national dynamism brings together the Italian Futurism's worship of the machine and the human reproduction as the fuel of modern progress. America is a machine that destroys anything alive by turning life as understood as a consumer product in the novel into garbage. Biomass is not only an expression but it is the political reality without which the system collapses. The thinking, rational and creative aspects of the Cartesian subject is jettisoned at the expense of extracting the animate mass of it, almost like a fossil fuel for America's destructive mode of existence. Biomass is not just human life but all life. It is pure *zoe* that we share with all other living creatures. The industrial system as well as the information sectors represented by Rife feeds on this totality of *zoe*. We encounter this same explanation of biomass earlier from Hiro when he explains the concept to his friend Da5id the hacker in a different context, right before Da5id becomes infected with the computer virus in Metaverse:

"Biomass?" Da5id says. "A body of living stuff. It's an ecology term. If you take an acre of rain forest or a cubic mile of ocean or a square block of Compton and strain out all the nonliving stuff-dirt and water-you get the biomass." ... "Industry expression," Hiro says. "The Industry feeds off the human biomass of America. Like a whale straining krill from the sea." (SC, p. 89)

In order to "renew" America, Rife brings an infected mass of third-world immigrants to California. These people are infected with his language virus: they cannot understand languages but only receive instructions given by Rife. Like the mythical

people of Babel, they speak one language; they babble, or sound like “falabala.” They lose all political agency, all hope for a qualified, political life and individuality. The conglomeration of ships of various sizes and shapes carrying these infected people are called the Raft as is mentioned in the above extract by Rife. With the addition of these people into the communities, with injection of more blood serum into people and with more infected hackers in Metaverse, the communities living in thousands of American city-states and franchised nations will return to the mythical time of the Tower of Babel when everyone spoke a single language of submission. They will simply be quantifiable, reproducible, regulated biomass; the human capital that makes up “the means by which human life and biology are regulated under neoliberalism” (Breu, 2014, p. 15).

3.2 Language against immunity

The novel suggests that only by maintaining diversification of language/thought and showing affect to everyone exploited by the system humans can eliminate the threat of mind control by the system that treats the human brain like a computer that is susceptible to viral discourses and the body as a biological material to be used for profit. Otherwise, the individual remains the target for the processes attempting to turn it into “biomass,” mere bodies and biological material to be the fuel for the biopolitical society of control. This unthinking but animate mass will be bereft of any political agency and conform to their precarious position without being unable to resist and assemble against the consumerist authority represented by Rife.

The language virus can be read symbolically as the punishment humans get for conforming to the culture of consumption and becoming indifferent to the ethnic and financial others, those who are in the outside of one’s community. In biopolitical

understanding, the society is seen in organic terms, as a living organism consisting of living beings. Both recent history and our current political situation make it clear that when a nation is seen as an organism, the other can easily be categorized as the dangerous, cancerous or unhealthy part of the system. This is like suggesting in a banal, journalistic manner, that its slums are the bleeding wounds of a nation. The ideology that declared the Jews during WW2 as *homines sacri* and denying them rights to exist used the same biopolitical logic in defining the Jewry as a vermin eating up the healthy Aryan body from within. In the context of the novel, we see that such precarity is extended to the majority of the population, and the safe, privileged and “the immunized” communities have remained as isolated enclaves that monitor their environments for any intrusion by those in precarity. In such a political climate, the language virus can be seen as a critique of a diminished political life that has lost its democratic, pluralistic values in exchange of a racial, financial and environmental *apartheid*. On the other hand, the new technologies such as virtual reality provide opportunities for uniting people and break the physical limitations imposed on them by the state induced precarity that also renders them vulnerable to mind control.

When he is on an intel-gathering mission in Metaverse, Hiro goes into a bar called the Black Sun, the favorite meeting point for all hackers. After a short while, a female avatar gives his hacker friend Da5id a card and when he reads it, Hiro witnesses his fellow hacker’s avatar being evaporated in Metaverse. Da5id’s ex-wife Juanita, with whom Hiro had an affair when they were college students, informs Hiro that Da5id did not only disappear from Metaverse, but he also went into a coma in Reality. Juanita encourages Hiro to investigate this incident and gives him hints about a possible conspiracy against the hacker community of Metaverse. Following

Juanita's instructions, Hiro visits a simulated entity of artificial intelligence in the appearance of a male, middle-aged intellectual called the Librarian. The software of the Librarian was written by a scientist called Lagos, suggesting a connection with the Greek word, logos. The Librarian gives Hiro a presentation about the myth of Babel and Sumerian history. He explains that the myth of the Tower of Babel was inspired by real historical events. Human beings in the age of Sumer once shared a single language and there was no multiplicity of opinions. People then were like computers and their minds operated with written instructions prepared by the religious elite. Only when a hacker called Enki (also a Sumerian God) prepared a written code called a "num-shub" on a clay tablet and made people read it, this original language of mankind began to diversify and made it possible for different ideas to form. Otherwise, humanity would have stayed in the same location of Babel, both physically and intellectually. There would not have been any thought or resistance to authority.

The novel uses the Judeo-Christian account of Babel in order to form its structuring analogy, that, the human brain and computers are basically the same; they share the ability to process languages. They both are hardware to be programmed with languages. Similar to the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis that I have outlined in the first chapter, languages determine thought in this formulation. As a programming language tells the computer what there is to see, a human language also calls things into existence for the human brain to think. On the other hand, this linguistic determinism is possible because we all possess a universal faculty with which we are able to learn and process languages. Diverse human languages are dialects of a common deep structure in the human brain. In this sense, the idea of

language in the novel is a middle ground between relativistic and universalist approaches to language:

So Lagos was trying to say that the newborn human brain has no structure-as the relativists would have it-and that as the child learns a language, the developing brain structures itself accordingly, the language gets 'blown into' the 'hardware and becomes a permanent part of the brain's deep structure-as the universalists would have it." (SC, p. 229)

By altering their language, you can alter the reality perceived by people because it is the specific properties of the languages wired into our brain that allows us to classify and make sense of the world around us. On the other hand, languages become determinant factors embedded in the deep structures of the brain, determining the way reality is registered within the human brain. The virus in the novel, therefore, can be read as an image to show the interconnectedness of language with the body. The interconnectedness of the two is a common motif in all three novels analyzed in this thesis, as the language faculty altering drugs, viruses and bioengineering operations in the novels demonstrate the reciprocity within the mind-body link. The virus that will restore the masses back to the pre-Babel time of utter linguistic monologism, and it is able to operate both in reality and on virtual platforms, because the human mind undergoes structural changes conditioned by language properties. This is how the hacker Da5id goes into a coma after reading a piece of computer language. Rife's virus, called Snow Crash, is able to do that because just like computers, the brains of humans have been shaped by a language of binary thinking: they think like computers. As the Librarian keeps talking, we find out that Bob Rife has discovered that the analogy between computers and humans is a new one but its origin is as old as the human civilization itself:

"Computers rely on the one and the zero to represent all things. This distinction between something and nothing -this pivotal separation between being and nonbeing- is quite fundamental and underlies many Creation myths." (...) "Even the word 'science' comes from an Indo-European root

meaning 'to cut' or 'to separate.' The same root led to the word 'shit,' which of course means to separate living flesh from nonliving waste. The same root gave us 'scythe' and 'scissors' and 'schism,' which have obvious connections to the concept of separation." "How about 'sword'?" "From a root with several meanings. One of those meanings is 'to cut or pierce.' One of them is 'post' or 'rod.' And the other is, simply, 'to speak.'" (SC, p. 249)

Hearing the above explanation from the Librarian, Hiro feels that Librarian is pulling his leg, but then decides that he is not capable of doing such a thing as an artificial intelligence. As a hacker, Hiro uses computer language in such a way as to create audio-visual presences in the cyberspace. He calls things into being by using ones and zeros. In this sense Metaverse comes into being through Logos that is based on presence. This also suggests that the real world is also built around the same principle. The world exists due to the initial existence of Logos as the ground of meaning. Hiro is fascinated by the fact that this logocentric division between presence and absence structures both computers and human thinking. Carrying swords himself, he is enacting science in Metaverse and Reality, cutting things out, carving life out of non-living material. A human being is the one who creates something out of nothing due to the presence of the speech, or language. It is also noteworthy that the creator of the Librarian, Lagos, is a former officer of the Library of Congress, which is the embodiment of the scientific knowledge in the Western tradition.

According to the Librarian, it is not the Judeo-Christian God that destroyed the original linguistic wholeness of the humanity out of wrath and made people unable to understand one another as in the myth of Babel. The people of Babel were a “biomass” unable to formulate metaphors and novel ways of making sense of their world. Therefore, the Sumerian hacker/God Enki created “a speech with magical force”, a software to make language diverge rather than stay monolithic. Enki was the first one to realize the biopolitical dangers of language control: it was possible to

control the human body by controlling its language. Enki created a form of speech, and incantation called a num-shub which gave the people of Babel immunity to the viral ideas in the form of “me”, instructive tablets of written culture that are transmitted from generation to generation. After employing an international research team and founding the biggest archeology department in the world, L. Bob finds out about the num-shub’s whereabouts in modern day Iraq in order to make sure that no one can make people immune to language programming again. According to the Librarian a num-shub is:

a speech with magical force. The closest English equivalent would be 'incantation,' but this has a number of incorrect connotations." "Did the Sumerians believe in magic?" The Librarian shakes his head minutely. "This is the kind of seemingly precise question that is in fact very profound, and that pieces of software, such as myself, are notoriously clumsy at. (SC, p. 251)

Like in *Native Tongue*, language here is related to magic. It is seen as magical that language creates something out of nothing. There is being rather than non-being because of language calls phenomena into being by naming them. Num-shub is at once the story, language and a self-fulfilling fiction. It marks the beginning of civilization that is, in this sense, the history of people’s moving away from the ideal state of sharing a single tongue. Language does what it describes simply by being spoken as its magical presence. By using language, Enki makes multiplicity out of oneness:

Enki, the lord of abundance, whose commands are trustworthy, The lord of wisdom, who scans the land, The leader of the gods, The lord of Eridu, endowed with wisdom, Changed the speech in their mouths, put contention into it, Into the speech of man that had been one. That is Kramer's translation." "That's a story," Hiro says. "I thought a nam-shub was an incantation." "The nam-shub of Enki is both a story and an incantation," the Librarian says. "A self-fulfilling fiction. Lagos believed that in its original form, which this translation only hints at, it actually did what it describes." (SC, p. 258)

By the intervention of Enki, civilization begins and different communities can finally emerge as structured with different languages. This is shown to be the basis of political life with multiplicity of speech, therefore opinion. It is only after the people of Babel gave up building their ziggurat they start leaving the ancient city of Babylon and populate different parts of the world. The Librarian also makes a distinction between Enki's idea of community and the Biblical account of the ideal community of the Logos. The single Sumerian language before the separation enabled people to understand each other without misunderstanding because as there was nothing to resist or oppose. This linguistic prehistory of the human community is the ideal state for totalitarian rule because it does not allow the development of a political life in which the just and the unjust, hence politics cannot exist without opposing worldviews enacted in different languages. Therefore, human beings speaking the Sumerian language were not qualified as political agents but only as an interpellated and easily subjugated biomass. The language of the Logos is fully and ideally performative as it does what it says in the moment of utterance:

"Early linguists, as well as the Kabbalists, believed in a fictional language called the tongue of Eden, the language of Adam. It enabled all men to understand each other, to communicate without misunderstanding. It was the language of the Logos, the moment when God created the world by speaking a word. In the tongue of Eden, naming a thing was the same as creating it. (SC, p. 330)

After extensive historical and archeological research, Bob Rife formulates the Snow Crash virus in order to make people return to the time before Enki intervened. The virus affects the brains of hackers in Metaverse and everyone else in Reality. The biological counterpart of Snow Crash is called Ashera's virus, after another Mesopotamian deity. The Librarian explains that this virus was still latent in the human brain after the Tower of Babel was abandoned. This virus is what makes us susceptible to "viral ideas", such as conspiracy theories, religions and political

ideologies. These viral ideas appeal to communities altogether. They get their power from their mass appeal. According to the Librarian we are always already inclined to follow ideas without questioning them due to our irrational nature as human beings. However, being infected with Snow Crash makes us even more susceptible. The only thing preventing the world from being taken over by such metanarratives is that we share a mutual incomprehension with one another. Incomprehension is not a negative quality but the very source of political life.

“No matter how smart we get there is always this deep irrational part that makes us potential hosts for self-replicating information. But being physically infected with a virulent strain of the Asherah virus makes you a whole lot more susceptible. The only thing that keeps these things from taking over the world is the Babel factor - the walls of mutual incomprehension that compartmentalize the human race and stop the spread of viruses. "Babel led to an explosion in the number of languages. That was part of Enki's plan. Monocultures, like a field of corn, are susceptible to infections, but genetically diverse cultures, like a prairie, are extremely robust. (SC, p. 476)

Stephenson celebrates diversity of languages as the source of resistance to the society that encapsulates the individual as a consuming and consumed body within the language of segregation and advertisement. Communities resist being taken over by viral discourses of capitalism through linguistic diversification that mean multiplicity of opinions. Although we have an irrational part in our nature that makes us susceptible to being infected with metanarratives we still manage to have an existence in addition to our bare lives due to this diversification. However, unless a community learns how to resist the virus by opening up to difference, it is doomed to become mere biomass and automata for the system to exploit. Yet there is a problematic aspect to this formula: how much difference we should allow into our system and how much we should resist the outside? What happens to a community if there is no line separating it from the outside? I think this question of immunization structures the novel's idea of language virus to a great extent. Only by diversifying

language, by opening ourselves up to different voices despite mutual incomprehension, we are able to attain immunization to viral ideas. Otherwise, culture remains monolingual and language monological like in the Pre-Babel state. Paradoxically, also only by excluding the other we form a self-enclosed community. How does the novel resolve this tension between the self and the other, or, between the community and its outside?

Roberto Esposito's concept of community in his biopolitical theory provides a lens through which this paradox is seen more clearly because his concept of community is based on its double, namely immunity. Esposito explains that the terms community and immunity derive from the same Latin root: *munis*. It has several meanings, such as gift and obligation. In this sense, being in a community binds us to the other in a relationship of duty. As I have pointed out earlier, community is what lies outside of the self and it is not supposed to be based on a relationship of sameness and shared traits with the others. It is rather refers to a sense of duty one performs in order to maintain the integrity of the community by exposing the individual to contact with the outside of one's community, with a potential threat:

... if the idea of community expresses a loss, removal, or expropriation – if it recalls not a fullness, but a void and an alteration, this means that the idea of community is felt as a risk, a threat to the individual identity of the subject precisely because it loosens, or breaks, the boundaries that ensure the stability and subsistence of individual identity. It is because community exposes each person to a contact with, and also to a contagion by, an other that is potentially dangerous. (Esposito, 2013b, p. 49)

This understanding of community as imbued with a risk by its very nature to the individual's self-integrity is represented by the response the community gives to the other as intruder, by becoming an enclosed organism existing in a self-monitoring physical environment in *Snow Crash*. This immunitary mode of life is kept active at the expense of viewing those in precarity as the ultimate threat. The society in the

novel is organized into microstates obsessively sealed off against intruders; those without the necessary identities who can be granted access into these states. Just like Enki uses the magical force of Logos so that people can develop immunity against viral ideas through proliferation of discourses and diversification of languages in the form of opposing discourses, Esposito's idea of community is bound to protect its own wholeness by activating a mechanism of immunization. Here, immunity protects each individual from the threatening alterity of the mass. Immunity protects subjectivity both from his/her own community, which lies outside of the self in Esposito's formulation, and also from the outside of one's community:

In the face of precisely such a threat, which has been mythically transcribed in all of the accounts that associate the origin of the human community with a founding offense, modernity activates a process of immunization, following the paradigmatic clash between *communitas* and *immunitas*. If the former binds the individuals to something that pushes them beyond themselves, then the latter reconstructs their identity by protecting them from a risky contiguity with the other, relieving them of every obligation toward the other and enclosing them once again in the shell of their own subjectivity. Whereas *communitas* opens, exposes, and turns individuals inside out, freeing them to their exteriority, *immunitas* returns individuals to themselves, encloses them once again in their own skin. *Immunitas* brings the outside inside, eliminating whatever part of the individual that lies outside. What is immunization if not the preventive interiorization of the outside, its neutralizing appropriation? (Esposito, 2013b, p. 49)

Esposito's argument makes perfect sense when we think of the account of Babel in the novel as an origin story of the human community, a story "which has been mythically transcribed in all of the accounts that associate the origin of the human community with a founding offense" as Esposito notes above. Not in the Biblical sense, as the Judeo-Christian God's punishment of the pre-Babel community for building up a tower towards the heavens, but the Sumerian God Enki's act of hacking the human brain so that people will stop being a monoculture and not become susceptible to the language and practice of biopolitics that reduces all humanity to its bare life, to its animalistic, pre-political existence. In the kind of

mythical explanation the novel brings to this original offence, then, the so-called Babel factor becomes a mechanism of immunization. The duty towards the other is foundational of the community, yet it puts the individual identity at a risk of becoming disintegrated. Then, Esposito's view of the individual and that of the community is rather a negative one, that needs to negate and exteriorize the other in order to be self-same. This negative, immunitary logic of being an individual and also a community is expressed in the novel in a collective way. The microstates are consisting of people who act immunized to any responsibility to what lies outside. The state-induced precarity is always induced primarily upon its others: the marginalized, poor, deviant, potentially or practically threatening to the health of the body politic. The collective attitude towards the other living in precarity is to be indifferent:

If the members of the *communitas* are bound by the same law, by the same duty, or gift to give (the meanings of *munus*), *immunis* is he or she who is exempt or exonerated from these. *Immunis* is he or she who has no obligations toward the other and can therefore conserve his or her own essence in tact as a subject and owner of himself or herself. (p. 39)

However, this clash between community and immunity is a matter of intensity, as too much immunity in the end makes the system collapse. Rife's plot of infecting the entirety of human community with the virus is a warning note as elaborated in the novel. It represents how such a regulated and monitored system of insider/outsider politics, is likely to turn all life into a Nazi-like regime of total biological control, as Esposito also warns us. Like Agamben, Esposito sees Nazism as the ultimate historical development of a problematically immunized biopolitical regime. Once you push the other away on purpose of keeping yourself pure and enclosed, the system becomes a regime of death, a "thanatopolitics" by Esposito's expression, and the human body becomes the ultimate laboratory of politics. We lose all our sense of

duty to the other in its positive sense as a form of common-life and get trapped in our extreme immunity to alternative discourses, surrendering in the process to the power of a totalitarian logic of governance whose sole purpose is to create hyperreal threats in order to legitimize all its practices on human and non-human life. In order to protect itself to the threats it creates, the system over-immunizes, and turn bios into zoe. This means, according to Esposito, that political life reduces itself to biology in order to protect itself, and this process is oppressive of life itself.

To borrow the language of Walter Benjamin (who himself died because of a border closure) we might well say that immunization in high doses means sacrificing every form of qualified life, for reasons of simple survival: the reduction of life to its bare biological layer, of bios to zoe. To remain such, life is forced to bend to an outside power [potenza] that penetrates and crushes it. (Esposito, 2013b, p. 61)

But how can we resist too much immunization in the age of information and posthuman disembodiment concomitant with a system whose sole objective is to control the body? This is one of the central questions that *Snow Crash* problematizes. After all, the individual is the inhabitant of these excessively compartmentalized, enclosed microstates in the novel. On the other hand, the erasure of embodiment and the potential of language as a means of writing one's own narrative as enacted in Metaverse, imparts the protagonist Hiro with an awareness of duty towards others. He is opposed to the virus because it will make everyone lose their identity by robbing them of their agency of linguistic creation. Although initially Hiro is described as an immune figure who conducts his duties only in fear of his own life, after witnessing the demise of his fellow hackers infected with the virus, he collaborates with Y.T., a fifteen-year-old courier girl to solve the mystery behind the virus. That puts Hiro into a research process during which he discovers about the num-shub of Enki, the incantation/code written on a clay tablet unearthed and kept by Rife. With the help of Y.T. he runs away from Rife's men and manages to have

the num-shub read by the Librarian. The effect of this reading in Metaverse finds its impact in Reality. The mindless biomass of people stops speaking in tongues in a climactic moment at the end of the novel. They are redeemed and transformed back to normal. Once again they start speaking in their diverse tongues and open up to the incomprehension with one another. People once again become immune to being inscribed by the language of power in an unproblematic way, without the mediation brought by the multiplicity of language. Interestingly, Hiro at that point stresses the importance of a creative and multiple use of language as a hacker/world-builder. Hackers are the new intelligentsia of the posthuman age who understand language is power because only by creating his/her reality within language one can have a resisting force:

"Rife's key realization was that there's no difference between modern culture and Sumerian. We have a huge workforce that is illiterate or aliterate and relies on TV-which is sort of an oral tradition. And we have a small, extremely literate power elite- the people who go into the Metaverse, basically-who understand that information is power, and who control society because they have this semimystical ability to speak magic computer languages. "That makes us a big stumbling block to Rife's plan. People like L. Bob Rife can't do anything without us hackers. And even if he could convert us, he wouldn't be able to use us, because what we do is creative in nature and can't be duplicated by people running me. (SC, p. 483)

It only stands to reason that one can extend this new form of literacy to millions of people today because the creative function of language in virtual as a means of building the virtual reality itself is not confined to a power elite in the twenty-first century. More and more people have access to new communication technologies and they participate actively in the production and circulation of discourses. Without a doubt, the idea of language as constitutive of reality expands into the sphere of the virtual in the age of technology. The message of the novel is that only having the awareness of this aspect of using language one can resist the biopolitical power that aims at turning human lives into an undifferentiated entity of biomass. However, this

is only one aspect of resistance in the novel because language is also shaped by the embodied actions of people in real life. By materializing simultaneously in Metaverse and in Reality, and also by incorporating technology into their bodies in a machine-human fusion, Hiro and Y.T. and others succeed to assemble and cooperate in preventing the virus from spreading.

It can be argued that with both their technologically augmented bodies and with the self-awareness of having partly real and virtual embodiments, the characters in the novel in general act as hybrid formations of organic and inorganic properties. Donna Haraway uses her “myth” of cyborg to explain how cyborgism is both a reality and a fiction that can help us understand the unstable ontology of the posthuman. She contends that with the age of high technology in the late twentieth century, the human beings have become simultaneously artificial and natural entities, because our subjectivities are inscribed both socially and technologically. We rely on artificial intelligence, computer technology, and bioengineering as well as biomedical experimentation on animals to survive and understand ourselves. Haraway famously declares: “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (Haraway, 1985/2004, p. 39). This is the heteroglossia celebrated in *Snow Crash*, a heteroglossia seen as the only antidote to the immune system failure of the society, in which the system starts attacking its own political life in order to kill the other. In other terms, a safe life democratically ordered cannot co-exist within a world marked by precarity for the majority. What we strive for cannot be a common language because a common language brings back the pre-Babel state of total mind-control. Cyborg imagery is crucial to explain the posthuman because the dualisms only help to widen

the gap between *zoe* and *bios* in a world in which the clearly drawn boundaries between animal and human as well as machine and human have ceased to exist. While the binary language of patriarchal humanism renders women as bare life in *Native Tongue*, the virtual/real virus aims at turning the whole population into biomass, yet another signifier for bare life. When the virus infects a body, the brain starts babbling instead of uttering sentences. It is the ideal, perfect common language from the perspective of Rife. The virus itself exceeds language because the infection means the common language that is also no language. The failure of the dualisms to explain what we are is concomitant with our failure of grasping the nature of this virus. As Stephen Dougherty also points out: “In an age of simulation the virus is the perfect monster with which to frighten ourselves. It is a copy without an original; it is without context, and thus without meaning; it is beyond representation” (Dougherty, 2001, p. 11). On the other hand, the whole novel is an attempt to represent this virus as a response to the excessive immunization that our world attains in our posthuman and biopolitical era. Just like the virus resists definition by being in both registers of reality at once, the representation of bare life also resist definition unless it is understood with the cyborg metaphor. As the dream of a common language to restore us to an innocent time preceding biopolitics is futile, resisting the viral threat of becoming speechless can only work through partial affinities, rather than identity politics based on dualisms. In the novel, resistance to the virus is not only formed on a linguistic basis as counter-discourses but it is also grounded in the bodies that are resolved to take up their duty to the other by opening their enclosed individuality to the threat of contamination by the other, on the basis of co-existing as bare life. Being thrown into precarity as bare life is not a cultural or political identity, but it is our shared condition of being excluded in power by our capacity to be killed.

3.3 Embodied resistance

As the boundaries between real and virtual are erased within the novel, we should use the adjective “disembodied” carefully when discussing embodiment in relation to the text. Although the virtual reality is a mode of existence without the physical embodiment, the characters are still represented by the audio-visual embodiments digitally written, namely their avatars. Furthermore, the language virus is able to affect the physical bodies of people and to break down their avatars. In this sense, the novel defines two loci of embodiment for the characters: Metaverse and Reality. As people are reduced to receptacles of information as well as biomass, and communities are reduced to copies of one another without any reference to shared values other than an excessive need for immunity rather than community for its subjects, disembodiment of the subject becomes detrimental unless the virtual reality itself is used as a political platform. On the other hand, we witness an effective use of Metaverse as a site for political resistance in the novel. It is where Hiro tries to inform people about the virus and also utilizes the software of the Librarian in order to reveal Rife’s plot and eventually enacts the process of re-immunization that will save the society from being reduced to unthinking automata.

So, the novel does not give any precedence either to the virtual reality or to physical embodiment as both modes of materializing in space and time are crucial as locations within which the resistance to oppression is actualized. Rational inquiry afforded by technological means to resist viral ideas is indispensable because without the necessary knowledge it would be impossible to understand the workings of the virus and to fight with it. Yet, as the bare human life is the sole object of biopolitics in the society, the resistance cannot just consist of counter-discourses to be effective. Language is seen to be a means of constituting and resisting reality with its capacity

of creating counter-discourses. However, similar to the context of Elgin's *Native Tongue* analyzed in the first chapter of this study, *Snow Crash* also stresses the importance of the embodied acts of the subject in resisting the social inscription.

The women in the former novel realize that language creation does not suffice in the end to create transformative action, and they refuse their traditional duties as the reproductive apparatus of the status quo, searching for a new formulization of nature-culture relationship changed by modernity into an antagonistic one. The importance of embodiment along with the disembodied freedom of movement that technology brings is realized more in *Snow Crash*. In this section, I will focus on the ways in which the main characters attain subversion through their relations with their bodies as well as with the bodies of others.

The plot of the novel involves a fast evolving action and the constant movement of bodies across different, enclosed communities. Being on the move and moving fast have thematic significance. The emphasis on speed in the age of technology and information is reflected in the embodied actions of the characters. Both Hiro and Y.T. struggle to be physically elusive and adept at improving their bodies with technological extensions. Their embodied actions, or the way they perform their subjectivities through bodily movements, become counter-statements against power. Katherine Hayles makes a distinction of the body and embodiment on the basis of self-enactment and social inscription. Whereas the body is socially inscribed and idealized, embodiment is open to creation and it can be elusive from power. It can also be said that the body to embodiment is what a language system is to individual utterances; langue to parole. In this sense, it is an apt textual strategy here to imagine embodied actions as statements, both resulted from the power and also resisting it:

Embodiment is akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational. Whereas the body can disappear into information with scarcely a murmur of protest, embodiment cannot, for it is tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person. As soon as embodiment is acknowledged, the abstractions of the Panopticon disintegrate into the particularities of specific people embedded in specific contexts. Along with these particularities come concomitant strategies for resistances and subversions, excesses and deviations. (Hayles, 1999, p. 198)

For example, Y.T and Hiro incorporate technological devices into their bodies, becoming augmented agents whose constitution defy clear boundaries between biologically given and artificially created. These formations are a direct result of the power that is in need of tracking, recording and recognizing the human body and identity at any given time. Power here produces its own opposing force by producing the augmented bodies. The subjects use these technologies as weapons against the very order that produce them in the first place. Fusing with technology also becomes a form of resistance to being tracked down by technology. Even when they become disembodied in Metaverse, they still use avatars resembling their authentic bodies, insisting on continuity. Therefore, we must think of these characters in their own social fields to understand how they cope with the ever-changing panoptic control mechanisms as they move in space.

Hiro and Y.T. make their living by being fast and they are able to use this know-how as a form of resistance against the mind-controlling, interpellating scheme of Bob Rife. Their ways of embodying themselves are, I think, indicative of how functional they can be in the face of the upcoming virus as heroic figures. As a pizza deliverer/hacker and a courier respectively, Hiro and Y.T represent an economy that is based on information and service technologies. Being occupied in these life worlds, they gain certain skills and since they are the products of a particular form of politics, they are able to “feel” its workings. According to the French sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu, speech and action in a “field”, are performed often unconsciously and without a view of their finality. Yet, this does not change the fact that certain ways of using language and action stem from the inner workings of a given field. By the word “field” Bourdieu means any autonomous network of power relations, such as a religion or a political community. We perform ourselves with a “feel for the game” and this performance comes naturally as our bodies.

Practical sense is a quasi-bodily involvement in the world which presupposes no representation either of the body or of the world, still less of their relationship. It is an immanence in the world through which the world imposes its imminence, things to be done or said, which directly govern speech and action. It orients 'choices' which, though not deliberate, are no less systematic, and which, without being ordered and organized in relation to an end, are none the less charged with a kind of retrospective finality. A particularly clear example of practical sense as a proleptic adjustment to the demands of a field is what is called, in the language of sport, a 'feel for the game'. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66)

Therefore, although they may not be aware of it on a conscious level, their forms of embodiment is always already a form of statement, speaking of the rules that are constantly shaping it. Their embodied actions, such as being constantly on the move and having a “feel” for the dangers in the urban environment reflect the speed and precariousness of life in the world of late capitalism. The characters in the novel often have this feel for the game: they are always fast and practical. The fact that their jobs require Hiro and Y.T. of being carriers of information helps them in the long run to help each other overcome Rife’s virus and save people from being infected. As the virus is both material and virtual, Hiro and Y.T.’s embodiment is also the meeting point of culture and nature. That is why it is necessary to look at the ways in which Hiro and Y.T. use their lived experiences and materialize themselves to matter as political agents.

The novel begins with descriptions of Hiro’s appearance. Hiro is the hero in this future world, not because he is physically strong or has knowledge of

computer language as a hacker, but because he knows how to navigate around the town and pursue knowledge as well as to avoid dangers with a “feel for the game” in his field of social existence. His physical constitution reflects his need for staying in his own protective shell in a world that is constantly immunizing the community by enclosing the individual to contamination supposed to be from the outside, from the other. He is also represented as a posthuman figure in physical appearance, part machine and part corporeal, a figure complicating the split between natural and artificial:

His uniform is black as activated charcoal, filtering the very light out of the air. A bullet will bounce off its arachnofiber weave like a wren hitting a patio door, but excess perspiration wafts through it like a breeze through a freshly napalmed forest, Where his body has bony extremities, the suit has sintered armorgel: feels like gritty jello, protects like a stack of telephone books. (SC, p. 3)

His material body is resistant to attacks from the outside, such as bullets. His armor even filters out light of the air. Hiro’s joints are protected by a form of jell. This is indicative of his flexibility and speed in moving. Hiro is wearing black in order to be invisible at night, so he is able to move and remain unnoticed at the same time.

Hiro’s legal record, DNA pattern, citizenship data and personal history are all recorded in the database of the Mafia and the states. All his life is reduced thus to disembodied data belonging to the state of control:

So he's in their database now-retinal patterns, DNA, voice graph, fingerprints, footprints, palm prints, wrist prints, every flicking part of the body that had wrinkles on it -almost- those bastards rolled in ink and made a print and digitized it into their computer ... So it was like being in a family. A really scary, twisted, abusive family (SC, p. 9)

Being identified and known down to such minute detail is associated with belonging to a family, for the family is the unit in which a person historically originated as zoe, precedent to any political life. That is the root of Hiro’s anxiety for being recorded in the databases in the form of a digitized ink print. He is already copied and

reproduced in the system like everyone else. The human body is objectified and known under biopolitics in such an intimate way as to resemble a closely knit, albeit abusive family. Under all the technological equipment he wears, it is possible to see his eyes and notice the series of hyphenated identities comprising Hiro. His cultural identity and biological features are an amalgamation of the apparatuses of the state of control and his family's racial history:

Beneath this image, it is possible to see Hiro's eyes, which look Asian. They are from his mother, who is Korean by way of Nippon. The rest of him looks more like his father, who was African by way of Texas by way of the Army-back in the days before it got split up into a number of competing organizations such as General Jim's Defense System and Admiral Bob's National Security. (SC, p. 26)

The embodied identity in Metaverse is never given and fixed in the novel. People in Metaverse need avatars to be able to move around in the virtual reality and be represented in it. The creative users, the hackers, are those who are able to write their own avatars and do not depend on avatars mass produced or written by others. Being a hacker himself, Hiro builds his own avatar and is proud of the fact that he can write his own avatar unlike the majority of people. Such self-creation is seen on a par with "writing." The bodies embodied in the form of language in this disembodied platform are open-ended and can become different any minute. By writing for himself an avatar that looks almost the same as his "real" body, Hiro asserts his authenticity in the virtual space and attain a sense of continuity between reality and virtual reality.

Your avatar can look any way you want it to, up to the limitations of your equipment. If you're ugly, you can make your avatar beautiful. If you've just gotten out of bed, your avatar can still be wearing beautiful clothes and professionally applied makeup. You can look like a gorilla or a dragon or a giant talking penis in the Metaverse. Spend five minutes walking down the Street and you will see all of these. Hiro's avatar just looks like Hiro, with the difference that no matter what Hiro is wearing in Reality, his avatar always wears a black leather kimono. (SC, p. 44)

Hiro fashions himself as a Japanese samurai to stress his Japanese heritage as well as his resilience. This way he resists the social inscription on his body as a marginalized pizza delivery person in reality. His body gains a freedom of movement and access to knowledge as well as opportunities for self-creation by language not possible in the material world. To repeat Christopher Breu's (2014) remarkable commentary on our historical moment, that our era is: "simultaneously an era preoccupied with immateriality and one defined by biopolitics" (pp. 1-2) Breu also claims that "Both the privileging of the so-called immaterial or virtual and the idea of complete biopolitical control imagine a material world that is a passive site of inscription and unproblematic manipulation" (pp. 1-2). Yet, the existence of such technologies as Metaverse complicates the relationship between the material and immaterial by giving the political agents opportunities for engaging in subversive action while remaining physically intact. Hiro's body blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction: while his body is effaced in virtual reality, he still is embodied in a self-conscious way and performs his identity by making his body a series of statements open to change.

Therefore, in the age of information and biopolitics, "The body needs to be understood as more than a passive site of inscription— a *tabula rasa* upon which biopolitics and thanatopolitics inscribe their insistent and sometimes terrifying scripts," (pp. 188) as Breu also agrees, and Hiro's always already inscribed yet ever signifying body exemplifies. Resistance in the form of counter-inscription here is related to language and writing. Not everyone possesses such resisting power in the novel. Those who are passive receivers of ideology in real life, the masses, or biomasses, are consumers of ready-made avatar sets in Metaverse. People such as

Hiro see them as lifeless, plastic dolls. The avatar equivalents of them are called “Brandy and Clint” (SC, p. 45), stressing consumerism as well as inertia.

As Hiro represents the value of language and self-creation as well as embodiment in resistance, his counterpart, Y.T. is an example of how established gender categories and human/non-human boundaries can be viewed as more fluid for resistance in the age of communication technology. We meet Y.T. when she appears on her floating skateboard to save Hiro from his Mafia bosses. Although she is a teenager of fifteen years of age, Y.T. is able to save Hiro’s life by making the almost failing pizza delivery on his behalf in the last moment. She does not know Hiro at the time, yet she still helps him, with a sense of solidarity due to their similar occupations. Y.T. is a courier and her job is to deliver any message or item to its recipient. Like Hiro, she is associated with speed and agility as a requisite of her specific field of work. Being a teenager and female, she reverses the classical damsel in distress theme in the very beginning. Seeing that Hiro is blocked on his way into a Burbclave, Y.T. immediately offers him her help and disappears with Hiro’s delivery. This way she proves that the narrative language should not be trusted at its face value. Despite what his name suggests, Hiro Protagonist is saved by an underage, female hero. Lisa Swanstrom emphasizes the significance of this early seen in terms of the critique it brings to the extremely immunized social structure depicted in the novel. Hiro and Y.T. come together based on their affinities as those whose bodies are used as vessels, as couriers and hackers, in the age of information. They utilize the very technology that controls them to elude the isolation it brings:

This early episode in *Snow Crash* marks an interesting convergence of events. While the novel in its entirety offers a scathing satire of social fragmentation through its depiction of warring ethnic conglomerates, in this particular Good- Samaritan moment, two people from completely different ethnic backgrounds and age groups come together in the open air, thereby

undermining the rules of isolation that otherwise govern the social and technological networks represented in the novel. (Swanstrom, 2010, p. 54)

The name of Y.T. is often thought by people to stand for “Whitey” because she is a white, middle-class girl. However, she always corrects people who think so and tell them it actually stands for “Yours Truly”. This can be interpreted as an attempt to own herself, that it is her who is signified by the name Y.T. Her message is that the signifier Y.T. refers to the person Y.T. in a world of simulation and reproduction of images with no original model. Furthermore, “Yours Truly” is also how a letter ends and Y.T. is a carrier of letters, messages. She is a receptacle for information but she is also conscious of this role and tries everything to stop men from inscribing on her body, both sexually and metaphorically. Y.T. uses a lot of slang words, often to mock bureaucracy and its officials. Although she has many different security barcodes and gadgets placed on her body like Hiro, she displays great ingenuity in using technology to avoid danger. Y.T. is constantly on the move. During their first encounter, Hiro is fascinated by this heroic figure:

The Kourier is not a man, it is a young woman. A fucking teenaged girl. She is pristine, unhurt. She has skated right down into the pool, she's now oscillating back and forth from one side of the pool to the other, skating up one bank, almost to the lip, turning around, skating down and across and up the opposite side. She is holding her pool in her right hand, the electromagnet reeled up against the handle so it looks like some kind of a strange wide-angle intergalactic death ray. Her chest glitters like a general's with a hundred little ribbons and medals, except each rectangle is not a ribbon, it is a bar code. A bar code with an ID number that gets her into a different business, highway, or FOQNE.

“Yo!” she says. “Where's the pizza going?”

He's going to die and she's gamboling. “White Columns. 5 Oglethorpe Circle,” he says.

“I can do that. Open the hatch.” (SC, p. 21)

Y.T. has many identification cards and barcodes that give her entry into different gated communities. As the plot progresses, she uses these to run away from Rife’s

men who try to capture her and also help Hiro find the num-shub of Enki in the Raft. Both Hiro and Y.T. possess what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the practical sense stemming from their particular professional field. On the other hand, Y.T. contests the established categories of gendered embodiment with her deliberate choice of speech, bodily gestures and moving in space. She contests what Bourdieu (1990) terms bodily hexis:

Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking. The opposition between male and female is realized in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body, in the form of the opposition between the straight and the bent, between firmness, uprightness and directness (a man faces forward, looking and striking directly at his adversary), and restraint, reserve and flexibility. As is shown by the fact that most of the words that refer to bodily postures evoke virtues and states of mind, these two relations to the body are charged with two relations to other people, time and the world, and through these, to two systems of values. (p. 70)

Y.T. breaks down the said opposition between male and female by her bodily movements and way of using language. In terms of her embodiment, she is shown to be flexible, fluid, secretive but not reserved. The use of slang also contests the traditional female role. We can also say that the use of technology complicates the bodily hexis associated with binary categories. Y.T. uses a type of electronic harpoon to strike at the motor vehicles on highways and uses their momentum to be carried away to her destinations faster. Her skateboard is a prosthetic extension of her body as she navigates through the city. Clearly, Stephenson creates this iconic character to defy the traditional “hexis” associated with the female gender. Although her mother is described as extremely subservient to “the Feds”, a remnant of FBI that she works for, Y.T. is quite the opposite. Being a teenager she is the future promise of a posthuman configuration. She explores her human bodily limits along the highway system that dominates the urban environment by following the patterns of access,

rather than remaining embedded on property relations, a fact exemplified with the fact that she refuses to stay in her middle-class, suburban home. She is the embodiment of the nomadic and fluid agent of hyperreality. Y.T. also destabilizes the boundaries between human and the machine as she incorporates electronic devices into her body in an attempt to sabotage the male gaze and the male intrusion into her body. For example, she always carries a device called “dentata” in her vagina. “Vagina dentata” is Latin for toothed vagina. This device protects her from possible attempts of rape. She is constantly exposed to the male gaze, but the weapon is not visible to the eye as it is fused with her genital organs. If someone tries to rape her, the dentata device gets digitally activated and sends the intruder in a coma by shooting a sedative needle into the attacker’s penis:

The manager thunks down a couple of steps, glares at her, glares at her for rather a long time. The manager, clearly, is tempted. That momentary glimpse of flesh has been ricocheting around in his brain for half an hour. He is wracking his mind with vast cosmological dilemmas. Y.T. hopes that he does not try anything, because the dentata's effects can be unpredictable. (SC, p. 95)

Y.T. is kind of a cross-dresser and trickster figure as she not only disguises her female body in an androgynous outfit but also changes back into a regular teenager costume after every workday before she goes back to her suburban life that she shares with her mother. Just like Hiro switches back and forth between Reality and Metaverse, Y.T. leads a versatile life of a middle-class American teenager besides her life of high-speed adventure within the criminal information market. She keeps her regular, “girly” clothes hidden behind the ceiling tiles of a McDonalds toilet:

She stands on the seat of the third toilet, pushes up one of the ceiling tiles, moves it aside. A cotton sleeve tumbles out, bearing a delicate floral print. She pulls on it and hauls down the whole ensemble, the blouse, the pleated skirt, underwear from Vicky's, the leather shoes, the necklace and earrings, even a fucking purse. (...) Then she puts on the ensemble. Now she looks just like she did when she had breakfast with Mom this morning. (SC, p. 119)

Although such performative actions give her an air of unreliability, towards the end of the novel Y.T. saves Hiro's life again and helps him find the clay tablet of Enki's num-shub that immunizes the indoctrinated "Falabalas" in the Raft. Along the way, she seduces Rife's major gunman called Raven who represents bodily strength, libido and brutality. As a descendent of the Aleutian people who were destroyed by the Americans during the World War Two, Raven works for Rife out of his general hatred for the American military forces. Being the heroic trickster she is, Y.T. seduces Raven and sleeps with him so that the dentata will put him into a coma. This plan saves Hiro and his friends some time before they can manage to capture the num-shub. Growing in a posthuman world of information as well as working as a carrier of messages in a fast moving, hyperreal community of exclusion and inclusion, Y.T. employs her skills and bodily hexis to defy the very system that has shaped her. By her embodied actions she complicates the common-sense view in the Western philosophical tradition that has seen the body as "a nongendered, prediscursive phenomenon" (Weiss & Haber, 1999, p. xiii) that is always associated with nature rather than culture. This emphasis is in line with the problematization of the term "the body" during the 1990s, and the gradual shift to the use of the term "embodiment" in the critical theory. On the other hand, seeing Y.T.'s body as only a culturally constructed text would downplay "the idea that there are bodily constraints on what we can experience, conceptualize and reason about" (Johnson, 1999, p. 84). There may be human limits and constraints that the body poses on the subject, but it does not change the fact that it is Y.T.'s conscious actions and ethical choices that turn her body into a signifying, embodied site of resistance, connecting her with the others.

Along the way to the Raft, Y.T. and Hiro encounter a cyborg creature called a “Rat Thing.” The bodies of these creatures are partly machine and partly made from the parts of captured pit-bull dogs. A corporation of security systems called Ng turns dogs into cyborgs equipped with deadly weapons and powered by a nuclear isotope inside their bodies. Rat Things are sold to the gated communities as security guards that are constantly running around and scanning the environment in case of trespassers. When Hiro and Y.T. run away in a Burbclave from the men sent by Rife to capture them, a Rat Thing chases them and gets injured. If a Rat Thing stops running, its cooling system gets turned off and it starts to heat until the body melts down. When it stops, this creature/machine/animal becomes visible to Hiro and Y.T.. They are the first people ever to see what a Rat Thing really looks like:

The Rat Thing has stopped. Which they never do. It's part of their mystery that you never get to see them, they move so fast. No one knows what they look like. No one except for Y.T. and Hiro, now. It's bigger than she imagined. The body is Rottweiler-sized, segmented into overlapping hard plates like those of a rhinoceros. The legs are long, curled way up to deliver power, like a cheetah's. It must be the tail that makes people refer to it as a Rat Thing, because that's the only ratlike part-incredibly long and flexible. (SC, p. 111)

The Rat Thing resembles many different animals but it is none of them. Even more so than the human characters, it destabilizes the established categories of animate and inanimate, natural and artificial. The emphasis on its speed is telling: it has to be fast just like Y.T. or else it overheats and melts down. As Y.T. is fast and resists inscription by augmenting her body, the Rat Thing here is embodied in a way that naturally prevents the gaze of others. As the Rat Thing is lying on the ground Hiro feels intimidated by the scene and warns Y.T. that it can be very unpredictable because the Rat Thing has “animal parts”, or “biological components” (SC, p. 112), suggesting unpredictability. However, Y.T. loves animals and keeps walking towards it. Suddenly she feels an affinity between the “suffering” machine/dog and herself.

Both are made up creatures that incorporate electronic devices and unrecognizable to their surroundings. Y.T. feels the pain of the Rat Thing:

Then she thinks: The poor thing is burning itself alive ... She steps right up to it, flips her goggles down to protect her face from the heat The Rat Thing's legs stop their spasmodic movements, as though waiting for her. She bends down and grabs its front legs. They react, tightening their pushrod muscles against the pull of her hands. It's exactly like grabbing a dog by the front legs and asking it to dance. This thing is alive. It reacts to her. She knows. (SC, p. 113)

Intuitively she “knows” that it is a suffering, sentient being before her. Making an ethical choice, Y.T. risks her life and grabs the overheating, nuclear body of the Rat Thing. Her hands get burned severely but she keeps dragging the Rat Thing to its coolant/hutch. In the end she manages to save its life. It is this kindness, this display of affect on a suffering organism that saves Y.T.’s life. The Rat Thing remembers her kindness and when she is in the Raft trying to capture the num-shub it runs to her help. At one point we are given an inner monologue of the Rat Thing and find out that it remembers its past before turning into a cyborg: “The factory that put him together thinks of him as a robot named Number B-782. But he thinks of himself as a pitbull terrier named Fido.” (233) Fido also refers to “himself” as a “nice little doggie” (SC, p. 233). In the end, when Rife was trying to get on his jet with the virus samples, Fido chases the jet and risks his life while Y.T. is watching him running from a distance.

Fido chases it down like a dog going after a fat mailman, makes one final tremendous leap into the air and, turning himself into a Sidewinder missile, flies nose-first into the tailpipe of its left engine. The jet explodes about ten feet off the ground, catching Fido and L. Bob Rife and his virus all together in its fine, sterilizing flame. How sweet! (SC, p. 558)

With this instance of affect and counter-affect between Y.T. and Rat Thing/Fido, culture and nature are interfused in such a way as to confuse the logic of biopolitics that clearly distinguishes between *bios* and *zoe*. In addition to the role of the rational/scientific reasoning in representing the workings of the language virus, the

relationship of affect across species as well as the different ways of embodying the world are pointed out as the indispensable components of any resisting action to the biopolitical inscription. As Donna Haraway (1985/2004) states: “The machine is not an it to be animated, worshiped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment” (p. 38). By incorporating the machine into resistance the novel reminds us of the importance of realizing the fact that we are, again in Haraway’s words, “theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (p. 8) This fact gives us the creative possibilities for realizing our ways of embodying the world in such a way that will lead us to an ethics of caring for the other as well as resisting the very language of biopolitics that constantly tries to undermine such an ethics of care.

In *Snow Crash*, the image of the language virus is used to make a critique of the autoimmune disease of the technologically saturated society. In order to protect life from supposed threats from the outside manufactured by the media, the self becomes enclosed in its protective shell and immune to any duty towards the lives of others, a condition that is crystallized in the excessive and paranoid exclusion of non-members, non-citizens from the microstates structured as communities of surveillance in the novel. In such a future, the potential of language as a means of creating counter-discourses as well as self-fashioning the ways in which the person is materialized in virtual reality are presented as lines of flight from the forces that try to capture life itself to reduce people into “biomass.” People can only become healthily immune to viral discourses of segregation and monologism when the diversifying movement of language is sustained. There should always be opposing views and language should also incorporate the experience of the others excluded by the community. Otherwise, the community collapses onto itself like the individual,

unable to move and interact with the outside with any political agency. Language calls things into being, therefore, it is of utmost political importance as an act of resistance. Yet, the creative function of language should always be coupled with the subversive forces of the body as exemplified with the technology-body fusion and radical bodily hexis of the main characters. In the end, the world is symbolically saved from the catastrophe by the embodied actions of human and non-human entities whose bodies function as statements, complicating life, that is the object of biopolitics, by blurring the boundaries between what is human and non-human as well as those between the natural and artificial.

CHAPTER 4

TRUTH AND LYING IN AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL SENSE:

LANGUAGE AND THE BODY IN EMBASSYTOWN

4.1 Language of the hosts

China Miéville's novel, *Embassytown* (2011), is set in Arieka, a faraway planet located on the edge of the known universe. The human population called Terre lives in the eponymous town, which is a colonial outpost of an imperial and expansionist human federation. The humans are able to survive in Arieka with the help of the Arieke, or the Hosts, the indigenous species of the planet. The imperial federation rules this distant settlement with a few appointed officials from the center, as well as with "the Ambassadors," a special group of people who work as intermediaries between the Arieke and humans. The Ambassadors are bred in human farms from infancy; they are genetically engineered and enhanced, so that they can speak the alien language of the Hosts and communicate with them. The fact that they are "bred" by the government of the town in a "farm" only for the purpose of maintaining the human presence on the planet and for preparing the eventual colonization of it, draws a parallel between bare life of the human body and that of the alien other. In any case, the politics is derived from the disposable, animalistic biological life of the body to perpetuate its force as the human language.

The phenomenon of the genetically engineered Ambassadors show how political power manipulates the body for its purposes and speaks through the constructed, posthuman bodies. Like in Elgin's *Native Tongue*, language is a site of political resistance in the sense that it is employed as a tool for reformulating one's experience in relation to oppression. Although at first the human community seems

to depend on the Arieke to survive on the planet, as the plot develops further, it is shown that the humans are exploiting the Arieke bodies as well as their habitat. The human administration keeps a monopoly on the Arieke language, making sure that the human and non-human entities cannot communicate without its medium. In the end, only by transcending the linguistic and bodily boundaries, it becomes possible to join forces against the human rule that keeps both species in subjection by defining the terms of contact between the two by limiting the possibility of interaction. Like in *Native Tongue*, a distant presence of a federative human rule comes to the fore only to break the monopoly of a specialized group of translators in order to take total control of the interaction between humanity and the extraterrestrials.

Anthropocentrism in its latent, colonial manifestation in *Embassytown* replaces the patriarchy in *Native Tongue* as the primary means of oppression towards the other. Only when the human self and the Arieke other recognize their shared status of disposability as bare life within the political system, they can assemble based not on the basis of identity, but on the affinity of being kept out of politics as active political agents. Certain human and alien characters manage to assemble only when they gain the awareness that “the truth” of their political existence is not only a biological, but also a metaphysical construct realized in language; a construct based on the dual categories of the distinct human versus alien.

Therefore, the main objective of this final chapter is to show how language’s truth-making aspect is worked out as an act of resistance that changes the experience of the body. In the first section, I will situate the role of language in the novel as the site where political truth(s) and lies are constructed. As the Arieke language does not allow its native speakers to utter lies, the human protagonist of the story, Avice, has

to train a group of Arieke so that they can speak lies in their language and attain political agency. Only when the alien Arieke realize they cannot have truths if they do not have lies, they begin to strive for a transformation of their language. I also suggest that the inseparability of truths and lies correspond to Esposito's theory of biopolitics that is based on a dual understanding of community/immunity. A sense of community is only possible to hold by creating collective lies/truths, defining a sense of the outside in the process. The Arieke realize that they need to incorporate humanness in the form of adopting the specifically human ability of producing metaphors, in the sense of how Nietzsche saw metaphors as collective lies or the basis for truths, so that they can have a political language to resist authority.

Finally, I will indicate the ways in which the novel attempts to dismantle such dualisms as body/mind and human/non-human. Early in the novel we realize that the unintelligible, animalistic Arieke is able to look at the human body as its other. This reverses the roles in anthropocentrism as theorized by Jacques Derrida on his work on the animal question in Western philosophy. Furthermore, Cartesian dualism of mind and body is also put into question by two significant images. First, the Arieke uses the human body itself to generate figures of speech so that they can make abstractions by comparing themselves to embodied human actors. Since they do not have abstractions they need embodied actions to make speculations. Second, the Arieke body and language constantly influence each other. When they hear lies in their own language their bodies get intoxicated and later on obedient toward humans. After a group of Arieke deafen themselves so that they will not hear humans lying, they start pointing at things for the first time in their evolution. The Arieke also feel pain when they try to change their language into a metaphoric one. On the other hand, when they can finally use metaphors and speak of themselves as if they are

otherwise, this brings the collaboration between the two species. By contesting such boundaries, the novel shows the interconnectedness of all living species and their shared role as the common object and objective of biopolitics. The joint attempt of the characters to attain political agency and refuse their object status is achieved when the view is taken that language not only signifies, but it also performs alongside the body. The human body is expected to perform certain ordeals so that it becomes a figure of speech, an objectified component of Language of the Arieke. Otherwise, the human language does not make any sense to the alien mental capacity. Yet, when the Arieke observe that their living “human similes” appear and try to stop the Arieke’s bodily pain caused by their attempt to form metaphors, the alien others realize that those they constitute as objects in their language can perform as subjects in reality. Since their truth is made of language, the individual utterance can be used to resist and contest the established truths. Certain human and alien characters in the novel strive for change, by assembling and speaking “lies” so that they can break the political authority’s monopoly on truth making, since lie/truth is a political construct as well.

The human rule on the planet shows a number of overt biopolitical characteristics. Life in Embassytown is regulated from infancy as all the children are raised communally in care homes; education, birthrate and health are closely monitored and improved by the government. The production of the Ambassadors is the epitome of the power’s control and manipulation of human life itself. The body of an Arieke has two vocal organs and they need to use them simultaneously to speak their “Language.” (The capital “L” is always used in the novel to refer specifically to the Arieke language) Anthropomorphically speaking, an Arieke has evolved to possess two separate mouths to speak a single language. Therefore, the human

anatomy does not allow a single human speaker to produce the sounds that make up the phonetics of the Arieke Language. Consequently, the Ambassadors are genetically engineered and extensively trained. The Ambassadors are humans who are bred in pairs for a single, specific profession: They are supposed to speak Language simultaneously as biotechnologically augmented human pairs. The political objective of communicating with the Arieke, thus maintaining the human presence on the planet precedes their biological existence, as it is the reason they were produced in the first place. Then it can be said that the Ambassadors are the perfect example of bare life inscribed by biopower. They must be exactly the same, genetically, mentally and physically, so that the Arieke can perceive these “doppels” as a unified speaking presence and voice. Otherwise Language only registers as noise for them.

The *raison-d'être* behind the settlement of Embassytown is supposedly to trade human technology with that of these enigmatic extraterrestrials. The human community relies on the technology of “biorigging” developed and provided by the Arieke. Initially in the narrative, the Arieke are almost always referred to as “the Hosts” and this name connotes the due respect the humans are expected to pay towards these aliens. We gather that the Host technology is based on biological means, and biological organisms are produced to do specific jobs. Even the Host city that surrounds Embassytown can be considered “alive” as their dwellings are also of biological material. The human community also depends on the oxygen produced by the “biorigged” aeoli organisms provided by the Hosts. Humans cannot enter the Arieke city without wearing aeoli masks that help them breathe. This makes the Host city even more mysterious for the human community. The common human population only knows these aliens as a species that they are supposed to venerate

due to the humans' dependence on them for life. Only the Ambassadors who can communicate with the Hosts have a deeper knowledge of them but they ward off their knowledge as government secret from the commoners. It goes without saying that interspecies communication is one of the major themes within the canon of science fiction and it allows a writer to speculate on the physical and cognitive limits of the human species. The so-called first contact story is a subgenre of science fiction in which the theme of interspecies communication is elaborated in various ways. Such contact is often the result of one party's plans of exploring, invading, enslaving, exploiting or destroying the alien other. When there are no overt hostilities involved, the interaction between the human self and the alien other is often imagined as being centered on reciprocity in trading technology, natural resources or information. The novel puts together the themes of interspecies communication and an anthropocentric form of colonialism in order to make a critique of a biopolitics so extreme that it creates its own class of bioengineered colonial officials as potentially disposable from the outset. It comes as no surprise that the respectful human attitude towards the Arieke is later put in doubt when we find out that the human federation has the secret plan of turning the planet into a space fort for further exploration into the unknown parts of the universe.

What is the relationship between bare life and language in the novel? As has been explained earlier in the first chapter, Agamben associates language with the political sphere while defining bare life as voice. His critique of Foucault's historical rupture from sovereign power to biopolitics, from the right to kill to the management of life, stems from Agamben's view of the founding role of the individual in politics as the one who is defined by his capacity to be killed, or his potential to be declared as the sacred man at anytime. Therefore, the voice of bare life is always already

included in biopolitics by way of its exclusion as unqualified for a political life. While the ultimate, apolitical “biomass” is called “falabala” in *Snow Crash* for being ideally an incomprehensible voice, the incomprehensibility is also at the basis of the distinction of bare life and politics in *Embassytown*. That is the reason why the human rule on the Arieke strives to keep the two species as mutually unintelligible to one another by manufacturing the bodies of those who can translate across the two languages. This way the government makes sure that bare life cannot politicize itself and demand for a place in a politics that manages the life of humans and plans to colonize that of the other. The power stays as power at the expense of maintaining the biopolitical distinction of bare life and qualified life (that is confined to the staff of the embassy itself) and also at the expense of keeping the Arieke as the incomprehensible other. This political structure becomes questionable to humans and to the Arieke alike, when the two groups learn to recognize their shared status of disposability as bare life within politics. They gain this awareness by exploring the truth-making function of language, hence the discursivity of politics. The bodies that are objectified in language are also capable of suffering as being the subjects of their own suffering, therefore they cannot be denied political agency. Resistance to authority in the novel stems from this mutual recognition of the other’s suffering as bare life.

The boundaries of subject/object (bios/zoe) and human/non-human (self/other) as political categories enacted in language become manifested when a human child accidentally finds herself among the mysterious Arieke. The story is narrated from the perspective of the protagonist, Avice Benner Cho, a female Embassytowner. Avice is a young girl when the narrative begins, and she is at first representative of the common human attitude towards the Hosts. Avice, like any

other child, was born and raised in a communal children's home by "shiftparents," a group of employees whose job is to take care of the human children. Avice and her friends often play close to the air-walls dividing the Host and human living spaces. The children dare each other as to who among them can run farther into the Host area while holding their breath. During one of these games, a friend of Avice gets poisoned by the Host city's alien air and is helped by an old man living at the edge of the human area. The man is called Bren and he has a bad reputation in the town as an outcast. Soon we find out that Bren is a former Ambassador whose doppel died. Bren carries the wound from his former links and cables that once enabled him mentally connect with his doppel, Don, when they used to be called BrenDon as one individual speaker of Language with two identical bodies. He finds Avice's air-poisoned friend and brings him to his house. Bren also invites Avice and asks her to help him until the paramedics arrive. Avice encounters a few Hosts at Bren's house and it becomes her first close encounter with the Arieke. The Hosts save the life of Avice's friend by applying first aid with their own devices and the human paramedics arrive to take the poisoned boy to the human hospital. This is the first instance where Avice, whose name resembles the French word *avis* that means opinion (a derivation from the verb "to seem") soon feels that what seems to be her experience with the Hosts and what it means can be very different.

Although there are a few other species of "exoterres" brought by humans and living in Embassytown on Arieke, the indigenous Hosts are not similar to them. Unlike the other aliens, the Arieke cannot speak or learn other languages. Their existence is enmeshed within their unique Language. This makes them far more removed than the humans, physically as well as mentally. While the exoterres are merely depicted as people from foreign cultures, the Hosts are of an entirely different

level of existence in the eyes of Avice. Here, like in Elgin's *Native Tongue*, a distinction is drawn between the humanoid and non-humanoid aliens. Language of the latter is seen as expressive of their utterly alien existence.

They were not the only exoterres I'd seen. There were exot inhabitants of Embassytown—a few Kedis, a handful of Shur'asi and others—but with them, while there was strangeness of course there was never that abstraction, that sheer remove one felt from Hosts. One Shur'asi shopkeeper would even joke with us, his accent bizarre but his humour clear. (*Embassytown*⁴, p. 12)

Early on in the story, the Arieke are depicted as mysterious, aloof and uncanny by Avice as they are also to anyone else around her. Children try to alleviate their fear of the Hosts by mimicking them from a distance when they see them walking in the Embassytown streets. However, when Avice encounters a few of Hosts at Bren's house for the first time, she experiences their “incomprehensible presences” closely. Unable to speak or understand Language, what she feels is fear more than respect towards them as expected from commoners like herself. Although the Arieke are the indigenous population and the humans are colonizers, it is not valid to say that Embassytown is a typical colonial setting because the humans rely on the Hosts for survival. They do not rule the Arieke. Yet this initial dependability for subsistence is not an indicator of the goodwill of humanity, either. As the plot proceeds, we find out that the metropolitan center of the human federation has been planning for a while to turn the planet into a space harbor for further exploration into the depths of the universe. The imperial anthropocentrism exists even when the humans rely on the indigenous others for survival. The local rulers do not share this information with the community of Embassytown. They are merely expected to respect the Hosts and rely on the Ambassadors for communicating with these distant aliens:

⁴ Miéville, C. (2011). *Embassytown*. New York: Del Rey Books.

All future in-text citations from this novel will include the abbreviation “E” to denote the same work, in order to eliminate confusion and excessive repetition.

Hosts, the indigenes, in whose city we had been graciously allowed to build Embassytown, were cool, incomprehensible presences. Powers like subaltern gods, who sometimes watched us as if we were interesting, curious dust; and who provided our biorigging, and to which the Ambassadors alone spoke. We were reminded often that we owed them courtesy. Pass them in the street and we would show the required respect, then run on giggling. Without my friends, though, I couldn't camouflage my fear with silliness. (E, p. 14)

In Avice's impression, the bodies of Hosts seem to be like the icons of a subaltern, exotic, distant religion, which she is not equipped to understand in the least. This allusion to subaltern deities conforms to the colonial formation embodied as the human political presence in the novel. The Hosts are statuesque yet they are not inanimate. To the contrary, the aliens possess the faculty of speech and they have their own distinct culture, however incomprehensible to the human mind. Lacking any means of communicating with the Hosts, Avice comes to the realization that her own human presence might be objectified in the Host's Language. Experiencing the Arieke's non-human intelligence combined with an utterly non-human linguistic medium, Avice's anthropocentric world-view is shattered with the realization that she might exist merely as *zoe*, meaning bereft of political or cultural agency, for the alien mind. Similar to the way a human being watches insects, the Hosts sometimes watch the human bodies moving around them as if they are "interesting, curious dust." This realization forms the first stage of Avice's political awareness that political agency in Embassytown excludes the Arieke and commoners such as herself from power as disposable, living objects from which the operation of power must be kept hidden.

Soon after Avice meets Bren and the Hosts, she is called by her favorite shiftparent and told that the Hosts have selected her for a special errand. She will receive payment in exchange of a required act but most importantly she will receive the gratitude of the Hosts and the Ambassadors in the end. It is interesting to note

that at this early age Avice deems it important to gain the goodwill of the ruling strata of the Embassytown society. This shows that she has somewhat internalized the importance of proximity to the political power as a denizen of Embassytown. Avice obediently accepts the offer. After she performs a strange ordeal, a dramatic performance for the Hosts, she becomes a human “simile” in Language. Avice’s life now will take a different direction following this incident. It is not clear why Avice especially is chosen for the very act, but we soon realize that becoming part of Language she becomes part of their existence as a recognizable presence in their life. Yet, the actual content of the performance she acts remains quite mysterious at first, apart from the fact that it was supposed to “hurt” Avice.

Bren smiled at the way my mouth was moving. “You... want me to... perform a simile?” I said at last.

“It’s an honour!” Dad Renshaw said.

“It is an honour,” Bren said. “I can see you know that. ‘Perform’?” He wagged his head in a sort of well, yes and no way. “I won’t tell you lies. It’ll hurt. And it won’t be nice. But I promise you’ll be alright. I promise.” (...) I’d an idea of what I hoped to do when I was old enough, by then, and the goodwill of Staff was something I wanted very much. (E, p. 24)

In order for Avice to act her part in this performance a few government officials accompanied by Bren take her to a derelict restaurant between Embassytown and the Host city. There is a void in the narrative concerning the details of this ordeal. Avice, although she endures this act, sees it as “the least comprehensible event” in her life. She dissociates herself from the whole scene and merely does what she is asked to. Avice performs her part in this ritual-like scene as the Hosts speak their Language and performs certain mimes. We are told that Avice was given by the Hosts certain things to eat and she was otherwise expected to remain quite passive during the entire act. The fact that this passive role hurt her will be clarified only when Avice finds out that this performance will be used to refer to passivity, obedience and a sort

of resistance to change in the Arieke language. Unable to make meaning of the event as a child, Avice remains puzzled:

WHAT OCCURRED in that crumbling once-dining room wasn't by any means the worst thing I've ever suffered, or the most painful, or the most disgusting. It was quite bearable. It was, however, the least comprehensible event that had or has ever happened to me. I was surprised how much that upset me. For a long time the Hosts didn't pay attention to me, but performed precise mimes. They raised their giftwings, they stepped forward and back. I could smell their sweet smell. I was frightened. I'd been prepared: it was imperative for the sake of the simile that I act my part perfectly. They spoke. I understood only the very basics of what I heard, could pick out an occasional word. I listened for the overlapping whisper I'd been told meant she, and when I heard it I came forward and did what they wanted. (E, p. 25)

By this performance Avice becomes a human "simile" in Language. Unable to utter lies and construct metaphors, we find, the Hosts need literal references to speak their Language. Since a metaphor is logically a lie, they rely on similes to make meaning. Avice becomes "a figure of speech" in Language and began to be spoken in Language. Although the Ambassadors tell her that a literal translation of her role in Language is not possible to convey, Avice is referred to as "the girl who ate what was given to her." She gets hurt and bruises after the ordeal. As a result she gets embodied in Language as a simile used to mean those who submit, conform to the status-quo or do as they are told. The event also gives her status among her friends because even being in the same room with the Hosts is of great importance for the commoners. Perplexed by the event and eager to find out what this means, Avice asks an Ambassador about her new status as a part of Language when she is invited to the Embassy following day.

The Ambassadors spoke to me in the language of our Hosts. They spoke me: they said me. They warned me that the literal translation of the simile would be inadequate and misleading. There was a human girl who in pain ate what was given her in an old room built for eating in which eating had not happened for a time. "It'll be shortened with use," Bren told me. "Soon they'll be saying you're a girl ate what was given her." (E, p. 26)

If we read Avice's becoming an embodied figure of speech in an allegorical way, we are supposed to think that it is imbued with hidden political meanings that can be supposedly revealed in various strategies of reading. This "hidden" meaning of Avice as a human simile, or literally "the girl who ate what was given her" is partly revealed later on as a reference point for the Arieke when they want to denote passivity and suffering, something that also refers to the lack of political agency that can take action to change this state of being. Avice's "meaning" as an emblem for inertia becomes fixed in the Arieke speech as a simile. However, the performance itself during which Avice becomes part of Language is never explained as a meaningful process. After all the whole of Arieke mind or language is not supposed to be translatable into human terms. On the other hand, the repetitive and embodied character of this performative aspect of their language is laden with political implications. As Avice is a living presence among the Hosts, she keeps acting out in time. When the political turmoil breaks out between the Hosts and the human community later on, Avice proves to be a catalyst for change when she tries to help the Arieke and also resist the human government's attempt of subduing the Arieke. Therefore, her fixed meaning as bare life with no political agency in Language, and her embodied actions demanding safety and equality for all living entities on the planet become contradictory for the Arieke mind that cannot resolve literal contradictions because their language does not allow for two things being true at the same time. As a result, Avice must be transformed from a simile into a metaphor for the Arieke. This way, metaphorical use of language can be adopted, a feature that allows the aliens to fully realize the reality constituting function of language, hence the metaphysical foundation of political life.

The fact that the Arieke needs performance to be able to speak of abstractions brings us to the theory of speech-act upon which Judith Butler builds not only her theory of gender but also the political resistance against precarity. Butler defines performativity as “that characteristic of linguistic utterances that in the moment of making the utterance makes something happen or brings some phenomenon into being” (Butler, 2015, p. 28). “That characteristic” is what enables the women to foreground their experience of precarious lives by naming it in *Native Tongue*. In the context of *Embassytown* again, we encounter the performative aspect of language, albeit in reverse motion. One can ask how does a bodily act become performative if performativity is linguistic? Avice is first and foremost a performer, and then she is given an essential meaning by the Arieke; the meaning of her bare life as the girl who eats what is given her. This meaning will be changed into a metaphor for political action as the narrative proceeds. Avice’s mysterious ordeal precedes language as the basis of a simile. These performative utterances in language make changes in reality, or they trigger a set of events. Here, the embodied performance itself becomes part of Language. Avice and the Hosts towards the end of the novel, erases this primacy of language over performance again while their very act of assembling against authority is the result of the awareness that language and the body complement each other. The bodily act is not secondary to language and vice versa. With the very act of coming together as the self and other based on their affinity of being excluded from politics, they utter the statement that they resist simply by assembling.

After gaining this status as a figure of speech in Language, a living body that is spoken and exists as speech, Avice eventually becomes embodied as a traveler in space-time also. Since the planet Arieke is so far from the center, it can only be

reached via travelling in “Immer”, a sort of subspace with a different existence than the usual space, “Manchmal”. These terms mean “always” and “sometimes” in German, respectively. After becoming a human simile, Avice is helped in this career by the Embassy Staff and becomes an “immerser”, someone whose job is to travel in Immer, a profession that requires extensive training and physical endurance. Being an immerser is a prestigious thing in Embassytown for it provides the experience of being in the “out”, the out of the planet as well as the regular human time. Like Avice is “immersed” in the alien Language as a body, she also gets immersed in subspace. She transcends both human language and the quotidian experience. After extensive training and exams, although not remarkably more talented than the other candidates, she manages to become an immerser with the political privilege she gains after becoming a human simile. Thereafter, she begins her career of journeying through Immer. Avice carries goods in spaceships and travels across different planets, gaining a sort of life experience usually not available to the commoners, and even to the Ambassadors.

During her long travels out of her home planet, Avice meets her husband Scile, a linguist of alien languages. After finding out that Avice is from Embassytown, Scile shows special interest in her due to the enigmatic reputation of Language of the Arieke as a unique phenomenon in the known universe. Scile persuades Avice to move back to Embassytown after they get married so that he can study Language and meet the Hosts. After immersing for years and now back in her hometown, Avice realizes she is welcomed into the ruling class of the town that consists of the Staff and the Ambassadors. Scile uses Avice’s upgraded social status in order to meet the Hosts and study Language. We learn most of our “scientific”

knowledge of Language from Scile's research in Embassytown that he often shares with Avice in astonishment:

For humans, say *red* and it's the *reh* and the *eh* and the *duh* combined, those phonemes in context, that communicate the colour. That's the case whether I say it, or Scile does, or a Shur'asi, or a mindless program that has no sense that it's speaking at all. That is not how it is for the Ariekei.

Their language is organised noise, like all of ours are, but for them each word is a funnel. Where to us each word *means* something, to the Hosts, each is an opening. A door, through which the thought of that referent, the thought itself that reached for that word, can be seen. "If I program 'ware with an Anglo-Ubiq word and play it, you understand it," Scile said. "If I do the same with a word in Language, and play it to an Ariekei, I understand it, but to them it means nothing, because it's only sound, and that's not where the meaning lives. It needs a mind behind it." (...) "There's no other language that works like this," Scile said. "The human voice can apprehend itself as the sounding of the soul itself." (E, p. 55)

Scile's explanation of the Arieke Language points toward a logocentric view of language and thought. The Hosts do not have a writing system nor do they "signify" in the human sense. There must be a soul lying behind each signifier, uttering the word in Language. Soul is the ultimate transcendental signified in Derridean terms. Speech and presence are superior to writing and absence. Without a living soul uttering a given signifier, the utterance is nothing but noise to the Host hearer. Language does not signify but it rather points to the soul speaking it. There is no place for play or ambiguity. Therefore this language cannot operate on metaphors. What the Hosts talk about must be present in their immediate environment as presences. That is why the Hosts need real people, animals and objects as similes in order to speak. Without points of comparisons, Language fails to communicate because no signifier can replace another one in a metaphoric way. Writing cannot be substituted for speech because it fails to convey the soul behind the spoken Language. When humans except for the Ambassadors speak Language, nothing is rendered comprehensible for a Host. Meaning must be present and be true to be

Language and this is not possible without a speaker who can utter two different sounds at once while being physically present to his interlocutor. Scile explains:

“But the Ariekei . . . when they speak they *do* hear the soul in each voice. That’s how the meaning lives there. The words have got . . .” He shook his head, hesitating, then just using that religious term. “Got the soul in them. And it has to be there, the meaning. Has to be true to be Language. That’s why they make similes.” (E, p. 56)

We learn from the linguist Scile that the Hosts also make similes out of animals, their own body parts, wings and even rocks. As I have mentioned before, even the Arieke technology is based on biological entities. So, it is as if the soul in nature, as they perceive it, manifests itself to the Arieke through Language. It speaks itself through the living nature and the Hosts are unable to perceive any other language. Avice finds it hard to understand how the Hosts cannot think of things that are not out there. They cannot speak of what they cannot think and vice versa. Their existence is linguistically, phonocentrically and logocentrically determined. Scile answers that the Hosts can only speculate on presences and they do not have a subjunctive mode of thinking:

“I can think things which aren’t there,” I said. “And so can they. Obviously. They must, to plan the similes in the first place.”
“Not . . . quite. They’ve no what-ifs,” he said. “At best, it must be like a pre-ghost in their heads. Everything in Language is a truth claim. So they need the similes to compare things to, to make true things that aren’t there yet, that they need to say. It might not be that they can think of it: maybe Language just demands it. That soul, that soul I was talking about’s what they hear in Ambassadors, too.” (E, p. 56)

This of course puzzles Scile as well as Avice. He begins to think that Language is impossible. How can a rational being exist without symbolic language after all? If they do not have metaphors, how can the Hosts organize their community? How can a language work if words are their referents? These questions confuse Scile and he is drawn into Language more and more. Scile also does not understand how the pair of

Ambassadors can sound intelligible in Language since they do not make a single soul but twins. Here biotechnology gets into the picture as the characteristic theme of all the language related science fiction novels that are the focus of this study. The body is altered, directly produced or manipulated for linguistic ends. At first, Scile mistakes the Ambassadors for twins. However, the Ambassadors are not exactly twins, but genetically engineered doppelgängers.

Since the Arieke language does not signify like the human language does, and each signifier is a funnel leading to the signified, it refers to a logocentric pattern of thinking determined by Language. It is logocentric because meaning is ultimately fixed at presence. The soul that is present dictates that “what is said” and “what is” match. The presence of the interlocutor at the time of utterance is equated with the presence of meaning because the signifier must be coming from a soul that is present. We can say that Language has been evolved in such a way that the meaning is not supposed to defer. There is no space in a chain of signification allowing free play of signification. The political implication of this strange formation is that it makes it impossible to think of any alternative to authority because of the lack of subjunctive thinking, meaning the ability to imagine alternatives in language. That is why the Arieke can only use similes, and not metaphors. Language also makes it technically impossible to utter lies. The Arieke have not evolved to produce untrue statements; therefore they need to have a concept of a lie to have a concept of truth. The species meets the phenomenon of lying thanks to the Ambassadors.

The very existence of the Ambassadors is the most emblematic image of the biopolitical practice in the novel. As life itself is the main object of politics in the modern society, human life becomes the ultimate resource to be altered, shaped, corrected and reproduced for the purposes of the state, here the imperial Bremen or

the colonial outpost of Embassytown. Although, these “doppels” have the unique ability to speak the alien tongue and live somewhat a privileged life as the political elite, they are nothing more than a state apparatus. The Ambassadors function exactly like the Chornyak Household in Elgin’s *Native Tongue*, in that their whole social existence and privileges depend on speaking the languages. Although the Linguist families still have certain autonomy in Elgin’s linguistic science fiction, in Miéville’s account the linguistic/interpreter class with altered their human bodies are the direct result of the alien language itself. The Ambassadors are produced only to speak. Like in *Native Tongue* the state structure uses technology to produce and alter bodies so that they become wired to speak different and non-human languages.

Since the Ambassadors are human, they can speculate and imagine false propositions in Language. Perhaps the only communal activity that both the Hosts and humans gather for are “the Festival of Lies,” during which the Ambassadors are supposed to tell lies to the Hosts who demand it. The Hosts demand to be lied to because it makes them intoxicated, going beyond their accustomed way of perception. Since something cannot be present and absent at the same time for the Host mind, hearing lies produces a hallucinogenic effect on the brain. In other words, lies uttered in Language by the Ambassadors make the Hosts high. They go out of their mind and experience hallucinations as if on drugs.

Our Ambassadors, though, were human. They could lie as well in Language as in our own language, to the Hosts’ unending delight. These eisteddfods of mendacity had not existed—how could they?—before we Terre came. The Festivals of Lies had occurred almost as long as Embassytown had existed: they were one of our first gifts to the Hosts. I’d heard of them, but never expected to see one. (E, p. 83)

Avice brings Scile to one of these festivals and as each Ambassador lies on the stage, Avice reports that the Hosts grow “boisterous, boisterous in a fashion I’d never seen, then to my alarm seemed intoxicated, literally lie-drunk. Scile was tense.” (84) After

learning more about Language, Scile becomes conservative about its status. He thinks that Language should remain as it is, as the only existent language whose main principle is logocentrism, being based on complete presence of speech. He starts losing his mind and comes to believe that Language is the voice of God, hence it should be protected and remain pure. Avise worries about Scile after he realizes that during the festivals not only the Ambassadors lie but also the Hosts also try to lie and compete with each other in lying. Although they cannot exactly utter untruth, even the attempt makes them euphoric.

Every tiniest success was celebrated. When the object was a yellow, the Host trying to lie, an Arieke with a scissor-shape on its fanwing, shuddered and retracted several of its eyes, gathered itself, and in its two voices said a word that would have translated as something like “yellow-beige.” It was hardly a dramatic untruth, but the crowds were rapturous at it. (E, p. 85)

This image should be thought in the context of the distinction between *zoe* and *bios*. The lack of untruth in Language inevitably corresponds to the lack of truth. How can the Arieke attain a sense of political choice, a sense of true and false, good and bad if they cannot lie? The image of the Festival has an anthropocentric meaning that without a sense of lying, the Hosts do not really have a speech; therefore they cannot attain *bios*, or political existence. This reduces them to their bare life in all their strangeness and incomprehensibility. Yet, we see their attempt to transform their language and exclude the bareness of their life into politics through language. Following their first contact with human beings whose sense of a truth is dialectically connected with the concept of untruth, the Arieke might have realized that their particular situation is an “anomaly,” and the cause of their being passive like “the girl who ate what was given her” against the humans who exploit them under the guise of a host-guest relationship on their very own planet.

My suggestion is that by their attempt to utter lies, the Arieke are trying to reach a sense of truth about themselves as a group with political speech. They are trying to move from voice into speech; or from *zoe* to *bios*. Such anthropocentrism is inevitable when imagining other sentient beings with political language. According to Agamben there is politics, “because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.” (8) In this sense, only by excluding their bare “Ariekeness,” their difference from the humans as embodied in their inability for political speech, do the Hosts can attain politics as a community. In the Festival, they strive to be immune to the intoxication from the lies by the very act of lying, by mastering humanness to include it, so that they can become a community by excluding them as different. Here, it is apt to remember Esposito’s complementary understanding of community/immunity, this time in the context of *Embassytown*. Esposito explains his understanding of biopolitics in the modern world in a two-fold way, as the inseparability of community and immunity and the ongoing tension between the two. In order to be a community, any group of human beings needs be bound together with a shared duty, a certain responsibility for returning the gift to the whole group. On the other hand, as community’s negative double, immunity refers to being free of such a duty towards one’s community and of the gift (*munus*), a sense that both *communitas* and *immunitas* etymologically share.

“We have already seen how the most incisive meaning of *immunitas* is inscribed in the reverse logic of *communitas*: immune is the ‘nonbeing’ or ‘not-having’ anything in common. Yet, it is precisely such a negative implication with its contrary that indicates that the concept of immunization presupposes that which it also negates. Not only does it appear to be derived logically, but it also appears to be internally inhabited by its opposite. Certainly, one can always observe that the paradigms of disillusion, secularization, and legitimation – to remain with those cited above –

presupposed in a certain way their own alterity: illusion, the divine, and transcendence, respectively.” (Esposito, 2013a, p. 51)

Respectively, the human community of Embassytown can imagine themselves as a community, a group of people with a shared sense of duty and gift-exchange, because their language enables them to utter lies, to imagine themselves into a “common” group, a distinct species, a community that is realized on the basis of excluding the bare life of non-humans, such as the Arieke. *Communitas* cannot be formed without *immunitas*, which is the tendency to push out the foreign elements within a group and self-identify with this act of fighting back against the intruding forces. The human community incorporates alterity in order to push it back as an immunitary movement. After the Hosts become severely addicted to human lies and internalized its necessity for becoming a community, to have a sense of true/untrue, they will try to initiate an immunitary movement to push the humans out of their own system. As community keeps people together within politics/lies, immunity sends them back to their own individual identities. As Friedrich Nietzsche famously declares in his *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* (1873), all truth claims are illusions because language is nothing more than a conglomeration of metaphors that are themselves lies. In the biopolitical vein of Esposito who conceptualizes the community as an immunitary reaction to alterity, a process of imagining a self-identity through negation, Nietzsche, too, locates the obligation to be truthful in the political power’s imposition on its subjects. Truths are discursive constructs like metaphors and there can only be interpretations of them, they cannot transcend each one another in any final sense unlike in the logocentric Language of presence, reason or soul:

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration [...]; truths are illusions

of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour [...]. Yet we still do not know where the drive to truth comes from, for so far we have only heard about the obligation to be truthful which society imposes in order to exist. (p. 43)

Nietzsche clearly does not make a substantive distinction between truths and lies.

Truths that are made of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms...and so on, are so because the society has the legitimacy to declare them as such. In Foucault's (1997) terminology, it has the sovereign right to kill anybody whose truth contradicts that of the sovereign in a way as to threaten the legitimacy of sovereignty. As for Agamben, the power over truth must be coming from the fact that the state has the power to declare a state of exception. By the mere act of such declaration it has the right to impose the obligation on the population to be truthful to its version of truth. In this sense, power works performatively to create its own essence as truth. The Arieke realize the truth-making function of language and this function is only possible if their language can start forming metaphors.

As the Hosts discover the role of producing metaphors/lies in attaining a form of speech making that can give them a sense of political existence; Scile becomes worried about the status of Language. He wishes it to remain as it is. Language becomes the sole expression of the Arieke soul itself and has an almost religious importance for Scile. As a linguist who knows how an ordinary language works on the principles of signification with the relation between the signifier and signified being arbitrary as in Saussurean linguistics, Scile is worried that the unique Language is becoming contaminated with lies. If the Hosts learn how to lie, then Language too will become full of ambiguity and stop voicing the soul behind it. The Hosts will gain lies and truths but they will lose the transcendental signified, the logos itself which speaks itself through Language. We find out that a Host named

surl/teshecher is now leading a group of the Arieke to become better liars. Scile manages to organize a group of “human similes” like his wife in order to stop this movement. Avice realizes something is wrong with Scile, who thinks that unlike similes, metaphors are dangerous because they change everything:

“Simile spells an argument out: it’s ongoing, explicit, truth-making. You don’t need... *logos*, they used to call it. Judgement. You don’t need to... to link incommensurables. Unlike if you claim: ‘This *is* that.’ When it patently is not. That’s what *we* do. That’s what we call ‘reason’, that exchange, metaphor. That *lying*. The world becomes a lie. That’s what Surl Teshecher wants. To bring in a lie.” He spoke very calmly. “It wants to usher in evil.” “I’m worried about Scile,” I said to Ehrsul. (E, p. 141)

The Host called surl/teshecher is by far the most successful liar among the Arieke. Although “it” cannot quite lie in the human sense, it tries to break down sentences in into two by slowing down as it speaks, in order to give a sense of lying. After they become closer and closer to lying, the group of Hosts led by surl/teshecher begins marching to the embassy building in a rebellious fashion. The group of humans supported by Scile and some of the Ambassadors managed to have surl/teshecher killed. This incident makes us question the goodwill of the Embassytown’s human community and their attitude towards the political reasons behind the human settlement. When the Arieke shows a sign of threat the humans makes a reactionary move immediately. This also suggests the position of the Arieke as a subjected group. If the Hosts can lie, they can turn against their “guests”, the humans, in an immunitary move to become a self-identified community with the sense of an other to exclude. This incident also marks the ending of the narrative titled as “Formerly” and the beginning of the disastrous, second half of the text called “Latterday”. Soon after this event, a pair of newly commissioned Ambassadors arrives Embassytown from the faraway human metropolis, possibly to intervene the anticipated turmoil between the two species. Since the Ambassadors have always been among the

inhabitants in the town, this arrival is seen as an oddity and causes unease among the ruling class.

The Embassytown staff organizes a ball to officially welcome the new Ambassadors. To everyone's astonishment, the new Ambassadors, EzRa, are not doppels or twins but they are two distinct looking individuals. This puzzles everyone present including Avice, because it is common knowledge that only doppels can speak Language. However, this mysterious pair from the imperial metropolis is able to speak Language and when they speak it the Hosts in the hall become intoxicated as if they are hearing untrue statements. We soon find out that it is because Ez and Ra are mentally linked but not completely interfused to sound as if they are a single presence to the Arieke mind. This gives the effect that their speech is there and not there at once so the Hosts experience their statements as hallucinatory. The voice of EzRa immediately becomes a serious addiction for the Hosts. They initially become ecstatic, later almost delirious when feeling withdrawal symptoms. This puts the Embassy staff in a difficult position because the Hosts soon begin to demand new doses of EzRa's speech. The Hosts finally get addicted to human signification that is never an accurate representation of the Arieke's experience of reality.

The Ambassador EzRa was sent to Embassytown in order to break the monopoly of the local Ambassadors on Language, thus on the politics of the settlement. EzRa is able to speak Language despite not consisting of doppels because Ez has an unusual propensity for emphatic unity with others. Ez and Ra were not bred and raised by the government but they are biologically altered as adults. Ez is a secret agent and suffers from depression when the Hosts become lie-addicts and turn life into total chaos in their living space. Even their animate, "biorigged" technology gets addicted and as living matter starts showing symptoms. During that time Ez kills

Ra in a moment of madness. This wreaks havoc upon the town because the language-starved Hosts start marching toward the embassy building shouting the name of EzRa. As a species the Arieke divide into two, following the upsurge of their addiction. A group among them starts plucking off their “fanwings” which is the Arieke organ for hearing, in order not to hear more lies. The rest remains addicted. Cal of the former CalVin, an Ambassador whose doppel commits suicide, is surgically linked to Ez and form EzCal. This new pair starts commanding the addicted Hosts and makes them obey their instructions. On the other hand, the fanwingless Hosts start attacking their own species and mutilate them so that they too will join the fanwingless. The group becomes extremely aggressive and decides to demolish Embassytown and kill all the humans so that the new generations of Arieke will not be addicted. This group is called “the Absurd” (from Latin *absurdus* “out of tune,” hence “irrational”; related to *surdus* “deaf, dull”)

Caught between these different camps and witnessing the pending apocalypse of her hometown, Avice decides to take action. Inspired by her own human simile status as part of Language, she comes up with an idea in order to stop the Absurd and the human forces from clashing in total war. She teams up with Bren and a former pair of Ambassadors called YISib and flees Embassytown to train a group of Hosts in the Host territory when the Absurd marches down to Embassytown with growing numbers along the way. A Host whom she names Spanish Dancer due to its colors shows a strong desire to change and break addiction to EzCal’s speech. Avice’s determinism to change the status quo inspires Spanish Dancer to use Avice as a contradictory simile in Language. This marks the beginning of change for the Arieke as a species. Spanish Dancer will be among the first transformed Arieke:

It’s not good that we are this. We wish to be other than this. We’re like the girl who was hurt in darkness and ate what was given her because we imbibe

what is given to us by EzCal. There was a long silence. *We want instead to be like the girl who was hurt in darkness and ate what was given to her in that we want to be . . .* and then there was silence again, and Spanish Dancer shook its limbs.

“It tried to use your simile twice, contradictorily,” Sib said. “But it couldn’t quite manage.” (E, p. 261)

In order to form resistance against the human rule, the Hosts need metaphors, or lies, so that they can form their own truths while speaking of their own experience.

Spanish Dancer goes on to say: “We want to decide what to hear, how to live, what to say, what to speak, how to mean, what to obey. We want Language to put to our use” (E, p. 261). Avice decides that if she can manage to teach the Hosts how to lie and use metaphors they will transform and no longer be addicted. If the group she moves away from EzCal’s influence can become immune, she can show them to the Absurd and prove that change is possible. Only then the Absurd will understand there is a non-violent option to end the war. In the meanwhile the Absurd start using their body parts to point out to things, something new for the Arieke. Avice thinks: “Every time they point, they signify. So far the price is way too high. But now we know Ariekei can do it. And teaching this lot that without taking their wings means teaching them to lie” (E, p. 296). She also realizes that by using her as a simile, the Arieke all along have been trying to lie and make their own truths: ““I had to be hurt and fed to be speakable, because it had to be true. But what they say with me . . . That’s true because they make it” (E, p. 296) Similes are a gateway to lies, “a route from literal description to signifying”, and if she can manage to make the Arieke say that they are “her”, as both “the girl who ate what was given her” and the human body who tries to change things, this will change the Arieke:

But we can push them down it, even that last step, all the way.” It became clearer to me as I spoke. “To where the literal becomes . . .” I stopped. “Something else. If similes do their job well enough, they turn into something else. We tell the truth best by becoming lies.”

Not paradoxes, I wanted to say; these weren't paradoxes, they weren't nonsense. "I don't want to be a simile anymore," I said. "I want to be a metaphor." (E, p. 296)

Avice wishes to become a metaphor, a metaphor of political change for the Arieke.

Metaphors are deemed dangerous because they allow the self to become someone or something else, paving the way for finding affinity between the two species, an affinity of the shared precarity of being reduced to a non-political existence. A simile can state affinity between two things, but it does not function as a predicate, it cannot tell "the lie" that an Arieke "is" Avice. If the self can be the other, it opens up possibilities of assembling against authority, and to strive for change. We see in the novel the striving of Avice and a group of the Arieke to transform Language from an essentially logocentric one into a language devoid of a transcendental signified.

Derrida, in *Of Grammatology* (1997), identifies logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as "the exigent, powerful, systematic and irrepressible desire" for a transcendental signified that "would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (p. 49). Breaking ties with their transcendental signified, that is the voice of the speaking presence present at the moment of interlocution is indeed exigent for the Arieke, because when there is an unfixed movement from sign to sign, as exemplified by the use of metaphors, the Arieke body suffers. It becomes intoxicated, yet this intoxication proves to be a detrimental one when the Arieke struggles from literalness to the metaphorical in the beginning.

Derrida's deconstruction of the Western metaphysics of presence is based on the opposition of writing to speech. Derrida notes that in the Western tradition of metaphysics, voice is always considered as closer to the mind. (p. 1) Therefore, logocentrism is also a phonocentrism. As the Arieke move away from the necessity of the speaking soul to end the play of signs in Language, they get closer to the

potential of their bodies, too, as a means of appearing, assembling and claiming for political agency, because the externality of the body (writing that triggers the chain of signification) to logos (transcendental signified, voice) is deconstructed. In the end, Avise manages to make Spanish Dancer and the other conscious Arieke utter lies. This transforms the way they speak Language and their whole worldview. They no longer strive for literal references and the unity of meaning/presence. Like *Native Tongue* and *Snow Crash*, this novel also views language as the starting point for resistance to the biopolitical authority. Like in those novels, the dualism of mind and body has to be eradicated because just like language, the body too is not a given. Language does not dwell outside of the body and commands it. Instead, they complement and inform each other.

The linguistic resistance in *Native Tongue* points towards a politicized body as a site of conflict because their linguistic project fails to include male and female bodies in an all-inclusive language. *Snow Crash* locates the tendency of language to diverge as a polyphonic medium, as the only guarantee against totalitarian control in an obsessively exclusionary world that keeps foreign elements out in an immunitary move to seemingly “protect” the individual life. Finally, *Embassytown* puts the strongest emphasis on language’s capacity to signify ever-changing truths/lies in the society of control. However, realizing the subversive potential of language and signification also requires a realization of the body’s significance in relation to resistance. In the novel, the body is not a given surface on which power shapes and leaves its marks, but it is always already produced and transforming, like language itself. This is because the body becomes a source of meaning as it learns to signify.

4.2 Metaphors in unison

While the use of metaphoric language and speaking of one's experience is celebrated as the resisting force of language, this very resistance also includes the representation of the other as excluded from power. As we have seen, Avice could only manage to end the violence between the human and non-human others only when she trained the Hosts to tell lies, in other words, producing alternatives to the established truths. The attribution of metaphoric language to the Arieke complicates the logic of biopolitics that rests on a clear distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, bare life and the qualified life of the political-speaking human. This way the marginalized humans and the aliens mutually include and represent one another as those whose experiences are non-represented or underrepresented within politics. In line with the Worfian hypothesis of linguistic relativism shared by all three novels analyzed in this thesis, *Embassytown*, too, puts a great emphasis on language as a determinant of the mind of its speaker, hence of their particular political reality. The biopolitical state apparatus uses its own language to divide and exploit both species but it is proven possible to resist it by introducing changes into language to contest power and create counter-truths. Struggling for a new language also entails a new understanding of the relationship between mind and the body in the novel.

Since language has been associated with the expression of a rational mind in Western metaphysics for thousands of years, we tend to think mind and body as distinct phenomena and tend to value mind, and language as its sole manifestation as the main determinant of a political existence. Yet, the body remains as the sole object of biopolitics in the contemporary world. If the body is endlessly produced and inscribed upon by the oppressive discourses, how can it defy the all-pervading power over its life? *Embassytown*, like the two other novels, attempts to erase the imagined

borders between the body and the mind by pointing towards the changing character of this dualism under technology.

The depiction of the body as an open-ended, dynamic site of inscription is the strategy of the novel in order to bring about the erasure of the body-mind dualism. The body is not a given, unchanging, non-ideological base entity to be ruled by the mind that reasons and commands it. This understanding is conveyed to the reader early on in the novel as Avice begins narrating her early life as a child in Embassytown. Growing up within the human community of an alien planet and being raised by the state-employed “shiftparents” in a residential care home, Avice experiences herself as un-finished and in need of definition. The physical as well as the mental borders between the Hosts and the human population make Avice question her human body. She narrates her childhood as an adult narrator and finds that her face then was like a yet unfinished text. Her idea of her own face is like a piece of writing: “my face then was just my face now not-yet-finished, the same suspicious mouth-pinch or smile, the same squint of effort that sometimes got me laughed at later, and then as now I was rangy and restless” (E, p. 10). She plays with her friends a dangerous game that involves running while holding her breath till the border separating the two species’ living spaces, where “the airs mixed”, through “a gaseous transition, breezes sculpted with nanotech particle-machines and consummate atmosphere artistry—to write Avice on the white wood.” (10)

This way she tries to define her identity by naming herself, locating her name outside the anthropocentric zone of Embassytown, where the authorities control the knowledge of the Hosts and where the physical space limits inter-species contact. As Avice explores her “humanness” by pushing the limits of her body to leave her mark in the alien zone, she experiences liminality as an embodied experience. While trying

to reach the border to define her own self, the other reaches her from beyond the same border. Avice experiences her first close encounter with an Arieke's body at Bren's place when her gas-poisoned friend is lying unconscious. They walk with a "swaying grace" and in "complicated articulation." As there is no easy communication between the two species except via translation by the Ambassadors, Avice cannot be sure what meanings their complicated articulation entails.

It was a Host. It stepped to the centre of the carpet. I stood immediately, out of the respect I'd been taught and my child's fear. The Host came forward with its swaying grace, in complicated articulation. It looked at me, I think: I think the constellation of forking skin that was its lustreless eyes regarded me. It extended and reclinched a limb. I thought it was reaching for me. (E, p. 13)

Avice realizes that she automatically respects the alien presence although she is not sure what "it" is thinking of her. This respect is mostly taught by the human government rather than gained by the Host. Since the alien does not have anthropomorphic eyes, Avice cannot be sure it really recognizes her as a separate entity. Later we find out that the Hosts can only hear the human language as noise, and that humans believe the Hosts cannot perceive them as rational beings, but only companion animals of the Ambassadors. Clearly, this is an estranging idea regarding anthropocentrism. By rendering the human body as languageless in the eyes of the non-human intelligence, the narrative questions what defines human.

Jacques Derrida uses a similar image of the animal returning the human gaze in *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)* (2002), and says: "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there" (p. 397).

Avice is figuratively naked as body before the strange glance of the Arieke. She thinks it is looking at her but not sure if it is seeing her as a living and thinking creature with emotions. For the first time she begins to question the limits imposed on the humans by the authority. Perhaps the Hosts can really look at the human body

after all and see it as feeling, thinking and speaking. This understanding transforms her into a resistance fighter on the side of non-violence between the humans and the Arieke later on, after she becomes a figure of speech in Language. Being immersed into Arieke Language, Avice realizes that the non-human animal body is able to look and make the human body as part of its world. Even if there is no common language between them, Avice sees that she is being regarded and responded to by the Host body. The alien body itself speaks and jettisons the dualism of man and animal.

Derrida's description of the age-old anthropocentrism is reversed:

Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond. (Derrida, 2002, p. 400)

Seemingly resembling the human relationship with non-human animals, the Hosts walk with "dog-sized" presences as their companions. These are biological entities that they use as power sources. During this first close encounter, Bren tells Avice that the Hosts cannot perceive ordinary humans as sentient individuals because humans cannot speak the Arieke language. The rational animal myth is further estranged here as the narrative puts humans in the place of animals before the Hosts. At that point, Avice gets further confused both with the fact that she is no different than a pet for the Arieke and also that the Hosts themselves resemble animals.

We sometimes found ourselves facing them, as they walked with crablike precision on whatever their tasks were, or even ran, with a gait that made them look as if they must fall, though they did not. We saw them tending the flesh walls of their nests, or what we thought of as their pets, those whispering companion animal things. We would quieten abruptly down in their presence and move away from them. We mimicked the careful politeness our shiftparents showed them. (E, pp. 13-14)

The estranging effect of the Arieke physiognomy is in line with their linguistic strangeness. Avice reports that a Host walked on four legs "a little like a spider's, long, too-jointed, dark-haired, and extended its wings: from its back its auditory

fanwing, in many colours; from its front, from below its larger mouth, its limb of interaction and manipulation, its giftwing” (E, p. 79). When Avice returns to Embassytown with her linguist husband Scile, she is still confused with the Host behavior. Avice, the Ambassador CalVin and Scile “shake hands” with a Host, but it seems to do it merely as a way of imitating and respecting the human culture:

We would like to shake your giftwing with our hands, CalVin said in Language, and Scile, his face still closed to me, only pursing his lips a tiny bit, held out his hand. The Host clasped my husband’s hand in a greeting that would have made no sense to it, and then it clasped mine. (E, pp. 79-80)

Here, by objectifying the human body and culture within the alien world the novel contests anthropocentrism, which often goes hand in hand with body-mind dualism in Western thought. The realization of the contingency of the anthropocentrism is the prerequisite for resistance to the oppressive authority in the novel. This authority, which is crystallized within Embassytown’s political apparatus, promotes the division between the human self and its others.

As I have mentioned in the beginning, Avice as a child performs the act asked of her by the Hosts and becomes part of their Language, a human simile. It is important to note that the semantics here is established along the route that is from the body itself back to the language and not visa versa. She first and foremost exists literally as her body, and then this real world body becomes a language property, a figure of speech, a corporeal reference point for a simile construction. Perplexed as a child by this enigmatic incident, Avice seeks for the meaning of her body as part of the alien language and the only source she can consult is the political authorities. The Ambassadors congratulate her for “being in Language” because it means the continuation of the status quo that promotes the distinction between the human self and the alien other:

“What does it mean, sirs, ma’ams?”

They shook their heads, they moued. “It’s not really important, Avice,” one of them said. She whispered to the computer and I saw the created face nod. “And it wouldn’t be accurate anyway.” I asked again with another formulation, but they would say nothing more about it. They kept congratulating me on being in Language. (E, p. 26)

After becoming “the girl who ate what was given to her”, Avice not only becomes a meaning within Language, but she also gains the favor of the political elite. She is aware that only because of her bodily performance, her help with the simile in Language, she gets help in passing the exam board and gains access to the outer world as an “immerser”, someone whose job is to “de-world into the out.” (26) It is interesting that only by becoming immersed in Language does Avice gain access into the out, meaning the out of Embassytown and her home planet. Leaving “the sometimes” that everyone is surrounded with, she now has to experience the always, Immer. Although Manchmal is in constant change and subject to the regular physical laws, Immer escapes the regular time perception of the humans. It also defies description. After she becomes an immerser, Avice often mentions the inexpressibility of Immer. We learn that travelling in Immer requires extensive physical and mental training. A regular human being cannot endure it, and has to travel in a stupor during journeys in Immer. Immersion in language is contrasted with immersion within a pre-symbolic space.

There are currents and storm fronts in the immer. There are in the immer stretches it takes tremendous skill and time to cross. Those were among the techniques I now knew, along with the somatic control, the mantric thoughtfulness and instrumentalised matter-of factness that made me an immerser, allowed immersers to stay conscious and intentional when we immersed. (E, pp. 30-31)

The physical and mental experience of “immersing” and her own embodiment in Language as a reference point causes Avice to see her body as a source of generating meaning. A major critic of Cartesian dualism, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) acknowledges

Friedrich Nietzsche as a philosopher of the body. She contends that language itself for Nietzsche is essentially corporeal in origin because Nietzsche thinks that “Words are doubly metaphorical: they are transcriptions or transpositions of images, which are themselves transpositions of bodily states” (Grosz, 1994, p. 126). Therefore, it is the body that actually reasons, thinks and responds to the universe as the origin of language and philosophy. Nietzsche also prophetically teaches this in the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006) by saying: “Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man – he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body” (p. 26). Language and self are projections of the body that also informs and transforms it in a constant state of flux. Consequently, the body is a battleground enacted by the will to power. The Immer in the novel is the body of language, its structuring aspect which gives rise to the sometimes of language, the *manchmal*. Avice tries to describe her experience of the immer in semiotic terms:

The immer’s reaches don’t correspond at all to the dimensions of the *manchmal*, this space where we live. The best we can do is say that the immer underlies or overlies, infuses, is a foundation, is langue of which our actuality is a parole, and so on. (E, p. 31)

Like Nietzschean body preceding language, the immer is behind utterance, or self-expression. Only through language one can imagine herself outside of her own body. Avice is immune to “immer sickness,” the bodily reaction the human body gives to this ecstatic experience, due to her training and role in Language. This is what enables her to empathize later on with the position of the addicted Hosts. She is able to imagine herself outside of her own native language as well as experience her body not as a given entity but the contingent sum of the sensations dictated by physical and mental actuality, “the sometimes” or *manchmal* of her human culture.

Just like the embodied experience of Avice as a figure of speech in the Host language introduces change into it, the alien body itself determines that very language. When some of the addicted Arieke start mutilating themselves by destroying their hearing organs, the Arieke becomes resistant as they can no longer hear the voice of power speaking through the bodies of the bioengineered pairs. The fact that they can mobilize with a common aim at first puzzles the humans, including Avice: “Language, for the Ariekei, was truth: without it, what were they? An unsociety of psychopaths” (E, p. 273). The humans think that the Hosts cannot think without hearing themselves, as their thought equals speech. However, the change in their bodies does not stop them from transforming into signifying bodies. The mutilated Arieke do not stop thinking as the humans predict, but they start pointing towards objects for the first time. This in turn creates a body language among them and they become a community in search of immunity towards humans for the first time. Avice is quick to recognize the importance of this new, silent language of saying “no” to oppression:

Each word of Language meant just what it meant. Polysemy or ambiguity were impossible and with them most tropes that made other languages languages at all. But *thatness* faces every way: it’s flexible because it’s empty, a universal equivalent. *That* always means *and not that other*, too. In their lonely silent way, the Absurd had made a semiotic revolution, and a new language. (E, p. 295)

As we can see, the conception of language here is embedded in the body itself and language changes alongside the bodily changes. This idea of language contests the hierarchy between the body and mind, or human and non-human, because language here is not the expression of the human mind but a function and extension of the body. This signifying body can be understood along the lines of the metaphor of Möbius strip, the inverted three-dimensional figure of eight that Elizabeth Grosz uses in her seminal work on the philosophy of the body titled as the *Volatile Bodies*

(1994), she proposes that “The Möbius strip model has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another” (p. xii). This image also helps us reformulate the psychic interior and the physical exterior. Language as the expression of the mind does not dominate the body, but they are rather in a mutual relationship of transforming each other on an egalitarian basis. The body is not a blank surface, it is always already signified and it has the ability to counter-inscribe.

However, the contestation of the body/mind and human/non-human dualisms is not confined to the difference between the Arieke and the Terre. The biopolitical production of the Ambassadors is also a striking example of the torsion of such a Möbius strip model for the body-language. When the Staff looks for a solution to stop the Arieke attacking Embassytown, thus bringing the total annihilation of the human race on the planet, Avice discovers the existence of the human farm hidden in the Embassy. This is where the failed Ambassadors, those who cannot speak Language properly due to their not quite synchronized bodies, or those who lost their doppels are kept away from sight. This place is where the failed biological produce is kept. Avice becomes shocked by the sight of this infirmary/prison, and decides to quit the political clique of the Ambassador EzCal behind, to start her own emancipatory movement outside of the human town. There are apparently more failed Ambassadors than the “correct” ones. Since the logic of biopolitics is to “make live” rather than kill, Embassytown is too “civilized” to kill these failures. We also find out that not only the biologically unfit, but also the political dissidents are kept in this place.

There was a huge variety of the failed. Many more than there were Ambassadors. I was horrified at these numbers. I never knew, I told myself. We were too civilised to end them: hence this polite prison where we waited for them to die. I knew enough Terre history to assume that some of these

failed must be counted so because of political refusals. I was reading every nameplate we passed, and I realised it was for names I recognised, like Dalton—those of dissidents of whom only bad citizens like me spoke. No sign. Past an extreme section, men and women older than my shiftparents baying like animals and those talking with careful civility on coms to their carers, or to no one. “Christ,” I said, “Christ Pharotekton.” (E, p. 214)

These “homines sacri”, in Agamben’s terms, are likened by Avice to animals.

Although they cannot be killed, they have no political agency, qualified life, or bios.

This is the biopolitical excess, the unwanted biomass that the system has to discharge in order to carry on its operations. These people have to be hidden from view so that the state can assume its civilized self-image and conceal its logic of operation from the public. Here we have a clear similarity between Embassytown’s Ambassador infirmary and the image of the Barren Houses in Elgin’s *Native Tongue*. Both places are specifically built in order to keep translators who are no longer of use to the state apparatuses. While the inmates are the women linguists in Elgin’s novel, here it is the genetically engineered doppelers, the Ambassadors. Both groups are used by the state to communicate with the other. On the other hand, the general population sees both groups as privileged. When the linguist women begin to represent themselves in their constructed language, they begin to be viewed as reprogrammed machines by the their patriarchs.

In a similar vein, the Ambassadors are the posthuman bodies in the sense that they blur the boundaries between nature and culture, natural and artificial. They are, to repeat Donna Haraway’s words, “chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism” (1985/2004, p. 8). This way, they remind us of our own cyborg ontology and politics. Haraway also states in her *Manifesto*, “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (p. 8). These bodies are produced, exploited, put to use and discharged as biological material. After seeing

the dramatic landscape, the unrepresented bare lives of these technologically produced human bodies, Avice realizes that what unites living beings does not rest on our anthropomorphisms or language abilities but at once the biological and culturally inscribed life which she feels the humans share with the Arieke. Building upon Haraway's theory of cyborg, Rosi Braidotti defines becoming posthuman as "a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 193). *Embassytown* aligns itself with such a sense of attachment on the basis of a shared space between the self and the other. The existence of the Ambassadors and the addicted Hosts tell us the same story about the biopolitical state that fosters and captivates humans. Instead of the anthropocentric and dualistic biopolitics exemplified in the novel, Braidotti, in her work entitled *The Posthuman* (2013), proposes a "zoe-centered egalitarianism" on the basis of our shared embeddedness in nature and technology: "The zoe centred embodied subject is shot through with relational linkages of the contaminating/viral kind which inter-connect it to a variety of others, starting from the environmental or eco-others and include the technological apparatus" (p, 193). Realizing the mutually transformative relationship between the embodied existence and language, Avice decides that she can stop violence by pushing the Arieke body and mind beyond its limits, to the point where counter-truths emerge out of language and countering the exploitation of biological life becomes possible for humans and non-humans alike.

Realizing that her whole life is nothing different than those worn-out bodies waiting to die in the Ambassador infirmary, Avice begins to empathize not only with the unrepresented humans but with the Hosts who are controlled by the human politics. In short, she finds a common ground for a new ethics that is based on our

shared status of being fictitious and material as posthuman bodies. One of the prominent critics of science fiction, Sherryl Vint (2007) proposes, “The ‘post’ of posthumanism should be a ‘post’ to the heritage of humanism, which makes humans the only subjects in a world of objects. An ethical posthumanism must work against this boundary of the human from the nonhuman, refusing this final ground of abjection” (p. 189). In order to break down such a boundary and inspired by her own fixed meaning in Language, Avice acts quite the opposite in order to push the Arieke mind by creating a contradiction in her meaning as a submissive being.

When the Absurd starts marching to the Embassy and killing all humans on their way, Avice, Bren and those Hosts that wish to transform themselves and end the addiction without becoming deaf move away from Embassytown. This is because the newly formed Ambassador pair, EzCal, decides to use their addictive speech in order to fight the Absurd back by ruling the addicted Arieke against them. At this point, as Avice forces the Host named Spanish Dancer, it fails to form sentences in which it is metaphorically Avice, or “the girl who ate what was given her in darkness”, and it cannot do without the simile. Spanish Dancer can be “like Avice” but cannot “be Avice.” When Avice insists that the Hosts say that they are not like her but her, the Hosts start shaking. The Ambassador who is helping Avice and Bren objects: “What’ve you done?” whispered Sib. “You’ve driven them mad”, to which Avice answers: “Good (...) We’re insane, to them: we tell the truth with lies” (E, p. 308). Finally, after being pushed by Avice further and further, Spanish Dancer manages to omit “like” and can say “I am you” to Avice.

You are the girl who ate. I’m spanish/dancer. I’m like you and I am you. Someone human gasped. Spanish craned its eye-coral and stared at its own fanwing. Two eyes came back to look at me. I have markings. I’m a Spanish dancer. I didn’t take my eyes off it. I’m like you, waiting for change. The Spanish dancer is the girl who was hurt in darkness. (E, p. 309)

To everyone's astonishment, a Host finally can use metaphors. By showing Spanish Dancer and a few other "post-Arieke" to the deaf members of the violent Absurd, Avice manages to stop them from destroying the humans and Embassytown. It can be said that this ending has multiple meanings. The Arieke has to adopt the human ability to tell lies in order to resist the status quo. Only when they start using metaphors they can start imagining themselves as a group with shared interests. This should not be seen as a pure form of anthropocentrism that elevates mankind to a superior position among other species. When Scile mistakes the logocentrism that he finds in the Host language for the divine voice, this brings his downfall. He starts defending the enslavement of the Arieke at the expense of keeping their language pure. Resistance is only possible by adopting the free-play of language as an army of metaphors and anthropomorphisms because the discourse of politics is made of the same army in endless different configurations. This same language was what kept the human and non-human bodies in their designated places until the Arieke experienced "becoming human" by way of using metaphors. Creating a counter-army of metaphors is proven the only alternative to contest their situation. Through linguistic creation brought by a shared sense of vitality, the self and the other become subjects in each other's language, and no more mere objects. Once they start representing themselves by narrating their own experience in metaphors, the Arieke no longer seek for literalness; neither do they get hallucinations when they face contradictions and the free play in language. The novel does not search for a final ground of meaning, but proves itself to be about celebrating the open-endedness and instability in language. This is how political existence comes into force and how the journey from voice to language develops in a way valuing bare life as a priority in politics. In

the concluding chapter of the novel *Spanish Dancer* gives a speech to its fellow

Arieke and promises change and unity like a political orator:

Before the humans came we didn't speak. We've been like countless things, we've been like all things, we've been like the animals over Embassytown in the direction of which I raise my giftwing, which is a speaking you'll come to understand. We didn't speak, we were mute, we only dropped the stones we mentioned out of our mouths, opened our mouths and had the birds we described fly out, we were vectors, we were the birds eating in mindlessness, we were the girl in darkness, only knowing it when we weren't anymore. (E, p. 336)

Finally, *Embassytown* shows us that our bare bodies as embodied indicators for our existence as living beings, should be seen as an open site for resistance. This resistance can only be actualized when the self and the other mutually include and represent each other and their shared status of being the center of objectification by the language of power in biopolitics. This language of power is, of course, laden with the tradition of Western metaphysics that is based on a clearly cut distinction between the human self and the non-human other. By extending the capacity for a signifying linguistic medium to the sphere of the non-human, the novel ultimately contests the parameters for defining the human as the sole giver of meaning in the universe. As a critic of the novel points out: "To the extent that language functions as a privileged instance for determining who and what is regarded as sentient and thus worthy of ethical recognition, the question of language becomes an urgent ethical one" (Weakland, 2015, pp. 94). As the new user of metaphors, *Spanish Dancer* tells Avice at the end of the novel, language is a "lie that truths" or a "truthing lie" (E, p. 337), and the alien gives Avice these expressions as a gift, a token of their shared struggle against the human truth which has, up to that point, claimed that they cannot understand or feel for each other.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It is apt at to conclude this thesis by repeating Agamben's words: "There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion" (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). The voice of bare life is expelled from the city of men as non-language, less than human, a powerless and affectless noise; so that the commanding language of power can speak itself through the bodies, shaping and enclosing them into submission. Although the biopolitical society of control is visible first and foremost by its main object and objective, that is the human life and body, the three novels that are the focus of this thesis show us that it is language where the biopolitical separation of *zoe* from *bios* is established. Therefore, the resistance to this expulsion of the other from the male, anthropocentric and capitalist discourses, the exclusion of bare life from politics is formed again within language, by foregrounding the experience of the biologically, legally and socially underrepresented or erased experience of the body.

Native Tongue gives us the account of a future in which the female body exists as a hollow receptacle for the language of men and its biological offspring. Power in that novel comes into operation by denying women language, thus a politics of their own. They are bred and employed as translators of the men's speech, to translate their utilitarian concerns, their financial greed into the countless languages found in the universe. Translation is viewed as a one-to-one correspondence between different linguistic media of humanoid beings. In the language of power on Earth, women are spoken in animal terms; their bodies are

speechless, worn-out, tortured, thoroughbred, tame, wild or savage. Women are not able to remain in the utilitarian economy of language. They act as whimsical; they nag, demand foolish things, exaggerate and embarrass themselves. When you decide to mutilate them by cutting off their breasts to heal their cancerous bodies, but find it unnecessary to pay for their regeneration, they make mountains out of their “worn out mole hills” if they cry over their altered, bodies. The scientific discourse, biology gives us empirical proofs that women are less than human, therefore not eligible for the qualified life and political existence.

In order to resist their status as merely existing as bare life, the women secretly construct an exclusively female language, Láadan. They work in secrecy, because language is, as opposed to voice, dangerous to the status quo. It is dangerous because language, if one believes in linguistic determinism, calls things into existence by creating names for them. Cixous’s *écriture féminine* calls for a writing as excess, as a resistance to and rejection of the utilitarian economy of what she calls phallic authority. Feminine emotion is “spendthrift” and women can write superabundantly, uselessly. Yet this uselessness is only useless for patriarchy. Women think they can bring themselves to writing as resistance by writing their experience as bare life into being in their language. If they adopt the female language as their native tongue, this will transform the violent society. They lexicalize their supposedly feminine experience. For example, the word *wohosheni* means: “the opposite of alienation; to feel joined to, part of someone or something without reservations and barriers” (NT, p. 304). But is it possible to create new subjectivities that can disrupt the order of biopolitics via such language construction?

After beginning to use Láadan among themselves, the women began to be likened to machines by the men because now they have stopped trying to express

their concerns in the language of men. They just listen to them without raising any objection. This new silence unsettles the men to a great extent. The women replace the supposedly sexist properties of language such as the primacy of male grammatical gender with the female one, and end up being thrown out of the men's political sphere to live in the Women Houses. Their resistance to exclusion reproduces the same exclusionary logic within language. In a posthuman world where the distinctions between nature/culture and human/non-human are being increasingly blurred, the women fail to reject the anthropocentric binarism of the existing order in their language construction. The women's movement begets further separation; it does not promote unity across sexes and species, but leads to further segregation. On the other hand, the very act of language construction creates solidarity among women, and finally leads to an awareness in the sequel novels that, what needs to be sought after is not to attain *bios* via replicating the language of power but to unite on the basis of life, the fact that anything alive is equally object to exploitation under biopolitics.

The bare life in *Snow Crash* is embodied in language as the ethnic, economic and non-human others. The described future world of North America is such a segregated one that it is often impossible to find any positive, open communication between people. What we see, instead, is nothing but the endless circuits of information, microstate borders, zones of no entry, Apartheid-like gated communities and a chaotic urban space for all those who cannot afford safety in a world dominated by criminality and survival of the fittest. In this world of paranoid security and surveillance, the living bodies of service workers and intel-delivery people are transformed into the figure of *homo sacer*, that they can be killed by anyone with impunity. These instances of bare life are, like in *Native Tongue*, seen as receptacles

and disembodied information constantly on the move to enable capitalism to continue. It can be argued that anyone is potentially reduced to an apolitical existence, without a sense of conscious choice, as the individual is locked up in a sealed, supposedly “safe” space with no democratic participation in a shared, communal life that is established on positive values, but only widespread conformity to the power of the image, money and a revulsion towards any intruder. The sense of life in a given community is defined negatively with the process of pushing the other from within the system as a disposable entity.

Esposito views immunization as the negative double of community in modernity. While community exposes the individual to a threatening contact with the other, immunity renders him irresponsible and indifferent to it. Yet, the question of immunity is that of intensity. The excessive immunization in the society of control that is fictionalized in the text, leads to the collective reduction of everyone into a collective bare life devoid of democratic participation and care for the other. The lack of a sense of the real in the society of information is concomitant with the loss of the real in Baudrillard’s terms. The virtual, simulated experience of Metaverse cannot hide the fact that “the real” Los Angeles is yet another Disneyland, albeit a dystopian one. The billboards advertising citizenship and consumer goods dominate the landscape and there is nothing outside the language of capitalism, no positive content but only the networks of information based on differences in the structuralist sense.

The language virus comes down upon the world depicted in the novel as a critique of the society, of its metaphoric autoimmune disease whereby the organism ends up destroying itself by mistakenly attacking its own body. The death of the body is the end of life, and it is portrayed in the text with the loss of human agency,

or a sense of creativity, choice, and meaning. Rife's plan is to reduce all people into biomass, which is the lifeblood, the fuel of capitalism itself. The virus spreads both in Metaverse and in the real world, turning many people into unthinking vessels, biological robots that are controlled by a code written in the ancient language of Sumerian. The infected people are transformed back to the pre-Babel state of language/mind in which there is no multiplicity of opinion, thus no opposition to mind-control via viral discourses coded in language.

The human body and mind are not seen as distinct entities in the novel. That is how the virus is able to affect the hackers both in reality and virtual reality. A language is the software that alters the language faculty as well as the human brain. But is this entwinement of body/mind a site of unproblematic inscription as Christopher Breu also questions? In the posthuman age of information, the characters in the novel complicate the boundaries between fact and fiction as well as mind and the body. They are able to "materialize" in virtual reality and become digitalized in material reality. Those who are passive receivers of ideology in real life, the masses, or biomasses, are consumers of ready-made avatars in Metaverse. The analogy between the human and computer can be extended to that between human language and computer language. The hackers are those who perform their identities even when disembodied, by writing their avatars and building their environment in virtual reality. Likewise, Hiro and Y.T. use their material bodies in such ways in which their bodies reflect and complicate the logic of biopolitics. Bodily hexis is, indeed, political mythology embodied, as Bourdieu asserts. On the other hand, it is not permanent, but exists in a constant process of becoming, just like language does.

The bodies of these future human beings can no longer be thought as distinct from their embeddedness within digital and material technologies. Hiro and Y.T. are

embodied in such ways as to be defined as cyborg beings. Their self-styled ways of moving across the networks of data and segregated life-space enable them to resist authority by becoming elusive bodies in relation to the inscription of power. In this sense, their bodies signify resisting statements and complicate the boundaries between material/immaterial, male/female and human/machine. When they give care to Fido on the basis of sharing a similar life experience of being exploited by the society of control, the hybrid creature destroys the virus, metaphorically securing the multiplicity of languages and giving people a utopian hope for what Braidotti calls *zoe*-egalitarianism. Cyborgism does not point towards a lifeless existence, but a possibility of a critical, subversive life lived as a performance of fact and fiction.

In a similar vein, the political implications of such a non-Cartesian configuration of subjectivity is worked out in *Embassytown*. The body, like in the other, two previous novels, is treated by the biopolitical rule as a vessel, or a receptacle for information and discourse. The breeding of the genetically calibrated and technologically augmented Ambassadors is the embodiment of power's hold on the body. They are expected to voice the concerns of the dominant discourse and maintain the establishment in a planet inhabited by human beings and the alien other by being the translating medium between the two. Both the human body and the whole living space of the Arieke, including their literally alive, "biorigged" technologies as well as their own bodies are the object of the human politics. In the beginning, the human commoners such as Avice, and the extraterrestrial Arieke are excluded from the language of power they do not even understand.

The Arieke body in the human language is represented as animal-like and enigmatic with its four legs that are "a little like a spider's, long, two-jointed, dark-haired," and the child Avice finds it hard to register the Arieke body as a rational

subject. If Arieke has an animal, then how it can move around with its own pet animal or how can it try to “shake hands” with humans as a gesture of respect to the latter’s culture? Avice does not understand the mysterious sound that is the Arieke Language. Although it is hard to locate their organs of sight, Avice feels that the alien being before her returns her gaze and sees her. This is where her thinking about the boundaries between her self and the alien other begins. She suffers during the strange ordeal in which she has to perform her part as a suffering being and becomes a figure of speech, an object within the language of those she views as animalistic aliens. She realizes that as much as the other is an object as a bare living presence in her own human language, she is also an object in their language as a literal simile, a bare life that the Arieke needs to use to denote passivity, suffering and the other that they need to become different from, so that they can resist being exploited by the human rule.

After discovering the existence of the Ambassador “infirmity” that is hidden in the embassy building, Avice experiences a second important realization. Even the Ambassadors who are specifically bred as cyborg beings who can communicate with the Arieke, are not exempt from being regarded as mere vessels. Those who “fail” to be fully functioning are disposed and imprisoned in a small space, so that their “dangerous” knowledge of Language cannot be a threat to the status quo. Following this incident, Avice feels resolved to help the resistance group among the Arieke by trying to make them utter lies. By learning to tell lies, they learn to possess the truth of their experience as bare life excluded from politics in the planet, a politics that secretly enslaves their biological and social environment. By learning to speak of their own experience, the Arieke become “immune” to the human lies to which they are addicted. The Spanish Dancer learns to use the simile of Avice in a contradictory

way after witnessing how she goes against her own species to help the Arieke, Both Avice and the Arieke realize that there is no direct experience of reality without the medium of representation in language, and there is no soul behind words, but other words.

The logocentrism of Language becomes deconstructed by the Nietzschean understanding of truths/lies as the representations derived from corporeal existence. Their bodies are not distinct from their souls as their languages are not merely the expression of a psychic interior but a means of mutually recognizing their shared experience of being bare life, which itself is nothing but the basis of their political existence. The transformation of the Arieke is described as a semiotic revolution, in which the self-mutilated bodies of the Absurd start signifying by pointing at things. They attain a sense of politics by saying “this” and not “that.” Their bodily changes and the experience of their pain result in linguistic change. The experience of bare life finds a way of expressing itself even when they cannot speak or hear themselves speaking. The body and mind are thus shown to be a Möbius strip, in a constant process of informing and transforming each other as an entwined entity. When the Arieke become liars, they can finally become Avice “the girl who ate what was given her,” in a metaphorical sense and start joining forces with anyone or anything alive, those who resist their shared status of being reduced to objects within biopolitics.

Representing the experience of bare life as being simultaneously included as the object of biopolitics, yet excluded as the meaningless voice, non-language and the non-political from any active participation in politics, all three novels attempt to politicize the body and language in intersecting ways. In *Native Tongue*, *Snow Crash* and *Embassytown*, representation in language is itself the source of any reality to be experienced. Language is constitutive of reality and it structures the ways in which

one perceives his, her or its experience as oppressed and hurt by a power that is solely concerned with encapsulating the individual into manageable, clearly marked and segregated spaces that are divided along sexual, ethnic, economic and biological borders. The body, in these novels, is viewed a receptacle that is expected to speak and carry the language of anthropocentric, racist, consumerist and speciesist languages of sovereign power at work. It is the bodies of women in *Native Tongue*, who attempt to change their language to change the truth of their oppression. The bodies of the hacker and the courier in *Snow Crash* are expected to move along the networks of consumerist capitalism while carrying the necessary data to keep the system going. The human and the alien bare lives in *Embassytown* are, yet again, expected to play the role of translators and objects of a language that does not speak of their experience. The human communities in each novel intensify all their energies to become immunized, or indifferent to the experience of the other, cancelling out possibilities for any meaningful coexistence and solidarity with a shared sense of life.

The awareness of the constitutive character of language as the site of truth making, and the attempt for a representation and recognition of the oppressed status of the self and other as bare life, become the two focal points of resistance in these novels. The characters resist being encapsulated within the language of status quo after realizing that their marginalized status is linked with how power comes into existence, by including them as receptacles of information within the dominant discourses, yet simultaneously excluding them as active agents who can facilitate movements on the way of transforming the very systems that enslave them. The boundaries separating voice from language and life from politics are perpetuated both in the discourse and practice of biopolitics. These texts show that both the body

and language are not given entities, but they are in a constantly differing process of becoming. In the described future societies, the body can be engineered, manipulated and fused with machines. It can materialize in digital and “natural” environments at once, while “writing” new ways of speaking of its experience. The constructedness of the posthuman existence brings to the fore the ambiguities of biopolitics.

If biopolitics is bound to be affirmative of life, being modernity’s progressive application of state power that aims to improve life processes and to protect the health of a population seen as a collective body of a living species, then how come precarity has been steadily increasing in the so-called democratic West as well as in much of the rest of the world since the 1980s? The destruction of the ecological environment, economic inequalities and violence against sexual or ethnic minorities have persisted without giving much of a utopian hope for those abandoned into precarious lives. So much so that “the situation became increasingly dystopian as the celebration of Utopia became a mark of triumph for Anti-Utopia” (Moylan, 2000, p. 184). Dystopian novels in its science fictional varieties became more critical during the 1980s and 1990s, and various noteworthy examples were “less driven by extremes of celebration or despair, more open to complexities and ambiguities, and more encouraging of new riffs of personal and political maneuvers” (Moylan, 2000, p. 182).

Graham J. Murphy gives a number of examples to such SF dystopias, including Pat Cadigan’s *Mindplayers* (1987), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Gold Coast* (1988), Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It* (1991), Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Telling* (2000) (Murphy, 2009, p. 475) These novels share similar concerns with the three novels that are analyzed in this thesis. While Piercy’s and Robinson’s novels engage with the effects of

biotechnology and cybernetics within the society of control, Le Guin's and Butler's novels make critique of the state induced marginalization of various others in such communities ruled by corporatist governments. Although these last two novels emphasize the significance for a call to a pluralistic ethics of inclusiveness based on affinities, they do not specifically point towards an engagement with language as a means of shaping a concerted action to perform the right to have rights.

Could this be an indicator of a trend pointing towards a less critical, less political stance in science fiction novels in general, and in futuristic dystopias in particular? Some critics argue that as religion has made a comeback as a major ideological force within politics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and global terror as well as environmental threats has accelerated, science fiction as a genre that espouses "rationalism and secularism seems more and more out of step with the world. Increasingly, overtly sf works have incorporated gods, angels, or the supernatural" (Kincaid, 2009, p. 174). However, becoming a literature of the irrational and deconstructing rationality as part of the dominant political discourse are two different things. It can be said that the novels analyzed in this thesis belong to the second category as they all make a critique of the liberal humanist ideology of the Occident in different yet intersecting ways. Language in these novels is seen as being on a par with magic in the sense that it brings things into existence for the body to perceive, yet the described societies do not have any other magical aspect other than being dominated by a power that dominates by dominating language.

The developments in the high technologies of the late twentieth century, such as the Internet, bioengineering and artificial intelligence have been discussed in terms of their effects on precarity, medical ethics and mass movements. It is apt to state that science fiction, futurism and political thinking based on extrapolation have

become more entrenched in culture production since the arrival of the new millennium. Perhaps in our current era, science fiction as a generic name does not connote the meanings it did in the last century. Margaret Atwood famously rejected the label of science fiction although she widely uses the tropes of science fiction. Her *Oryx and Crake* (2003) depicts a future devastated by extreme forms of consumerism, pharmaceutical industries, and an overly immunized life within a biopolitics gone unleashed. Another non-genre writer, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) questions the meaning of survival in a similarly dreadful, post-apocalyptic world. As the generic boundaries become blurred, science fiction increasingly dominates fashion, product development, plastic arts, video game industry, film production and the way we relate to technology. Asking the question "is it fact or science fiction?" when one encounters a new experience has become a common reaction in the technologically saturated societies. Due to this unprecedented presence of technology in daily life, the limits of human experience have extended while the question of what essentially counts as human becomes ever more unstable.

Science fiction novel as the representation of posthumanity in the new millennium has popularized and debated this issue as it depicts now plausible realities in which "identity and often environment are uploaded into advanced computer systems" (Kincaid 2009, p. 176). Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003) imagines a near future world in which immortality has been achieved by the endlessly repeatable process of uploading one's mind into one's clone, and there is no longer precarity in the form of unemployment, scarcity of food and war. Ted Chiang's novella, *The Story of Your Life* (2002) treats linguistic relativity from the perspective of cognitive science and posthumanism while questioning the human limits of perception and their alterability through the

incorporation of an alien language as evolved to perceive a different universe, a theme that the novella shares with the three novels analyzed in this thesis. Similarly, Peter Watts's *Blindsight* (2006) depicts cyborg characters who can no longer be sure whether or not their thoughts are determined more by their in-built computer software or by their organic brains. The question of posthumanity seems to be a major source of speculation, in its more critically dystopian forms as well as in the more transhumanist, utopian novels in which precarity is somewhat eliminated. As technology brings out hitherto unimagined possibilities for the human mind and body to experience and by which they are transformed, science fiction as a forward-looking genre will question the meanings of the new ontology of the posthuman life. On the other hand, it is not fair to confine the whole genre to a particular set of concerns by claiming the posthuman will dominate science fiction in the twenty-first century, because, as Adam Roberts also contends: "Contemporary SF is a fantastically variegated and multifarious mode: any normative statement of the type 'SF is such-and-such' will be demolished by the myriad counter-examples that can be produced by anybody even slightly acquainted with the genre" (Roberts, 2006, p. 341). It can be said that the protean character of science fiction will continue to be defined by the new challenges and opportunities introduced by the accelerating pace of scientific and technological developments.

What this means for the role of language and the body in terms of the political strategies implied and suggested by fiction to cope with our increasingly precarious historical moment remains to be seen. With the third decade of the century in sight, what a considerable number of scientists and science fiction writers call "The Singularity" may be the quintessential myth of contemporary technoculture" (Csicsery-Ronay 2011, p. 260). It is a myth of an ambiguous future

constructed and imagined out of the signs of our technological world today. The term was introduced by the writer of science fiction and mathematician Vernor Vinge in the early 1990s. A major critic in science fiction studies, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, summarizes the concept:

In Vinge's view, the accelerating development of new technologies, especially high-speed computing, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology, will lead to their convergence, and a sudden, novumlike saltation into a new superintelligent entity. Local Artificial Intelligence engines will construct programs of such complexity that they will catapult into self-awareness, and through nano-assembly engines will be able to synthesize the hardware needed for their own welfare, expansion, and interfusion. The character of such a conscious macroentity, which might incorporate all digital machines in the world, will be, almost by definition, a mystery. It will communicate within itself in its own language, and will act in its own interests, with a speed and volume of operations unimaginable by human minds. (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 260)

If the operations of this conscious macroentity are expected to be unimaginable by human minds, and if it is going to communicate in its own language unintelligible to us human beings, the concept marks the limits of our known experience as embodied beings at the moment. Perhaps, even speculating on the concept as of now is an impossible endeavor because we do not have a language to describe the political consequences of an entity of super intelligence in a non-anthropocentric, post-biopolitical world in which our logocentric dualisms such as speech/writing, man/woman or embodied/disembodied have given way to a whole new existence with a transcendental signified at its center, structuring all meaning but whose meaning we will never comprehend: "By definition, the Singularity transforms whatever human-created elements it inherits in its hardware and software, so that it will no longer be recognizable to us" (Csicsery-Ronay 2011, p. 260).

It is ironic that science fiction as a genre came to being as the expression of an era marked by the social and political transformations caused by the massive secular developments in science and technology, and yet science fiction defines

today its new horizon of imagination and speculation with a transcendent myth of technology as if it is talking about God as the Singularity of existence, hence the singular source of meaning. Science fiction pervades our life as much as science and fiction do so, and it has become such a commonplace mode of writing and viewing the world because we have internalized change itself as the ultimate constant in our political existence. As Sherryl Vint says: "Far from this marking the end of sf, it begins a new chapter for this fluid genre" (Vint, 2014, p. 167). This thesis has been an attempt to explore the ways in which science fiction envisages fictional strategies for real life problems centered on our taken for granted political categories. It has been found out that the awareness of the constitutive function of language as the medium through which power asserts itself can be reversed as an act of resistance. Creating counter-truths and constructing new languages are a way of erasing the arbitrary categories into which human beings are forced, such as bare life and political life. The metaphysical foundation of biopolitics makes it possible to abandon certain groups of people into precarity, since the logocentrism on which it has been traditionally based always favors certain lives above others. It stands to reason that the role will language play in describing and resisting new forms of precarity brought by new technologies and the alarmingly momentous environmental degradation we face as a species will continue being explored, questioned, speculated on and given shape by the art of fiction.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. (D. H. Roazen, Trans.). Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Althusser, Louis. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (G. M. Goshgarian, Trans.). New York: Verso Publishing.
- Amis, K. (2012). *New maps of hell: A survey of science fiction*. New York: Harcourt Brace. (Original work published 1960)
- Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1958)
- Atwood, M. (1985). *The handmaid's tale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Atwood, M. (2003). *Oryx and crake*. New York: N. Talese.
- Baudrillard, J. (2006). *Simulacra and simulation* (S.F. Glaser, Trans.). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1981)
- Bould, M. (2011). Language and linguistics. In M. Bould et al. (Eds.) *The Routledge companion to science fiction* (pp. 225-236). New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Breu, C. (2014). *Insistence of the material: literature in the age of biopolitics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bruce, K. (2008). A woman-made language: Suzette Haden Elgin's Laadan and the Native Tongue Trilogy as Thought Experiment in Feminist Linguistics. *Extrapolation*, 49(1), 44-69. doi:DOI:10.3828/extr.2008.49.1.4
- Burgess, A. (1962). *A clockwork orange*. London: Heinemann.
- Butler, J. (2007). *Gender trouble: feminisim and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1990)
- Butler, J. (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics: Performativity/gender/precarity/subject. *Revista De Antropologia Iberoamericana.*, 4(3), i-xii. Retrieved from www.aiabr.org.
- Butler, J. (2015). *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

- Butler, O.E. (1993). *Parable of the sower*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Cadigan, P. (1987). *Mindplayers*. New York: Bantam Spectra.
- Cavalcanti, I. (2000). Utopias of/f language in contemporary feminist literary dystopias. *Utopian Studies*, 11(2), 152-180. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from www.jstor.org/stable/20718180.
- Chiang, Ted. (2002). *Story of your life and others*. New York: Tor Books.
- Cixous, H. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa (K. Cohen & P. Cohen, Trans.). *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1(4). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cixous, H. (2003). Sorties: Out and out: Attacks/ways out/forays. In S. Sellers (Ed.), *The Hélène Cixous reader*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1975)
- Csicsery-Ronay (J.R.), I. (2011). *The seven beauties of science fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Delaney, S.R. (2001). *Babel-17*. New York: Vintage Books (Original work published 1966).
- Delany, S.R. (2009) *The Jewel-hinged jaw: notes on the language of science fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. (Original work published 1977)
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). New York: The Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1976)
- Derrida, J. (2002). The animal that therefore I am (more to follow) (D. Wills, Trans.). *Critical Inquiry*, 28(2), 369-418. Retrieved May 7, 2017, from www.jstor.org/stable/1344276.
- Doctorow, C. (2003). *Down and out in the magic kingdom*. New York: Tor Books.
- Dorsey, C. (2000). Commentaries on Native Tongue. *International Review of Science Fiction*, 29(79), 35.
- Dougherty, S. (2001). The biopolitics of the killer virus novel. *Cultural critique*, (48), spring. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from www.jstor.org/stable/1354395.
- Elgin, S. H. (1987). Women's language and near future science fiction: a reply. *Women's studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 14(2), 175-182.
- Elgin, S. H. (2002). *Earthsong*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. (Original work published 1994)

- Elgin, S. H. (2000). *Native tongue*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. (Original work published 1984)
- Elgin, S. H. (2002). *The judas rose*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. (Original work published 1987)
- Elizabeth, G. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Esposito, R. (2008). *Bios: Biopolitics and philosophy* (T. Campbell, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Esposito, R. (2013a). The enigma of biopolitics. In T. Campbell & A. Sitze (Eds.), *Biopolitics: A reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Esposito, R. (2013b). *Terms of the political: Community, immunity, biopolitics* (R.N. Welch, Trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Ferrando, F. (2014). The body. In R. Ranisch & S.L. Sorgner (Eds.), *Post- and transhumanism: An introduction*. Pieterlen and Bern: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Foucault, M. (1997). The birth of biopolitics. In P. Rabinow (Ed.); R. Hurley (Trans.). *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: New York University Press.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the college de France: 1975-76* (M. Bestani & A. Fontana, Eds.; D. Macey, Trans.). London: Picador.
- Foucault, M. (2013). Right of death and power over life. In T. Campbell & A. Sitze (Eds.), *Biopolitics: A reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Halliwel, M., & Mousley, A. (2013). *Critical humanisms: Humanist/anti-humanist dialogues*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Haraway, D. (2004). A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. In *The Haraway reader*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1985)
- Hayles, K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Heller, K. J. (1996). Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault. *SubStance*, 25(79), 1st ser., 78-110. Retrieved September 14, 2018, from www.jstor.org/stable/3685230.
- Herbert, F. (1965). *Dune*. New York: Chilton Books.
- Huxley, A. (1998). *Brave New World*. New York: Perennial Classics (Original work published 1932)

- Iragaray, L. (1985). *This sex which is not one*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
(Original work published 1977)
- Johnson, M. L. (1999). Embodied reason. In G. Weiss & H. Fern (Eds.), *Perspectives on embodiment: The intersections of nature and culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Kincaid, P. (2011). Fiction since 1992. In M. Bould et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to science fiction* (pp. 174-183). New York: Routledge.
- Langer, J. (2013). Case studies in reading 2: Key theoretical and critical texts in science fiction studies. In N. Hubble & A. Mousoutzanis (Eds.), *The science fiction handbook* (pp. 100-125). London: Bloomsbury.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. (2000). *The telling*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. (2014). *The dispossessed*. New York: Harper Perennial.
(Original work published 1974).
- Mandala, S. (2010). *Language in science fiction and fantasy: The question of style*. London and New York: Continuum.
- McCharty, C. (2006). *The road*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- McWhorter, J. H. (2014). *The language hoax: Why the world looks the same in any language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Menzies, R. (2012). Creating a 'Truer' Language Within a Work of Fiction: The Example of Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue. *E-rea: Revue Électronique D'Études Sur Le Monde Anglophone*, 9(2). doi:DOI : 10.4000/erea.2410
- Meyers, W.E. (1980). *Aliens and linguists: Language study and science fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Miéville, C. (2011). *Embassytown*. New York: Del Rey Books.
- Moylan, T. (2000). *Scraps of the untainted sky*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Negri, A., & Hardt, M. (2013). Biopolitics as event. In T. Campbell & A. Sitze (Eds.), *Biopolitics: A reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Negri, A., & Hardt, M. (2000). *The empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2010). On truth and lies in a nonmoral sense. In *On truth and untruth: Selected writings*. New York: Harper. (Original work published 1873)
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Orwell, G. (1960). *Nineteen eighty-four*. New York: New American Library. (Original work published 1949)
- Pasnau, R. (1997). Aquinas on thought's linguistic nature. *The Monist*, 80(4), Analytical thomism, 558-575. Retrieved February 4, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27903550>.
- Piercy, M. (1991). *He, she, and it*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Roberts, A. (2006). *The history of science fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robinson, K.S. (1995). *The Gold Coast*. Tom Doherty Associates. (Original work published 1988).
- Roden, D. (2015). *Posthuman life: Philosophy at the edge of the human*. New York: Routledge.
- Shukis, S.A. (2006). Tongue-tied in America's metaverse: the nation as meta-language and the myth of consensus in Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash. In J.P. Lewis (Ed.), *Tomorrow through the past Neal Stephenson and the project of global modernization*. London: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Stephenson, N. (2008). *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam Dell. (Original work published 1992).
- Swanstrom, L. (2010). Capsules and nodes and ruptures and flows: circulating subjectivity in Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash. *Science fiction studies*, 37(1), 54-80. Retrieved December 12, 2018, from www.jstor.org/stable/40649585.
- Vint, S. (2007). *Bodies of tomorrow: Technology, subjectivity, science fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Vint, S. (2014). *Science fiction: a guide for the perplexed*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Watson, I. (1973). *The embedding*. New York: Scribner.
- Watts, P. (2006). *Blindsight*. New York: Tor Books.
- Weakland, J. P. (2015). "Forked Tongues": Languages of Estrangement in China Miéville's Embassytown. *Science fiction studies*, 42(1), 78-98. Retrieved February 11, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5621/sciefictstud.42.1.0078>.
- Weiss, G., & Haber, H. F. (1999). *Introduction to perspectives on embodiment: the intersections of nature and culture* (G. Weiss & H. F. Haber, Eds.). New York: Routledge.

Whorf, B.L. (1956). *Language, thought and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. (J.B. Carroll, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of MIT. (Original work published 1940)

Wittgenstein, L. (1922). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Zamyatin, Y. (1993). *We*. (C. Brown, Trans.). London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1924)