

Suffering Cyborgs: Inhuman Pain, Human Subjects

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SUMMARY

Popular culture in the U.S. has long constructed disability as a condition that results in inevitable suffering. The presumed link between disability and pain forms the basis of very concrete instances of disability oppression, but pain still remains a highly contentious and rarely discussed topic within disability studies. *Suffering Cyborgs: Inhuman Pain, Human Subjects* aims to address this gap through a critical theory examination of two seemingly contradictory cultural discourses of pain: popular culture narratives that construct pain as an inhuman experience and representations of cyborgs in films and television that deploy pain as a narrative device to humanize the inhuman.

The thesis examines *Time* magazine cover articles written over the last ten years as case-study examples of the more pervasive discourse of pain as a dehumanizing experience. It then looks at this construction against the television show *Caprica*, which uses pain as a marker of humanness in the less-than-human figure of the cyborg to argue that in both examples, pain becomes a litmus test for what it means to be human. This discourse contributes to the ease with which disabled lives are judged to be less worthy of living. To conclude, the inquiry turns to the television show *Battlestar Galactica* to deconstruct an example where pain fails to accomplish its narrative function of explaining a character's (less than human) actions. The author contends that the fissures within this narrative suggest the insufficiency of pain as a marker of humanness and signal an opportunity for a crip intervention in the cultural discourses of pain and disability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the best way to describe my pain would be to liken it to a suitcase that's stuffed too full. It's literally bursting at the seams. You sit on it to try to hold it down to keep it all in. If you manage to push far enough in a few places to zip it up then the other edges just pop open. I guess that would make today the kind of day that I could just sit on the suitcase and not worry about trying to close it. A good day. (Personal journal)

I took the above quote from one of the many pain journals that I have started over the years. When I wrote it, I had already been thinking about the difficulties in describing pain for some time and had become adept at playing with different metaphors to help make concrete what is anything but. I might even say that what follows falls into the same experiment: trying to represent, understand and speak about pain. Early on in this experiment, I learned that the task was far more complicated than just crafting an “accurate” representation of my bodily experience. The more I read about pain, the more I come to understand that, despite cultural and theoretical myths about its unrepresentability, representations of pain permeate our cultural sphere. Charity campaigns use pain to engender pity and raise money. The courts try to quantify the suffering of crime victims into a number (of years) that they then use to administer justice.¹ Most strikingly, pain emerges as an experience that disqualifies the “sufferer” from a human existence. As Jenny Morris (1991) illustrates, the presence of pain makes a person's life seem unlivable to those outside of the experience.² As such, pain's presence becomes justification for invalidating human life. Not surprisingly, these constructions do not reflect my experience of living with pain. While there are times that I feel overwhelmed with pain, times that I would characterize it as unbearable, times where I might even hyperbolize it to say that it makes me feel

¹ For a more in-depth critical discussion of how the legal system uses pain see, Berlant (2001).

² See Morris, ““Lives not Worth Living”” in *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability*.

inhuman, chronic pain still informs my life and influences my experiences in ways that are not without value, and I certainly would not judge the entire “value” of my life based on its presence.

Informed by my position as a disability studies student trained in gender and women’s studies and literary analysis, this project seeks to illuminate the ways that dominant culture *constructs* pain. Following the work of David Morris’ *The Culture of Pain* (1991) and Gillia Bendelow and Simon Williams’ (1998) “Pain and the ‘dys-appearing body,’” I challenge understandings of pain as fixed, universal and strictly medical. I look to cultural artifacts such as film, television and magazine articles to excavate a cultural understanding of pain. I offer case-study examples to highlight the constructed nature of culture’s elision of pain with unlivable lives. Pain works within the cultural sphere to invalidate the lives of disabled people (who are always already constructed as sufferers). The figure of the disabled sufferer relies on pain to signify a less-than-human (or inhuman) existence, and this signification works for the case of both bodily (physical) pain and emotional (psychological) pain.³

In setting out on this project, I anecdotally observed a distinct difference between what I saw as broader cultural discourses that represent pain as a dehumanizing experience and representations of cyborgs in film and television that depict pain as a humanizing feature. In order to challenge the discourse of pain as less-than-human or inhuman, I turn to these cyborg narratives that use pain to signify the *humanity* of the inhuman machine/human hybrid. I look at the dominant discourse of pain as inhuman (signifying inhumanness) against cyborg narratives that humanize the inhuman figure through pain in order to offer a reading of discourses of pain

³ Both cultural and philosophical understandings of pain largely make a distinction between physical and emotional pain. I re-present this view here, but only do so in so far as I speak about the cultural construction of pain. Ultimately, I intend to challenge the rigid distinction between the two.

as culturally situated and mediated. The culturally mediated nature of these representations emerges through this contrast.

I understand discourses of pain, by definition, to mean the culturally, economically and politically produced, circulated and mediated meaning surrounding pain. I adopt Foucault's broad understanding of discourse as more than just "language" in the proper sense. Rather, I consider the cultural, political and economic context surrounding the discursive formations of pain, which includes the language that people use to describe pain, the images that represent pain and the symbolic meaning associated with those representations.⁴ The contrasting constructions of pain between cyborg narratives and popular discourse allow us to ask: What makes pain an experience that de-humanizes disabled people in dominant cultural ideology while allowing pain to confer human status on the inhuman cyborg?

Disability studies scholars need to talk about and theorize pain in a way that recuperates it as part of the human experience and challenges the elision of pain with a less-than-human existence. Cyborg narratives reconfigure pain as proof of humanity, not its disqualification. More than that, cyborg narratives challenge the very construction of what it means to be human. As not fully human figures, cyborgs can only ever approach humanness. They exist on the margins of the human. Claims, like those made by Sobchack (2004), that argue that pain signifies humanness (instead of inhumanness) seek to recuperate pain as part of a human experience. This rhetorical argument merely confers human status on those experiencing pain in a way that leaves the category of the human unchallenged. Moreover, if we effectively shift dominant conceptions of pain to its opposite, disabled people merely become the paragon of humanity by virtue of their

⁴ See Foucault's (1970) *The Order of the Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*.

suffering, leaving the conception of disabled people as sufferers intact. Rather, we need to re-engage with pain in a way that also challenges the link between pain and humanness.

Representations of the suffering cyborg present pain as a marker of (partial) humanness *and* challenge the category of the human in such a way that presents a nuanced and complex depiction of pain worthy of critical inquiry. I argue that excavating how dominant culture uses pain to dehumanize disabled people and how cyborg narratives use pain to convey (and challenge) humanness promises to both illustrate the cultural construction of pain and reveal a potential way forward for disability studies scholars attempting to re-engage with pain. This re-engagement opens up a space where disabled people can share their experiences of pain. Like the coalitions that disabled people build around shared experiences of impairment and oppression, disabled people in pain can benefit from a greater acceptance of expression of pain. Moreover, challenging the definition of humanness to include experiences of pain works against (at least on one front) the cultural dehumanization of disabled people.

1.1 **Disability, Pain and the Judgment of Life**

Disability studies understands disability as the social, economic, political and cultural oppression of people with impairments. The social model separates disability from impairment and argues that social barriers (e.g. curbs, segregated housing and oppressive stereotypes) disable people rather than impairments (physical and functional limitations). The social model focuses on the disabling aspects of society in an effort to facilitate social change. Scholars like Jenny Morris (1991), Liz Crow (1996), Susan Wendell (1996) and Alexa Schrimpf (2001) – to name only a few – argue that the social model’s exclusive focus on those barriers fails to acknowledge the importance of the body in the disability experience. Crow specifically identifies the limits of the social model by calling attention to its denial of pain (Crow 209).

Michael Oliver (1996), proponent of the social model of disability and a key figure in its development, argues that not addressing pain “has been a pragmatic attempt to identify and address issues that can be changed through collective action rather than medical or other professional treatment” (38). Oliver not only sees pain’s omission as necessary to the political aim of the social model, but he also implies that the experience of pain cannot be changed through collective action. He suggests pain falls squarely within the medical realm and, moreover, implies that it is an individual and personal experience. My thesis counters Oliver’s position by highlighting the ways that culture produces particular understandings of pain. Social assumptions about pain (that it is a fate worse than death, that it invalidates the lives of people with disabilities, etc.) and what it means to live with a body in pain form a significant basis of disability oppression that can be ameliorated, in part, through collective action to change those assumptions. Speaking, writing and theorizing about pain from a disability studies perspective can and should challenge these assumptions. More than that, addressing the social assumptions of pain can influence the very corporeal way that disabled people experience their bodies in pain. Making pain easier to share can make pain much easier to manage, effectively changing the embodied experience of pain.⁵ The social/medical model binary has had the unfortunate effect of constructing pain as an emblematic example of impairment that the social model does not account for.

When it comes to the language that disabled people choose and the identities that we seek to form in opposition to the negative stereotypes that dominant culture has read onto us, disability studies scholars, activists and even artists (with a few notable exceptions) have strategically chosen to subordinate the experiences of pain behind other narratives, ones of

⁵ I will speak more about this below in relation to Sarah Ahmed’s (2004) discussion of witnessing.

empowerment, pride, depth and complexity of character. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell (2001) specifically argue, “disability studies has strategically neglected the question of the experience of disabled embodiment in order to disassociate disability from its mooring in medical cultures and institutions” (368). This position inadvertently contributes to an understanding of pain as something singular, fixed and objectively knowable.

Medical understandings of pain, by and large, treat it as either something that can be quantified through objectively administered measurements like pain scales and x-rays or as something entirely subjective and individual (which requires physicians to turn their diagnostic eye toward the credibility of the person reporting pain to measure the “truth” of his/her pain reporting).⁶ Qualitative research investigating people’s experience in pain treatment identify establishing credibility as a pain sufferer to be one of the biggest barriers to treatment and largest sources of anxiety for people in pain (Gustafsson et al. 2004; Holloway et al. 2007; Jackson 2005; Kenny 2004; Werner and Malterud 2003). By not engaging with pain, disability studies has essentially allowed this discourse to go unchallenged. Simon Williams (1999) similarly argues that not acknowledging, theorizing and/or representing impairment relinquishes it to the biomedical realm (803). Biomedicine, invested in broader notions of curing disability and healing suffering, solidifies a notion of pain as something knowable and curable.

Similarly, Shelly Tremain (2005) critiques disability studies for, in its attempt to focus on the social causes of disability, adopting a rigid (biomedical) understanding of impairment. She suggests that because, “much of the past work in disability studies has assumed a realist ontology, impairment has for the most part circulated in disability discourse as some objective, transhistorical and transcultural entity which biomedicine accurately represents” (Tremain 9).

⁶ For more on the difficulties of diagnosing pain see Dretske (2005).

Tremain investigates how cultural and historical influences shape our understanding of biomedicine and the body to challenge this view.⁷ In the same vein, my thesis uncovers the culturally situated understandings of pain and details the ways that cultural texts deploy such understandings to place judgment on the lives of people with disabilities. If we continue to see pain as the emblematic example of impairment, disability studies will not be able to move beyond the hesitancy to speak about pain. Only by re-engaging with pain as socially mediated will we be able to counter associations between pain, disability and the desire to die.

While narratives and expressions of pain are deeply imbedded in disability culture, pain remains a contentious topic of representation for those within the disability community precisely because of how easily the media, cultural institutions and non-disabled people (among others) use it to denigrate disabled lives. Examples of narratives where pain emerges as an almost naturalized reason for seeking death abound. From Elizabeth Bouvia, who made headlines in the early 1980s by fighting for her right to die (see Longmore 2006), to Kevorkian's claims to be relieving the pain of his patients, to Hollywood films like *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), the message to disabled people is clear: Pain (in all of its manifestations) is a fate worse than death.⁸ *Million Dollar Baby*, which won four Oscars, asks audiences to see pain as a justifiable and understandable reason not only for Maggie to want to die but also for Frankie's righteous decision to help (kill) her. Hollywood narratives like this and sensationalized stories in the media

⁷ Tremain, editor of *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, argues for the value of Foucault's work on governmentality and biopower to disability studies. I will expand on how I use Foucault's work (and those working with Foucault) more fully below.

⁸ For a detailed account of Kevorkian's presence in the media see Haller (2010). While Haller does not directly analyze the role that pain plays in this discourse, her chronicle of assisted suicide in U.S. media reveals the prevalent role pain played in Kevorkian's own description of his action as well as the public discourse surrounding the assisted suicide debate.

of disabled people seeking death to end their pain construct a prevailing and powerful image of disabled people as sufferers who would be better off dead.

Tobin Siebers (2010) maintains that society almost universally understands pain as a negative bodily experience. He points out that people generally assume that the disabled body suffers, whether or not the person actually experiences pain. Siebers states: “pain represents for most people a source of terror and an affront to human dignity. Nothing seems more horrifying to human beings than to imagine a lifetime of future suffering” (“In the Name of Pain” 183). An article appearing in *The Houston Chronicle* in 1996 (SoRelle) reports that the fear of pain is one of the top two reasons people support assisted suicide. I cite this not to provide ahistorical evidence for Siebers’ claim so much as to provide an example of the power such fear has (which I will discuss in more detail later). Siebers identifies the ways that such fear mobilizes oppressive attitudes toward people with disabilities. These attitudes (and the images that feed them) have proven exceedingly difficult to combat or even complicate and have often caused disabled people to be reticent to talk about their pain. As such, Siebers (2008) argues, “the greatest stake in disability studies at the present moment is to find ways to represent pain” (*Disability Theory* 61).

Yet this reengagement with pain is not as simple as speaking about pain after a long silence. Elaine Scarry (1985) offers perhaps the most well cited thoughts on pain when she argues that pain defies language and resists representation. She maintains that pain is such a singular physical and emotional experience that it reduces all humans to a pre-linguistic state, and she concludes that pain literally escapes sharing. Similarly, Jean Jackson (2000) argues that pain’s often invisible nature makes it exceedingly difficult, if not virtually impossible, to represent. While Scarry’s work provides an indispensable starting point for theorizing pain, we

need to acknowledge the ways that dominant discourses do share pain. More importantly, we need to examine who does the sharing, how they do it, what understanding of pain they advance and what effects these representations and narratives of pain might have on people with disabilities who experience pain on a daily basis.

To facilitate this project, I take up the position offered by Sara Ahmed (2004), who focuses her inquiry on the conditions that make sharing and acknowledging others' pain possible (34). Dominant culture, medical institutions and discourses of everyday life continue to represent pain in a multitude of ways, many of which have serious (even if indirect) consequences on the lives of people with disabilities. By tracing the circumstances that make acknowledging pain possible in these realms, we can begin to see a politics of pain emerge. I use this politics as a launching point for my inquiry and as evidence of the importance of uncovering the cultural construction of pain. In other words, a carefully constructed and maintained political atmosphere fosters certain narratives of pain and suppresses others. Closely examining the narratives and representations of pain that emerge and predominate the cultural sphere, we can develop a better understanding of the politics of pain, which will ultimately help disabled people carve out a space where our narratives and experiences of pain can not only be shared but also acknowledged. This can ultimately give us an opportunity to reshape pain based on our own experiences and to redefine what it means to be human in such a way that includes experiences of pain.

1.2 **Cyborgs**

In an effort to disrupt the cultural narrative of pain as a de-humanizing experience, I look in a somewhat unlikely place: cyborg narratives in film and television. Claudia Springer (2005) points out, "Popular culture has appropriated the scientific project [of the hybridization between

human and machine]; but instead of effacing the human body, these texts intensify corporeality in their representation of cyborgs” (71). Through initially anecdotal observations, I began to see this intensified corporeality in cyborg films. Moreover, I began to notice the way that these representations use pain as a signifier of the humanity within the cyborg. Ironically, images of not-fully-human machines provide an example where pain confers (confirms) humanity on the cyborg. Cyborg narratives tend to depict the figure of the cyborg as always in transition. The narrative arch and/or character development of many cyborgs in film feature them either in transition toward or away from humanity. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), perhaps the emblematic example of the cyborg that approaches humanness, portrays the Terminator as moving from the inhuman machine we see both in the first *Terminator* (1984) film and the beginning of the *Terminator 2* to the machine that bonds with John Conner and ultimately sacrifices himself for the good of humanity. This narrative deploys pain as a mechanism to measure the terminator’s development toward humanity (which I will discuss more fully in Chapter One). Similarly, *Blade Runner* (1982) depicts Rachel as a replicant (the film’s version of a cyborg) who does not know she is a replicant. The film arguably depicts the pain she feels upon learning she is a replicant as evidence of her humanity – a humanity that is ultimately confirmed by Deckard’s (the film’s hero) romantic interest in her.

These narratives that construct pain as a signifier of humanness, seen in the *Terminator* corpus and television shows like *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) and *Caprica* (2010), counter the seeming incommensurability of pain and human existence seen in both theorizations about pain and in popular discourses of pain. I examine, through close readings, the way that *Battlestar Galactica* and *Caprica* use pain as a narrative signifier in order to garner a better understanding of how we might disrupt the dominant discourses of pain and potentially locate a way forward

for disability studies scholars, activists and artists who seek to reincorporate pain into the human experience. After all, it seems appropriate for disabled people and disability studies to look to cyborg representations for inspiration as disabled people are often thought of (though not unproblematically) as emblematic cyborgs.⁹

1.3 **Intersections, Methods and Theories**

Intersectional inquiries into cultural artifacts or texts employ a variety of lenses, use multiple methods and apply an amalgam of theories. Undoubtedly, my training in literary analysis forms the backbone of this project as I read films and television programs as deliberately crafted texts that reflect a particular cultural moment. As Terry Eagleton makes clear in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), even the field of literary analysis has multiple meanings and changes depending upon the cultural moment. Eagleton specifically points out, “Methodologically speaking, literary criticism is a non-subject” (197). Eagleton problematizes the notion that any single literary method exists. Moreover, he challenges the declination between Literature and other “texts.”¹⁰ In his estimation, the criticism used to examine literature works just as easily to examine other cultural artifacts and situations. Eagleton indicates, “It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to do, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us achieve these ends” (210). In that sense, I start with what I want to do: I want to examine the seemingly contradictory representations of pain in cyborg films, which use it as a mechanism to humanize, and the more dominant understanding of pain as a de-humanizing experience in order to denaturalize the pain as a strictly biological sensation.

⁹ See Haraway (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 151.

¹⁰ For more on this see Eagleton’s “Conclusion: Political Criticism” in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*.

I draw from film and media analysis because I examine film and media texts. My analysis will discuss camera angles and editing pace to establish the effect that they create on-screen and the messages that they help impart to the viewer. I will also offer close readings of character dialogue, but the theories that I build off of, as discussed above, more closely form what might be considered my methodology. For instance, the disability studies perspective I work from informs both my approach to representations of disability on screen as well as representations of non-disabled characters. I rely heavily on the work of disability studies scholars like Paul Longmore, Martin Norden and Robert McRuer to analyze the meanings that disabled bodies on screen carry. Disability studies' attention to the social construction of able-bodiedness and the values laden in representations of both disabled and non-disabled characters direct my view of cyborg films as well as my analysis of the discourses of pain. In short, disability studies theories do more than just problematize representations of disability. They offer a particular methodological lens through which to deconstruct cultural representations and cultural values in the same way that feminist theories and methods go beyond just deconstructing the feminine.

Eagleton, in discussing the value of feminist theory says, "feminism recognizes no such distinction between questions of the human subject and questions of political struggle. The discourse of the body is not a matter of Lawrentian ganglions and suave loins of darkness, but a politics of the body, a rediscovery of its sociality through an awareness of the forces which control and subordinate it" (215). He calls for recognizing that discourse, literature and culture form one of the major forces that control and subordinate the body, and he sees feminism as offering a theoretical vantage point that excavates and deconstructs these relationships. In that sense, feminist theory offers another cornerstone from which I build my methodological approach. My thesis will examine the construction of pain as a bodily sensation imbued with

cultural value judgments inextricably linked to broader political projects that define what it means to be human.

This project also draws heavily from cultural studies work. Zylinska (2006) defines cultural studies in the following way: “As During explains, ‘engaged cultural studies is academic work (teaching, research, dissemination, etc) on contemporary culture from non-elite or counter-hegemonic perspectives (‘from below’) with an openness to the culture’s reception and production in everyday life, or more generally, its impact on life trajectories’ (1999: 25)” (78). Similarly, my thesis counters the hegemonic view of pain as a naturalized, objectively “knowable” bodily sensation to expose how Western medical contexts shape cultural discourses of pain in ways that have political and ideological consequences for people with disabilities and/or people in pain. The cultural construction of pain as an inhuman experience quite literally affects disabled people’s life trajectories by disqualifying painful lives from the cultural category of the human. Furthermore, I view cyborg representations as cultural artifacts situated within an ideological structure. In discussing film analysis, Comolli and Narboni (1993) argue, “every film is political, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing)” (45). In other words, I work from the assumption that films and television reflect particular ideological assumptions and can be viewed in contrast to other, more dominant cultural discourses of pain.

Finally, as should be clear by now, I draw heavily from Foucault and those influenced by his work to define and analyze discourses of pain and to recognize those discourses as steeped in bio-power and bio-politics. Foucault (1990) says, “one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143). For Foucault, bio-power

designates, categorizes and disciplines dominant understandings of *human* life. Foucault describes the process by which life itself came under the management of the state and other institutional apparatuses (hospitals, schools, work, etc.). Bio-power shapes our understandings of pain, and I propose that bio-power shapes our understanding of human life through shaping our understanding of pain. Our understanding of pain is wrapped up in our understanding of the human, and our understanding of the human is wrapped up in our understanding of pain. This interconnectedness, rather than being something intrinsic or inherent about pain or humanness, is produced by bio-power. Drawing attention to the ways in which pain constructs the human can work to destabilize this link and call into question the way that culture devalues human life based on the presence of pain.

We understand pain as a strictly medical problem that must be managed by medicine. Shelly Tremain (2005) argues, “the most effective exercise of power, according to Foucault, consists in guiding the possibilities of conduct and putting in order the possible outcomes” (8). In other words, power shapes the possible ways that we understand pain and respond to it. Foucault contends that power does not work in a strictly repressive, top down manner. Rather, he sees power as something that is exercised more diffusely. Foucault acknowledges the role of the State as a site of concentrated power, but he emphasizes that power moves in much more diffused ways, not the least of which is in the form of self-regulation. If we understand pain to be a deeply individual problem to be handled within the realm of medicine then we self-regulate to keep silent about pain within other realms. If we are to understand the conditions that make recognizing pain as a human and/or livable experience possible, we need to pay attention to the institutions and/or apparatuses that shape those possibilities, and those instances of power currently working against such possibilities.

Mairian Corker and Sally French (2002) argue that discourse produces knowledge of pertinent value to disability studies and our attempts to better understand the relationship between disability and impairment. They offer, “Thus the ‘disabled body’ is a site of discursive production and consumption” (2). Corker and French see the “disabled body” as both a material site about which discourse produces knowledge and as an active agent that produces and consumes discourses. They argue for a reflexive analysis of disability discourse, wanting to see attention paid to both the way that dominant discourses produce meanings about disability (the meaning of pain as an inhuman experience) and the way that discourses coming from the disability community privilege meanings of the disability experience that focus on social barriers. My thesis builds off of Corker and French’s work in that I examine both the discourses of pain that circulate within dominant culture and the discourses of pain located within disability writings.

1.4 **Chapter Outline**

Chapter One, “*Time* and Inhuman(e) Pain” examines the way that *Time* magazine articles construct pain as an inhuman(e) experience. I first examine in greater detail disability studies scholarship on pain. I consider Licia Carlson’s (2010) assessment of the assumptions that people have about pain (and disability) and the potential affects/effects of these assumptions. I continue on to argue that representations of pain that construct it as an unlivable experience extend beyond just discussions of assisted suicide and selective abortion. I offer the *Time* articles as examples of how popular discussions of chronic pain (which make no reference to assisted suicide or selective abortion) similarly construct pain as something that renders the person experiencing it inhuman.

Chapter two, “Is There Another Way?: Representing Pain and the Inhuman” establishes cyborg narrative’s use of pain as a tool to humanize the half machine and half human figure. I first offer a brief example from the Terminator films. I follow the development of the Terminator’s character from the first *Terminator* film to *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* to argue that the series uses pain to signify to audiences that the Terminator has changed from the killing machine of *Terminator* to the friend and surrogate father figure of *Terminator 2*. The bulk of the chapter specifically examines “There is Another Sky” (2010) and “Ghosts in the Machine” (2010), episodes from the television show *Caprica*. I examine how “There is Another Sky” uses pain to mark a character’s transition from human to machine and how “Ghosts in the Machine” uses pain as a test to determine the humanness of a machine. Opposite of the *Terminator* films, *Caprica* uses pain to mark these characters’ shift away from humanness. Looking at how pain functions in both these narratives to signify humanness, I grapple with the question of how we, in disability studies, might borrow from a conceptualization of pain posited in science fiction that humanizes without alienating and that builds coalitions based on shared pain without sentimentalizing it.

The third chapter, “Pain Motivates: Disability, Deviance and a Military Coup in *Battlestar Galactica*,” examines *Battlestar Galactica*’s use of pain (specifically the pain of disability) to justify the actions of Felix Gaeta’s character. The pain that results from Gaeta’s disability serves to motivate him to start a military coup. I look at the construction of pain as motivation for what the show characterizes as a descent from “humanity.” This particular example proves fruitful because the narrative itself acknowledges the insufficiency of pain as a justification by adding an extra-textual supplemental (queer) narrative to the story that supplies further justification for Gaeta’s action. I read this supplemental story against the main narrative

to challenge the reading of pain as a justification for inhuman action and to ask: how does this need for further narration signal an insufficiency in pain as signifier. I examine the possibilities that the addition of the queer narrative offers, and I borrow from queer theory to imagine a potential way to excavate and build upon those possibilities.

Finally, in the conclusion I return to the problem of pain and representation to ask: what can disability studies learn from cyborg narrative's depiction of pain. I argue that while cyborg narratives open up a space to investigate the relationship between pain and the human, the space ultimately fails to fully deliver on the potential that it offers. I contend that the cyborg narratives actually mirror other, more dominant, popular culture representations of pain by depicting pain as a litmus test of humanness. However, I consider the queer critique from the previous chapter to ask whether we might still use the potential that these narratives offer to envision what, borrowing from Jose Munoz's (2009) work, might be called a pained utopia – or a world where experiences of pain can both be reincorporated into the realm of the human experience while simultaneously challenging our understandings of what it means to be human.

2. TIME AND (IN)HUMAN(E) PAIN

In the most extreme cases, pain emerges within popular culture as a reason for arguing for euthanasia or assisted suicide and selective abortion. Disability studies scholars have outlined the pervasive and devastating results of the link between pain, disability and assisted suicide. Jenny Morris (1991) provides an overview of the implications of assisted suicide and euthanasia for disabled people. Beth Haller's (2010) recent study of popular news media outlines the prominent role that Kevorkian played in the assisted suicide debates, highlighting the disproportionate number of Kevorkian's victims who were disabled. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2004) outlines a widespread cultural logic of euthanasia. She highlights the complex of disability oppression that branches out from the assumption that painful lives should not be lived (791).

Garland-Thomson writes, "The cultural logic of euthanasia – manifest from Kevorkian's vigilante euthanasia to routine selective abortion of disabled fetuses – is a modern ideology that aims to pragmatically eliminate the unfit, decisively preempt supposed suffering, and progressively perfect humankind" (782). She connects the cultural logic of euthanasia to broader assumptions that place judgment on the lives of disabled people based on the presence of suffering. Garland-Thomson contends that pain and suffering are central to this cultural logic (788). Similarly, Paul Longmore (2003) traces the history of deeming disabled lives not worth living. He argues that Elizabeth Bouvia's "experience epitomizes all the devaluation and discrimination inflicted on disabled people by society".¹¹ Longmore suggests that, like the eugenicists of Nazi Germany, those that support Bouvia's decision to commit suicide do so on the basis of assuming a disabled life is not worth living. We can see similar examples of this

¹¹Paul Longmore. "Elizabeth Bouvia, Assisted Suicide, and Social Prejudice," in *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple, 2003), 155-156.

devaluation in almost any highly publicized case of a disabled person seeking assisted suicide. And certainly there have been several such cases since Elizabeth Bouvia. These cases provide the most visible, and in many ways the most extreme, examples of disability discrimination because they are literally matters of life and death, but this kind of discrimination permeates society much more pervasively.

This chapter unpacks the link between disability, pain and dehumanization. It examines the assumptions that underlie judgments about the quality of disabled lives and deconstructs the problem that pain poses for theorists seeking to challenge these judgments. The chapter also presents an example of how *Time* magazine depicts chronic pain as an inhuman experience to argue that in order to speak about, write about and represent pain we must first challenge the exclusion of those living with pain from a recognizably human experience. I argue that, while work on discourses of assisted suicide and selective abortion still remains to be done, we need to begin to unpack the ways that the cultural logic of euthanasia emerges within less overt discourses, as these discourses are, in some ways, much more difficult to work against.

2.1 **A Matter of Degrees?**

Licia Carlson argues, “the primary reason that disabled lives are judged to be not worth living rests on the notion of suffering” (166). Carlson posits that society holds three main assumptions about pain and disability: that the *cause* of disabled people’s suffering always resides in their impairment, pain *inevitability* coexists with disability and that disabled people suffer to such a *degree* that their lives become unlivable. She suggests that exposing these assumptions can effectively work to counter them. In many ways, this process is already under way. The social model of disability – and the theoretical developments that follow it – reveals and works against the assumption that impairment *causes* suffering. By redirecting attention

from the impairment onto society, social modelists call attention to the environmental causes of suffering. In line with Carlson's second point, Tobin Siebers observes that all disabled people are assumed to suffer, whether or not they experience any pain ("In the Name of Pain"). Disability pride campaigns challenge this assumption by claiming the power, pride and pleasure that comes from having a disability. This assumption also leads disabled people and disability studies scholars to be so reticent to discuss their pain, as if not confirming the pain that society assumes all disabled people have effectively counters this assumption. Calls to reengage with pain, like those made by Liz Crow, Jenny Morris and Susan Wendell, seek to directly intervene in this association.

This brings us to Carlson's final point; all disabled people suffer so much that life becomes unlivable. Disability studies has yet to fully address this assumption. For one, quantifying degrees of pain leads us down a problematic road. It implies that there are degrees of pain so intense that people should want to kill themselves (which then seems to allow for the moral permissibility of killing people experiencing said amount of pain). But I want to lay aside debates about moral permissibility and the "rights" of assisted suicide. We too often get stuck at this politically and emotionally fraught point and fail to expose and challenge the underlying belief that all pain is totally and utterly unbearable.

As someone who lives with chronic pain, there have been moments when I have felt pain that, as Elaine Scarry suggests, unmakes my world (*The Body in Pain*). There have been moments when I would argue that this pain was unbearable. But there have also been times when the pain travels around with me more like an annoying horsefly: impossible to ignore, often biting and horribly bothersome, but certainly not intense enough to cause my life to be judged any less worth living. Popular conceptions of pain rarely acknowledge it as something that

coexists with other phenomenological experiences, which is what makes the assumptions that Carlson identifies so dangerous to disabled people and which is why I argue for a strategic focus on challenging assumptions about the degree of suffering. I submit that if we can challenge the almost monolithic understanding of pain as always unbearable, we can begin to challenge the ease with which disabled lives are judged less human.

Both proponents and (some) critics of assisted suicide construct this link between humanness and pain. As discussed, those that advocate for “mercy killing” claim that it is the only humane way to end suffering. The impulse to end suffering is so great that some advocate “mercy killings” to prevent the suffering not only of the person in pain but of family members as well (Gibbs et al. 1990, 2). Similarly, those advocating for selective abortion argue that it humanely prevents both family suffering and the future suffering of a child (Carlson 185-6). Even Leon Kass (2002), a bioethicist who challenges the logic and ethics of assisted suicide, maintains the connection between pain and humanness. He argues that sustaining life through pain and suffering affirms our (the assumed non-disabled and/or non-suffering society’s) *human* dignity. Kass bases his argument on the notion that societies maintain human dignity by treating suffering people who very well may be living “the mockery that various severe debilities make of a *human* life” (130) with dignity. Kass does not challenge the idea that disability or pain reduces someone to a less than human state. Rather, he sees this less than human status as an opportunity for society to reaffirm or affirm its humanity.

While the popular and bioethical debates about assisted suicide and selective abortion provide fruitful ground to investigate the link between pain and humanness, these two areas of discourse already benefit from the critical engagement of disability scholars. I submit that the cultural logic of euthanasia permeates our society so deeply that we need to begin to look beyond

these two arenas to uncover other instances where pain invalidates the lives of disabled people. Therefore, I turn to *Time* magazine's depiction of chronic pain to highlight the ways that the magazine presents a more diffuse, but equally devastating, cultural logic of euthanasia.

2.3 **Time: Covering Pain**

Over the last ten years, *Time* magazine has featured three cover stories about chronic pain, in October 2002, February 2005 and March 2011, all of which (through the combination of text and pictures) depict pain as a similarly inhuman or dehumanizing experience. The dual-page image that opens "The New Science of Headaches" (2002) shows a portrait of a woman who is literally flaking away (Gorman and Park). Her chin, mouth, nose and one eye appear on the lower half of the page, but her other eye, forehead and hair have flaked away and appear to drift up and off the page as if she were more paper-mache than flesh and blood. We see a similar dehumanized construction of pain in Wallis's (2005) "The Right (And Wrong) Way to Treat Pain." The article opens with a large outstretched hand with a screaming face drawn on the palm. Its fingers close inward on the face and lightening bolts radiate from the open and screaming mouth. The drawing resembles a classic comic sketch and appears both monstrous and uncanny. Perhaps most striking of all, the inner cover image of the March 2011 (Park) article depicts an alien-like silhouette of a woman composed of a bright light, which dissipated at the extremities as if from the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

The articles that follow these other-worldly images similarly highlight the life-shattering or, to be more specific, the human-life shattering effect of pain. Claudia Wallis, journalist for *Time*, calls chronic pain a thief that "breaks into your body and robs you blind" until you are left with nothing but a "world [that] has collapsed into a cramped cell of suffering" (46). Wallis's description confers actions onto pain while describing the person in pain as an inanimate "cell of

suffering.” She bestows humanlike (though remarkably “thief-like”) qualities onto pain, but dehumanizes the unspecified person experiencing pain. Alice Park (2011) simply calls the experience of chronic pain “persistent, unceasing torment” (65). Notably, neither Wallis nor Park attribute these descriptions of pain to any of the people they interview for their articles. Rather, Wallis’s metaphor comes from her own understanding and interpretation of the interviewee’s experience.¹² Moreover, Park’s (2011) text does not include a single interview with someone experiencing chronic pain. Rather, her information comes exclusively from experts (i.e. doctors, specialists and therapists). Gorman and Park’s (2002) text interestingly features additional “Portraits of Pain,” which depict three paintings by artists who experience migraines (80). The first painting looks like a sheet shaped like a ghost with large eyeholes cut out. The title of the piece is *My Personality Barely Hanging In* (80). The second, titled *Anguish*, features a man screaming painted on what looks like a three dimensional cube with three large strips of his face cut off (80), and the final piece portrays a woman whose face is literally melting off, apparently suffering, as the title *Suffering Without Sin* suggests, for no reason (80).

As Christine Gorman and Alice Park (2002) explicitly reassure us, this “bleak state of affairs is changing rapidly” (78). All the articles reassure readers, in one form or another, that modern medicine is closer than ever to understanding the “mystery” of chronic pain. Park’s 2011 text, “The Right (and Wrong) Way to Treat Pain,” perhaps the most “realistic” portrayal of the barriers to treatment, still promises that doctors are “finding new ways to treat pain” (64). Park acknowledges that doctors still do not understand how chronic pain works and a cure for chronic pain is unlikely. However, she ultimately reassures readers that people have so many available

¹² It is perhaps unfair and problematic for me to assume that the journalists writing about chronic pain do not also experience chronic pain. However, nothing in their articles indicate that they write/investigate from personal experience.

treatment options to choose from that they can inevitably find a substantial degree of relief. Wallis's text similarly offers a breakdown of medical and alternative therapies to assure readers that options abound. For example, Wallis highlights the story of Penny Rickhoff in a text box set off to the side of the main article. Rickhoff's story tells of her initial back injury and all the activities that she once did like tennis and amateur flying. Below this sidebar reads: "WHAT SHE DOES FOR IT: A cocktail of narcotics and, until it was pulled off the market last fall, Vioxx. Now she takes Mobic; practices Tai Chi and abdominal breathing, which seems to help" (Wallis 50). This narrative includes the "devastating" effects of chronic pain as exhibited by the loss of beloved activities and the cocktail of drugs, but it simultaneously reassures readers that help exists. In fact, Wallis's article reads like an obituary for Vioxx and Celebrex that laments the drugs' (temporary) demise due to FDA regulations, suggesting in part that overregulation of pharmaceutical companies was the real barrier to chronic pain relief.¹³

Furthermore, all of the articles feature disembodied sketches of the human body, brain and nervous system – made bare through advanced imaging or graphic medical illustrations – that help delineate pain down to a knowably simple set of nerve clusters and receptors. For instance, Gorman and Park's text features a woman whose skull appears translucent to reveal the brain and its major blood vessels. Her head faces downward; her eyes rest closed, and her hand reaches up to her temple. Floating above and to the side of the woman is a close up of her pain receptors and blood vessels, which reveal the inner workings of migraine headaches. The article then details the type of prescription medications offered to help decrease the swelling in the

¹³ The cover of this *Time* actually includes a subtitle that reads: "PLUS: What's behind the new FDA advice on VIOXX and Celebrex," suggesting that the debate about whether these drugs should have been taken off the market frames the entire cover article on chronic pain. The title "The Right (and Wrong) Way to Treat Pain" actually implies that removing Vioxx and Celebrex from the market was the wrong way to treat pain, but the requisite further reading to flush this correlation out falls outside the scope of this analysis.

blood vessels that are believed to cause migraine headaches. These illustrations, along with the accompanying technical description of how to cure the problem, work to present an image of chronic pain as both dehumanizing *and* completely manageable. It suggests that doctors, pharmacists and scientists have managing chronic pain down to a simple science.

Marla Carlson (2010) argues that the development of increasingly effective anesthesia beginning in the nineteenth century produced not only “the expectation that one can live free of pain, but that to do so is a right” (33). We see this most explicitly in the way that assisted suicide emerges as a matter of having the “right” to end “painful” lives. But the same general implications emerge in *Time*. The expectation and right to live pain free makes the thought of living with pain inconceivable. Torturous even. While the article does not speak about assisted suicide at all, it sends the same message: living with pain is inhumane. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson tells us that as pain moved from a normal part of the human condition to an exception, it became the target of reform efforts (“Cultural Logic” 790), and since then, Western culture has embarked on a quest to cure pain and eliminate human suffering.

This quest has fundamentally shifted our definitions and understandings of pain. Rather than being a natural part of living in a human body, pain comes to represent an animal-like state. A state that is less than human. The articles in *Time* offer only a snapshot of the complicated depiction of chronic pain in popular culture, but a representative one nonetheless. The 2011 cover article cites over 76 million Americans as affected by chronic pain, but as the images scattered throughout the text and the chronicle of available treatment options indicate, science holds the key to finding relief. The majority of the personal narratives the articles offer (when they offer any at all) end with how the “sufferer” found relief through one of the many available treatments.

By highlighting the availability of relief, *Time* reduces those still living with chronic pain to something of an aberration, the result of an individual failure to seek out and follow through on proper treatment – a narrative that disabled people of various impairments know too well. The Fox television series *House M.D.* (2004-2012), for example – despite its promising first season – depicts Dr. House as a maladapted, antisocial drug addict whose pain makes him an eccentric and brilliant doctor, but one who ultimately will not accept help from others.¹⁴ The other doctors and members of the team tolerate him only because of his superior intelligence and exceptional diagnostic skills. Ultimately, however, the show depicts House as complicit in his pain and invested in his own isolation. *Time* presents similar stories of tormented sufferers who only needed to find and follow through on the right treatment to get relief. Essentially, *Time* presents just another version of the overcoming narrative – slightly tempered by the acknowledgement that treatment is often hard to find.

Paul Longmore (2003) argues that the proliferation of narratives that depict how medical advances allow disabilities to be “overcome” (with the accompanying correct attitude of course) “are increasingly neutralizing physical impairments” (140). In other words, these narratives suggest that all disabilities can be overcome with the proper attitude. *Time* similarly suggests that overcoming chronic pain is only a matter of perseverance. This exceptional, apparitional depiction of chronic pain not only presents a fixed degree of unbearable pain, but it presents an image of unceasing pain that it links to a kind of failed humanness. Rather, failed humanness by

¹⁴ The show’s first season arguably depicts a more nuanced version of a man who experiences chronic pain and takes Vicodine not because he is an addict but because it allows him to manage his pain. The show eventually positions this argument (made by Dr. House and a love-struck Dr. Cameron who works for him) as nothing more than a clearly misguided excuse for addictive behavior.

the distinctly American standards of autonomy, fitness and above all else, personal responsibility.

Despite the degree of investment that the *Time* articles place in medical advances (many of which include narcotic drugs), society still carries deep suspicion of anyone using prescription medication. We are viewed as drug addicts who fabricate pain to feed our addictive behavior. The distrust of individuals using narcotic drugs for chronic pain has been crystallized at the institutional level with the recent rise in pain contracts that require anyone seeking treatment for chronic pain at a facility using these contracts to “voluntarily” sign in order to access care. The contracts state that doctors can compel drug, urine and breathalyzer tests of anyone seeking pain medication. Although the exact terms of the contract vary depending on the treatment center, some even require women to agree to take birth control pills to prevent potential “problems” with the fetus. Kevin O’Reilly (2010) indicates, “The American Academy of Pain Medicine, the American Pain Society and the Federation of State Medical Boards have recommended that physicians consider using opioid treatment agreements” (1). These agreements, as O’Reilly suggests, coerce patients into signing a document, as they cannot access care without signing. O’Reilly maintains that these contracts create distrust between patients and doctors (1).

These contracts do much more than that. They further situate people in chronic pain (as patients) within a system of bio-power that manages their bodies and their behaviors. The system then places suspicion around those who use narcotic medicine for pain relief. This suspicion feeds off of the American standards of rugged individualism that believe that individuals should be able to overcome anything through sheer willpower. Individuals in chronic pain are called into a system of bio-power that both regulates their bodies in newly disciplinary ways (through the pain contracts) and condemns them for needing the system in the first place. This

condemnation contributes to the apparitional nature of chronic pain. For instance, *Time* constructs an image of modern medicine that promises pain relief, positioning those who cannot find relief as failing. Yet, once within the system, medicine calls the credibility of individuals and the pain that they experience into question, constructing a paradoxical trap where people in pain are always already failing to be a proper human (by American standards).

Therefore, I want to amend Carlson's assessments. It is not simply that popular discourse offers little room for recognizing varying degrees of pain, but it is also that this fixed understanding of pain is inextricably linked to definitions of what it means to be human. In order to fight for the recognition of disabled lives as worthy lives, as human lives, the disability community has historically (had to) put forward an image of otherwise healthy, hardworking, "reasonable" (usually white, heterosexual, male and manual wheelchair using) disabled person who deserves *human* rights.¹⁵ I'm not the first (nor the last) to argue that this figure of the human is entrenched in exclusionary notions of the normal or ideal human subject. Judith Butler (1993) tells us that the construction of healthy bodies "operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation" (*Bodies that Matter* 7).¹⁶ Cultural discourses leaves so little space to live in/with pain because to be in chronic pain is not a recognizably human experience. Moreover, cultural discourses rigidly

¹⁵ For a discussion of the whiteness of disability studies see Chris Bell (2006), "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal." For a discussion of the male centric nature of early disability studies see Jenny Morris (1996), "Introduction," *Encounters with Strangers: Feminist and Disability*. See Tom Shakespeare (2006), *Disability Rights and Wrongs* for an example of the argument for inclusion within the human community. Victoria Brownworth's (1999) introduction to *Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability* specifically argues that she included voices of lesbians with strength, power and determination in an effort to counter disability stereotypes of weakness and timidity (xvii). Though I do not share Brownworth's sentiment that these narratives are required to counter disability stereotypes, her position illustrates the above point.

¹⁶ Butler speaks specifically of gender here, but the principle can be applied to any socially constructed binaries.

police the boundaries between the human and the inhuman because the inhuman works to define the human. As definitions of the (contemporary Western) human rest on the notion of a pain free life, those that live with pain must remain inhuman.

Judith Butler (2004) argues in *Undoing Gender*, “I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable” (4). While disabled people need recognition as humans to live in the world (a sentiment that should be self-evident), the terms by which disabled people are recognized (as pitiable patients, tragic victims or stereotypical SuperCrips that always lead happy, righteous and pain-free lives) make life unlivable. The terms by which some disability rights campaigns argue for inclusion into the human category equally make life unlivable because they require silencing the body.¹⁷ While people may recognize pain or a body in pain as an unlivable body, voicing pain is necessary to gain recognition as a subject in pain worthy of subject status, but the terms by which subjects are recognized, as literally unlivable and pitiable, make that recognition impossible.

But Butler leaves room to maneuver through this paradox. She states, “That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility” (*Undoing Gender* 3). In other words, even if speaking, writing, representing the disabled body in pain creates a condition that seems unlivable, when not representing the body in pain creates an equally unlivable life, the only thing to do is to examine the preconditions that render representing the disabled body in pain unlivable? Or, to be more concrete, it forces us to examine why the painful body cannot be recognized as human. It focuses our attention on

¹⁷ See Oliver (1996) for evidence of the argument to silence the body and Wendell, Crow, Morris, Schriempf or Corker and French for arguments against this position.

fostering a space where the paradox of speaking pain and accessing humanness can co-exist. Rather than disability studies refraining from representing pain or even offering a plethora of pain narratives to counterbalance this lack, disability studies should first focus on fostering ways to challenge the very exclusion of pain from the realm of human experiences.

So, in setting out to answer Siebers's call to re-engage with pain ("In the Name of Pain"), I want to argue that we first need to forge a better theoretical understand of pain itself. The few scholars that theorize pain see it as an equally inhuman(e) experience: Elaine Scarry refers to pain as that which reduces humans to a bare, animal-like state. Schleifer (2009) calls it at once the most corporeal of experiences and at the same time, "ghostly, immaterial and otherworldly" (150). Tobin Siebers points out, "A painful life is not thought to be a human life" ("In the Name of Pain" 184). Drew Leder (1990) explicitly theorizes, "the painful body emerges as an alien presence" (73). If disability studies wants to move beyond the ease with which pain gets used against us, we need to construct new understandings of pain. We need to parse through the differences (and similarities) between chronic and acute pain. We need to destabilize the binary way of conceptualizing corporeal and psychic pain. We need to work toward fostering spaces where pain can be acknowledged in a way that engenders empathy rather than pity.

Disability studies scholars have long called attention to the way that notions of pity contribute to disability oppression. Pity fixes disabled people within a system of powerlessness and compels us to be grateful for the support and sentiment of non-disabled people (see Beth Haller 2010; Joseph Shapiro 1993). James Charlton (1998) argues that pity engenders paternalistic attitudes toward people with disabilities (55). Pain can elicit similar feelings of pity and reduce disabled people to objects. Lois Keith (1996) suggests that pity and the desire to

“help” disabled people comes from nondisabled people’s desire to feel good about themselves. This desire further cements disabled people as nothing more than objects.

Sara Ahmed similarly argues that charity campaigns, which parade the pain of – fill in the blank – to raise money work by eliciting feelings of anger, sadness and pity within the viewer. Ahmed comments, “the pain of others becomes ‘ours,’ an appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralizes their pain into our sadness” (21). Ahmed suggests that charity campaigns effectively neutralize the pain that they call forth. Pity requires us to imagine ourselves in another person’s shoes. This process inherently obscures the person whose shoes we imagine ourselves to be in. Empathy, on the other hand, “sustains the very difference that it may seek to overcome” (Ahmed 30). For Ahmed, empathy retains not necessarily the separation between the pain of the person that experiences it and the person observing or witnessing their pain, but the authority over the painful experience as rooted within the person in pain. In other words, the act of empathizing with another’s pain does not diminish the experience of pain for the person in pain. To ensure this rather subtle distinction, Ahmed states, “I want to suggest here, cautiously, and tentatively, that an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel” (30). She emphasizes the importance of the affective experience of pain and calls for a resistance to the desire to know pain. For Ahmed, pain’s unrecognizability and its unsharability do not impede the process of being affected by another’s pain. Rather, by dispensing with the desire to know pain, to understand pain, we refrain from neutralizing the experiences of those in pain.

Ahmed’s ethics of pain offers disability studies a provocative and highly valuable framework for resisting the elision between pain and pity. By fostering an ethics of pain we can resist the impulse of people to imagine what life for disabled people (with or without pain) must

be like and encourage instead openness to listening to and being affected by disabled people's experiences. Moreover, creating space for pain to be expressed without the imperative to *know* pain also makes the expressions much easier. It removes the interrogation that often follows expressions of pain. Without the fear of having to justify the source and credibility of pain, expressing pain becomes less risky. Deborah B. Gould (2009) argues that naming pain (in this case the pain of grief) "*affectively* alters how some queer folks were actually feeling" (233). She contends this naming processes, even if it incompletely captures the affective or lived experience, can fundamentally change how people feel experiences. She sees the act of naming and sharing as a significant step in making untenable feelings easier to live with. Similarly, I would argue that being able to speak about pain and share our experiences of pain can make being in pain more manageable. Among other reasons, sharing pain and experiencing empathy for another's pain helps to disrupt the pressure that comes from the imperative to deal with pain individually.

However, both the cultural understanding that pain is something knowable and that it is an individual problem form significant barriers to affecting this ethics of pain. Uncovering the ways that cultural narratives construct and utilize pain can begin to break down both the link between pain and pity and destabilize the naturalized understanding of pain as a thing to be defined and dealt with individually. Foucault argues that in denaturalizing fixed social understandings we can begin to change those understandings and fight against the political effects that result from them. He states, "the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" (Foucault qtd in Rabinow 6). The

naturalized and seemingly neutral definition of pain works to depoliticize the way which cultural discourses use pain to dehumanize disabled people. Therefore, to undermine that depoliticization requires a careful excavating of how cultural discourses use pain (and its naturalized unsharability) to dehumanize disabled people. Moreover, working against those discourses can make living in pain more manageable.

2.3 **Alienation, Bio-politics and Constructing the Human**

Reports of pain as an inhuman experiences dominate Western intellectual inquiries of pain. Elaine Scarry (1985) argues that pain is such a distinct, world shattering experience that it reduces people to animal-like states. She contends that pain exists outside of language. As the subtitle of *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* illustrates, Scarry argues that pain literally unmakes the world in the process of destroying language. She contends, “[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). She points out that language falls short of capturing the experience of pain. Scarry’s work informs the majority of cultural studies work on pain because she offers one of the first looks at pain as a biological *and* cultural phenomenon.

Jean Jackson similarly writes, “[t]he invisibility of pain creates difficulties for people attempting to conceptualize or communicate about it. Pain announces itself only to the person experiencing it unless that person announces its presence to others” (157). Yet, the only way to announce the presence of pain is through language, and if pain defies language, then - as Scarry argues - it defies sharability. Jackson identifies, however, that individuals in pain find ways to communicate their pain both through body language and metaphors. Jackson posits a specific

world - the “painful world” - that differs from the “everyday-world.”¹⁸ She suggests that individuals with chronic pain inhabit a world different from the everyday world, and she extrapolates that pain may not have language within the “everyday-world,” but it does have a language of its own in the painful world. In fact, she states, “Pain, in a sense, is a language, one that competes in several ways with everyday-world language” (Jackson 165). The discrepancy between worlds, Jackson argues, renders individuals inhabiting the “painful world” to feel alienated from the everyday world (165).

I turn to Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) work to better understand the way that pain alienates. Agamben argues that Western philosophical and political thought conceive of life as consisting of two components, life and bare life or what he calls *bios* and *zoē*. Agamben argues that *bios* represents human life (or a human life that participates in the human community) and *zoē* reflects a bare state of living. Humans share this bare life state with animals or other living creatures. Therefore, *zoē* reflects not the “humanness” of humans, but their biological, living matter while *bios* describes human life.

Agamben cites Aristotle’s *Politics* to more fully elucidate the distinction between *bios* and *zoē*. Aristotle argues, “Among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other beings. . . . But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust” (Aristotle as qtd in Agamben 7). Aristotle points to the ability to formulate language as that which separates humans from animals or *bios* from *zoē*. Language allows for humans to move beyond bare life and form political communities. Aristotle’s distinction between *bios* and *zoē* imbues *bios* with a privileged state of being, a state

¹⁸ For a more thorough explanation of the differences between these two worlds see her chapter “Self, Language, and Pain” (Jackson 143-168).

where human life becomes worthy of elevated status above animals by virtue of humans' ability to organize socially and politically. In accordance with Foucault, Agamben sees the distinction between *bios* and *zoē* as a product of biopower and/or biopolitics (the construction and management of bodies through political means).¹⁹ Agamben sees biopolitics as the process of designating certain lives as bare life and using that designation to justify expelling those lives from the *bios*. In other words, biopolitics determines whom society recognizes as human and whom it does not.

Applying Agamben to Scarry's postulation, we might say that pain unmakes not the world but rather the world of humans in relation to the community, the *bios*. Scarry's understanding of pain reduces men and women to a type of bare life, an existence prior to language and independent of the community. It separates humans from the community and returns them to bare life through the sheer presence of the bodily experience and the breakdown of language. This reduction facilitates the link between pain and a life thought not worth living. In other words, the conceptualization of pain as that which separates the individual from society and reduces them to nothing more than living matter makes the person in pain always already not human. Essentially, pain's presence precludes a human state of living.

However, Agamben argues that the distinction between *bios* and *zoē* has collapsed in Western politics. This distinction exists merely as an illusion. He suggests that biopolitics operates as an incorporation of bare life or *zoē* into politics, an arena reserved strictly for the human or *bios*, such that the living body (the bare life) becomes an object of politicization while

¹⁹ Foucault offers a lengthy discussion of biopower in *The History of Sexuality*, but I understand biopower to describe the way that government, institutions of the state and other apparatuses of power (in the current neoliberal climate capital qualifies here too) discipline and organize bodies and populations (140). Of course, biopower also describes the way that individuals regulate their own bodies for such apparatuses of power.

still maintaining the notion that life and bodies exist outside of the public (read: political) sphere. Agamben offers the notion of a state of exception to help elucidate this process.

...the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested.

(9)

The incorporation of *zoē* into *bios* operates in such a way that maintains an illusory distinction between the two. Agamben refers to this process as the state of exception. He maintains that this state of exception actually forms the “foundation on which the entire political system” rests. In other words, politics or biopolitics can only effectively manage individual bodies and the body populous by naturalizing certain bodies’ outsidership, thereby exempting policies that subject bodies to surveillance and management from political scrutiny because institutions and power structures frame such policies as exceptional. For instance, fingerprinting practices allow government agencies to track bodies, but policies that require fingerprinting for teaching jobs are understood as matters of public safety. The way we conceptualize pain in Western medicine exemplifies this state of exception. Socially, we conceive of pain as that which renders us inhuman (or in a state of bare life) while at the same time dominant cultural discourses (medical professionals, the media, etc) cite the presence of pain as evidence of a life not worth living (a political project designed to manage and discipline disabled bodies).

Moreover, theorists and people experiencing pain often argue that it exists outside of language, but the medical industry has created an entire language to describe pain. Many doctors have made their careers by developing instruments to quantify and communicate pain such as the McGill pain scale (which I am asked to use every time I go to the doctor) or the Melzack and Wall pain questionnaire (which I fill out every time I go to a new doctor or specialist). While individuals report not being able to express pain, the medical institution can and does express it for her or him. The individual who experiences pain goes to the doctor, and because he or she cannot make sense of a painful experience, turns to the medical professional to do so. Essentially, we go to doctors not only to find relief for our pain but also to understand it.

Therefore, what at first appears to be a strictly individual experience becomes a biopolitical one where institutions (structures of power) gain greater control over our bodies as the bearers of knowledge. In the process, even if pain reverts people to a bare life existence, it is not long before they and their pain are fully integrated into the *bios* again, now called into the political sphere as bodies in pain. So, while pain appears to exist outside of language (and if we follow Agamben and Aristotle, outside of *bios*), it actually has become fully integrated into political life as a means of exerting power and control over bodies through observation and medicalization. The state of exception transfers full authority over the uniquely personal and bodily experience of pain into the hands of medicine. The very understanding of pain as apolitical, personal and strictly medical calls those experiencing pain in a political system that further isolates, disciplines and medicalizes.

The *Time* articles merely exemplify one instance of this. Chronic pain “sufferers” live in desperation. Their lives turned into something akin to a bare-life existence. By virtue of their suffering those in chronic pain turn to the medical community that, as the articles suggest, can

help give their life back. Medical intervention offers a way back into the community. However, this re-entry comes in the form of increased surveillance both on the medical level (pain contracts) and on the cultural level (the figure of the drug seeking, drug abusing narcotic addict circulates widely within the cultural imaginary, as seen in television narratives like *House* (2004-2012) or even the addiction storylines featured on *Without a Trace* (2002-2009) and *E.R.* (1994-2009). In other words, the understanding of pain as something that renders someone less than human makes possible the increased suspicion and surveillance of people in chronic pain, which, in turn, helps to further solidify people in pain in this inhuman position.

Disability studies needs to keep this inclusive exclusivity in mind when arguing for a re-engagement with impairment, especially if pain continues to function as the example that launches this argument. The argument that social constructionism does not fully capture the lived experience of pain similarly positions pain as representative of *zoë*, where *zoë* reflects a version of the “truer self” outside of the biopolitical influence of the community or society. This position is rather ironic since disability studies works so hard to prove that impairment itself is a biopolitical issue. By separating disability from impairment, the social model position risks creating an illusion that we can extract the biopolitical components of the disability experience from the material, corporeal experience of impairment. While pain may appear to exist outside of social construction, it is actually fully incorporated into the biopolitical sphere. Any engagement with pain that figures it as fixed and irreducible to bare life does not realistically address how pain operates in the biopolitical sphere. Pain is already too imbedded within the biopolitical structure of medicine to be fully separate from social construction. Disability studies needs to be arguing for a re-engagement with pain that sees it not as the emblematic representation of impairment, but rather as emblematic of the complex way that impairment and disability interact.

More importantly, in countering the biopolitical deployment of pain as a mechanism used to place value judgments on disabled people's lives (as suffering beings), we need to bear in mind the multitude of ways to experience pain. Many theorists of pain build their inquiries off of Scarry's work, but Scarry writes of the pain experienced as a result of torture. One of the greatest oversights in theorizing about pain is the tendency to construct it as a singular experience rather than accounting for variances in intensity, duration and even cause. Acute pain experienced at the hands of a torturer seems to me to differ fundamentally from the chronic pain resulting from a back injury or the diffused pain of fibromyalgia or even the intense acute pain of end-stage cancer. Using Scarry's postulation that the acute pain of torture reduces people to animal-like states, while perhaps a useful starting point, seems a flawed way of constructing a meta-understanding of pain.²⁰ Many people who experience pain on a daily basis live what they would call a "human" experience with/in bodies in pain. Yet, the construction of all pain as inhuman dominates our cultural imagination and forecloses the possibility of recognizing those in pain as human. Only by interrogating images that link pain with humanness can we begin to expose the assumptions underlying this foreclosure.

²⁰ I am not advocating a meta-understanding of pain, but rather describing what I see as a (flawed) meta-understanding of pain that dominates both philosophical and popular understandings of pain.

3. IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?: REPRESENTING PAIN IN THE INHUMAN

The rise of Western society's reliance on technology has led to increased popular and critical attention to the cyborg. The cyborg is emblematic of the postmodern era where boundaries become permeable and humans interface with machines on a daily basis. Anxieties over what the proliferation of technology means for society has given rise to some now iconic Hollywood representations of cyborgs in film. Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz (1995) track the development and evolution of the cyborg figure in Hollywood from its initial monolithic representation of human's reliance on technology gone awry to the redeemed cyborg hero of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) in their text *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*. Anne Balsamo (1996) offers a feminist critique of some of the same films in *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* where she argues that the cyborg perpetuates rigid reiteration of gendered norms. And Sue Short (2005) observes the humanizing trend in more recent cyborg representations in her text, *Cyborg Cinema and Contemporary Subjectivity*. Short argues, "most [recent] cinematic depictions of the cyborg have sought to retain or reinvest this figure with recognizable human sentiment, perhaps in order to reassure audiences of a basic foundation at the heart of humanity" (36). These cinematic depictions specifically deploy pain as a humanizing mechanism. In fictional representations of cyborgs, pain highlights the "heart of humanity."

This chapter examines the way that films and television shows about cyborgs use pain as a signifier of humanness. I first lay out the larger trend in cyborg representations that Short identifies in more detail. The bulk of this chapter looks closely at two episodes from the television show *Caprica*, "There is Another Sky" and "Ghosts in the Machine" which follow two girls on their respective (and in many ways opposing) journeys as avatars in a virtual world. The

girls, Tamara and Zoe, die in a train bombing in the opening episode, and their consciousnesses live on in a virtual world called V-world due to a technological program that Zoe created. Zoe's avatar eventually transfers into a machine that inhabits the "real" world of the show (through a robot body). "Ghosts in the Machine" focuses on Zoe's father's attempt to prove that Zoe is in the machine. He subjects her to a series of painful tests meant to uncover the human inside the machine.

Tamara, on the other hand, wakes up in V-world after the bombing unaware that her "real" body has died. "There is Another Sky" tracks Tamara's journey toward awareness of her "real" death through a series of painful experiences. As the episode progresses, Tamara experiences less and less pain, signifying a journey toward complete acceptance of her avatar self and her willingness to let go of her remaining humanness. Both these examples illustrate the ways that the ability to feel and express pain indicates humanness. This chapter explores the ways that *Caprica* deploys pain as a narrative device to mark the difference between humans and machines. Examining the show's use of pain both highlights pain's constructed nature and draws our attention to the central role that pain plays in shaping our understanding of what it means to be human. Unlike the way that *Time* magazine frames pain, I argue that cyborg narratives construct pain as a central experience of what it means to be human. To recall Butler from the previous chapter, the presence of pain makes the cyborg's humanness recognizable. I look to the figure of the suffering cyborg in these episodes to ask whether cyboredness might be the condition that makes pain a recognizable experience of humanness possible.

3.1 **Considering the Cyborg**

Most of the analysis done on cyborg narratives and the figure of the cyborg cite Donna Haraway (1991; 1995; 2004) and her work on the transformative potential of the cyborg. While I

examine representations and not necessarily the theoretical figure of the cyborg, Haraway's thoughts on the cyborg bear discussing because they illuminate why representations of cyborgs lend themselves well to displaying pain as a human experience. Haraway proposes that the cyborg, half machine and half human, offers a transformative positionality from which to view and make sense of the world. Haraway states, "The cyborg point of view is literal, material, and technical; it is built, located, and specific – like all meaning-making apparatuses" (Haraway, "Cyborgs and Sybionts" xiv). Scholars have variously called this positionality a cyborg point of view (Haraway), cyborg ontology (Nusselder 2009) and cyborg subjectivity (Short 2005). According to Haraway, "cyborhood" offers a way of looking at the world from a hybrid perspective, which can challenge ideas of fixity, naturalness and wholeness. The cyborg point of view exposes the constructed nature of the social world. While the term cyborg, first quoted by Manfred Clynes in 1960 (Nusselder 4), literally describes a machine and living organism hybrid, Donna Haraway's theory of the cyborg re-defines it from its strictly scientific and literal usage to its theoretical application. Haraway offers the cyborg figure as a metaphor to describe liminal positionality, but she grounds this positionality in the literal, material and, most importantly, the technical hybridity between machine and human. "From another perspective," Haraway writes, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* 13). Haraway maintains that the cyborg can break down the boundaries between human, animal and machine. She cites people with disabilities as an example of the literal hybrid state between human and machine (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 178). While disability studies scholars have problematized this contention (which I will talk about below), the connection she makes bears some truth. Many disabled

people utilize prosthetic devices, presenting a cyborg-like image. However, this chapter only briefly considers the problem of referring to disabled people as emblematic cyborgs, but instead focuses primarily on representations of cyborgs because, in representations, the cyborg world offers a space where pain can simultaneously exist as a bodily sensation that humanizes instead of dehumanizes and yet challenges the very category of the human.

Petra Kuppers (2007) argues, “Out of [Haraway’s] embrace of cyborgs and monsters emerges a belief in the power of multiple, partial stories, delimiting the unifying and totalizing structures put forth by dominant knowledge discourses – a desiring, longing path toward a ‘powerful infidel heteroglossia’” (*The Scar of Visibility* 131). For Kuppers, the cyborg offers a way of disrupting dominant discourses, grand narratives and totalizing structures. These same structures, narratives and discourses work to constrict the lives of disabled people. In that sense, the cyborg provides a useful theoretical tool for working outside of those narratives. Carrie Sandahl (2001) also sees the possibility in cyborg representations when she writes, “For Haraway (1991, 150), cyborgs are liminal monsters that take pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibility in constructing new ones” (“Performing Metaphors” 53). Sandahl’s discussion centers on contemporary cyborg performance artist Ron Athey. She indicates, “Taking Athey’s cue, disability artists and activists might consider how this ontological status itself might be a new template for re-imagining and re-presenting bodies with disabilities” (“Performing Metaphors” 59). Sandahl values the liminal status that Athey represents in his performance work because he uses it to actively challenge the boundaries between the disabled and non-disabled, the queer and the normative in his work. Taking Sandahl’s cue, I argue that the liminal status of the cyborg in representations like those found in *Caprica* and *Battlestar Galactica* are able to disrupt the relationship between pain and inhumanness precisely because of their inhuman, liminal status, and examining these narratives as

potential templates can help disability studies scholars seeking to re-present painful bodies in ways that do not de-humanize.

Some disability studies scholars have taken issue with Haraway's cyborg theory because it effaces the lived reality of disability. Haraway cites people with disabilities as the perfect example of cyborgs. She states, "Perhaps paraplegics and other severely-handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices" (Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 178; qtd in Siebers, *Disability Theory* 63). While Siebers agrees that "Our cyborgs are people with disabilities" (*Disability Theory* 63), he argues that "Haraway is so preoccupied with power and ability that she forgets what disability is. Prostheses always increase the cyborg's abilities; they are a source only of new powers, never of problems" (63). Siebers charges Haraway with glorifying the cyborg experience to a point that it obscures the very real experience of people with disabilities.

Nirmala Erevelles (2001) similarly argues that "constituting the disabled subject as cyborg actually renders as immaterial the actual struggles of disabled subjects fighting for their immediate economic survival" (98). Erevelles points out that the cyborg figure does not exist in a material vacuum. The transformative symbiotic relationship between machine and human does not acknowledge that many people with disabilities not only struggle to afford the equipment that they utilize (if they even have access to it) but struggle to survive on a daily basis in an economic system that excludes them. Haraway cites people with disabilities as the greatest example of cyborg subjectivity and casts that subjectivity as empowering, but both Erevelles and Siebers argue that this approach ignores major components of the lived experience of disability. Most explicitly, the figure of the cyborg that Haraway posits does not account for the fact that the joining together of man and machine – as is often the case with prosthetic limbs – can be quite

painful. The representations of cyborg pain that I examine highlight the central place that pain plays in the cyborg experience.

Feminist scholar Anne Balsamo similarly points out,

Techno-bodies are healthy, enhanced, and fully functional – more real than real. New body technologies are often promoted and rationalized as life-enhancing and even lifesaving. Often obscured are the disciplining and surveillant consequences of these technologies – in short, the biopolitics of technological formations.

(Balsamo 5)

Balsamo acknowledges that Haraway's version of cyborgs represent an enhanced state, rather than a state of disability. She also points out the discrepancy between the promise of what Haraway refers to as complex hybridity and the reality that such hybrid states are still severely policed under a repressive system of surveillance. Haraway argues, "The cyborg is not subject to Foucault's biopolitics" (*A Manifesto for Cyborgs* 22). But people who use assistive technology devices are, in fact, subject to increased surveillance not simply from a social interaction perspective but also because the medical institution, insurance companies and the consumer market control access to the assistive technology devices that they use. In a very material sense, these devices may offer greater mobility and give people the freedom to move out of highly repressive institutions, but the biopolitical or biomedical system is constituted in such a way that it keeps control over disabled bodies through mediating their access to the assistive devices that they use.

Similarly, Balsamo suggests that cyborgs raise the possibility of new gender embodiment because their "recrafted bodies defy the natural givenness of physical gender identity" (39). She sees cyborgs as capable of recrafting their bodies in opposition to naturalized gender states, but

she effectively forgets that biopolitical impulses to normalize direct this recrafting process too. Even if cyborg bodies challenge what we consider fixed physical characteristics like gender, cultural influences dictate what we change those fixed physical characteristics into. For instance, prosthetics limbs made for people with disabilities often serve to normalize even as they improve functioning.

These critiques of cyborg theory remind us of the distance between the theoretical cyborg that Haraway proposes and the lived experiences of people with disabilities who might embody the cyborg. This distance cautions a simple transfer of theory to explain the real life potential of disability. Still, Haraway's cyborg theory offers an invaluable tool for reading the representations of cyborgs in film and television because it helps to explain, perhaps in part, the reason why cyborgs seem to carve out a human existence in a world that deems painful existences as non-human. Their liminal, boundary-breaking positionality (in representations) allows them the space to feel and/or recognize pain as a human experience. These representations offer their greatest potential precisely because, as Haraway suggests, they disrupt dominant narratives (of pain that see it as an inhuman/e experience). They exemplify the paradox that makes recognizing pain a human experience possible. By looking at these examples in contrast to the dominant way that pain de-humanizes, we can better understand the conditions that construct pain as such an inhuman experience. With this knowledge, disability studies can better fashion a way forward in its quest to represent and reincorporate pain.

3.2 **New Cyborg Cinema**

In her review of cyborg cinema, Sue Short comments on how cyborg representations have shifted over time. Short argues that early cyborg films depicted cyborgs as hyper-masculine characters that represent the fear of a growing dependence on technology. We see this in films like

the original *Terminator* (1984), *Blade Runner* and in television show's *Doctor Who* (1963-1989) (which features the unilaterally bad cyborg creatures called Daleks as one of Doctor Who's most enduring enemies). Short indicates that cinematic cyborg representations shift in the nineties in a way that highlights cyborgs' humanity (Short 7). Short draws a rather problematic line between the eighties and nineties cyborg films, as we can find plenty of examples that complicate her argument. For instance, if we extend our scope to television as well as film we see sympathetic, humanized cyborgs prior to the nineties in the *Bionic Woman* (1976-1978), *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978) or the marginally successful film *Cyborg* (1989). However, these shows and films primarily depict humans that benefit from technological advancements to become super-human cyborgs. Short defines cyborgs as "diverse in the forms they take: presented either as former humans who have been physically modified in some way, as androids with organic components, or as machines that develop such a degree [of] sentience as to confound conventional distinctions between human and machine" (Short 5), but her analysis of the humanizing trend focuses primarily on films that depict human-looking machines or cyborgs that would fall more clearly in the latter two categories she describes. Yet, films in/after the nineties similarly depict the deep-seeded fear of technology that Short locates in early cyborg cinema. *The Matrix* (1999) and *I, Robot* (2004) portray worlds where machines show little humanity in their quest to take over human life. Still, Short's observation that following *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* cyborg films began to confer a greater humanity onto their cyborg figures bears a fuller examination because I think what she really pinpoints is the humanness or human-likeness that these cyborgs portray.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the original *Terminator* film features the T-800 (a human-looking machine) as an unfeeling, nearly indestructible villain that is sent from the future to kill Sarah Connor so that she cannot give birth to John Connor (the future leader of the human resistance

against the machiens). *Terminator 2* features the T-800 as a reprogrammed version of the villain in the first film sent back in time by John Connor to protect his younger self from a different Terminator. The Terminator in the second film appears as a somewhat suspect hero at first, given his previous villain status. The film uses pain as a vehicle to confer humanity or human-likeness onto the T-800 and reassure viewers that he has, in fact, reformed (or been reprogrammed).

In a scene where the Terminator, John Connor and Sarah Connor regroup after a narrow miss with the film's new villain, the Terminator asks John Connor why he cries. John tells him that people cry because they feel pain. The Terminator's question implies his inability to understand pain. It signifies his very machine-likeness. By the end of the film, however, the Terminator says to John that he now understands why people cry. He has saved John and Sarah from the villain, and he stands, badly injured, above the same vat of melted metal that the other Terminator died in. He feels no physical pain from the injuries, but expresses an understanding of the emotional pain that comes from loss. The Terminator, now depicted as a surrogate father figure to John (as Sara Connor explicitly states mid-way through the film), tells John that he must destroy himself in order to protect humanity. John begins to protest, but the Terminator cites his inability to ever cry as one of the reason why he needs to destroy himself. He recognizes that he will never be fully human and therefore could be a threat to humanity. By invoking his inability to feel pain in this moment of self-sacrifice, the Terminator shows his regard for and understanding of human pain as an important component of humanity. This moment humanizes him through his proximity to (and desire to) feel pain. Moreover, the emotional pain that he expresses at having to leave John suggests that he has, in fact, achieved a level of humanness that marks him as distinctly human-like.

These new cyborgs – if we follow Short's assessment – feel pain, experience love and often even think that they are human. For example, the 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* depicts a

young cyborg boy, David, who is programmed to unconditionally love his parents. He is “adopted” after the parent’s “real” son, Martin, develops an incurable disease, and the parents put him in cryostasis (they freeze him so that he won’t die before a cure is found). When a cure is eventually discovered Martin returns and, jealous of David, tricks him into a series of actions that cause the family to get rid of him. Notably, the final straw that causes the father to demand that they “return” David comes after one of Martin’s friends tries to test David’s self-protection program by stabbing him with a knife. This program simulates pain. Hurt, David grabs onto Martin and they both fall into the pool that’s next to them. David clings so tightly to Martin that they both sink to the bottom of the pool and Martin nearly drowns. The audience recognizes David’s actions as distinctly human because he responds to the inflicted pain by reaching for comfort. David’s parents see his actions as monstrous because they don’t recognize David reacted out of pain. They see only the danger that he put Martin in. The audience identifies with David here precisely because we see his rejection as unjustified. Moreover, the stabbing serves to establish David’s humanness (or human potential).

Unable to return David for demolition, David’s mother leaves him in a forest. The film highlights both David’s ability to feel physical pain and his suffering at his mother’s rejection to suggest that David is more human than the family’s “real” son Martin who, in many ways, tortured David. David embarks on a journey to become just as real as Martin so he can return to his family. The film ends with David, in his search, trapped underwater for 2,000 years. An advanced cyborg creature (looking markedly much more inhuman than David) resurrects him. Humans have long ago died out and the new cyborgs exalt David because he is the only living machine that had contact with real humans. The show highlights his humanness both through this exalted proximity to humans and through the pain that David expresses upon learning that his mother has been long dead. Films like *Terminator 2* and *AI: Artificial Intelligence* draw a correlation between pain and humanness in such

a way that the cyborg's ability to feel, understand and/or express pain marks his or her humanity. I offer an amendment to Short's observation, then, by suggesting that what's noteworthy about this new trend in cyborg narratives is not just that the human-looking machines can access a greater humanity or come to resemble humans to a greater extent. Rather, pain allows this access to humanness. The cyborg's suffering makes them more human-like.

3.3 Caprica

Caprica ponders the relationship between technology, the self and the body in a story that follows the experiences of Tamara and Zoe. Both girls die in a train bombing, but their consciousness lives on in a virtual world called V-World through avatars.²¹ Characters in the show access this world through a piece of technology called a holliband that projects them – through their avatars – into V-World, a space that offers a world of consequence free entertainment.²² Zoe creates a computer program that constructs an avatar through bits of computerized information about a person (medical data, downloaded pictures which can be compiled to form memories, phone and email communication, etc). Prior to this program, no avatar could exist in the virtual world independent of a user or operator. This technology offers an extension of the self past death. Zoe and Tamara live on through their avatars in the real world. The story focuses on the questions raised by this revolutionary technology. Pain plays a central role in the show's attempt to parse through the question of whether or not these girls can still be thought of as human.

3.4 Tamara: From Human to Machine

As mentioned in the "Introduction," cyborg narratives tend to represent the cyborg as always in transition. The Terminator, for instance, transitions from pure machine to human-like. Tamara, on

²¹ I am consciously incorporating avatars into my understanding of cyborgs. Avatars use technology to project humans into a virtual world or into the real world through another interface. Therefore, I see them as cyborgs.

²² V-World offers something like Second Life, a computer program that simulates the real world.

the other hand, transitions from human to machine in the course of *Caprica*. The show exemplifies this transition primarily in the episode “There is Another Sky.” Tamara’s character begins the show as the emblematic innocent victim. She dies in the horrific train bombing and comes back to life confused and frightened. The show highlights this confusion and fear to draw out her innocence. Tamara’s father, Joseph, meets Zoe’s father, Daniel, at the memorial service for those who died on the train. Subsequently, Daniel offers Joseph the chance to see Tamara again after he discovers the computer program his daughter left. The series pilot ends with a horrified Joseph lamenting that he “resurrected” Tamara after he meets his scared daughter in V-World. “There is Another Sky” focuses on Tamara’s attempt to get out of V-World and her ultimate journey toward accepting her new life as an avatar.

The episode starts with Tamara as fully human. Rather, she thinks she is human, still alive and simply unable to leave V-World. Tamara wanders into a club in search of a woman who she thinks can help her find her way out. Tamara pushes her way through a crowd of young people who wait in line to get into the club. The people around Tamara wear dark clothes, leather, chains, suits and gothic attire, making her look out of place in her brown and white polka dot dress and lost expression. Her eyes are wide, and she apologizes for bumping into people. This scene serves to accentuate not only Tamara’s humanness but also her distance from the technological world of V-World. The hallway light highlights only the top of Tamara’s head and the tip of her nose, creating an awkward shadow on her face. A strobe light flashes on the rest of her face in intervals simulating the assault that V-World seems to have on Tamara. The scene collectively suggests that she did not visit V-World when she was alive.

Tamara eventually makes it to the front of the line and demands entry to see a woman named Vesta, who we soon learn is a type of virtual mob boss. Heracles, a boy about Tamara’s age, leads

her into a dark room. Vesta sits at a round table with three other people. In the center of the table is a lazy-susan, on which sits four guns. Vesta takes a few bets and then spins the lazy-susan around. When it stops, everyone at the table grabs a gun, aims it at his or her temple and pulls the trigger. As the guns go off, one of the men flashes like a glitch in a computer image and then disappears. Tamara turns to someone at her right and asks where he went. The woman tells her that he “de-rezed” or reverted back to the real world. Tamara moves forward to talk to Vesta, telling her that she cannot get out of the virtual world. Vesta picks up her gun and shoots Tamara. This scene is the first of three instances where Tamara gets shot. Tamara’s reaction to each shooting changes, and those changes signal her character’s evolution from human to cyborg. By tracing her reaction to the pain of getting shot, we can see the way that pain becomes a means through which the show reflects the character’s humanness or rather, her loss of humanness.

3.5 **First Shot**

Tamara reacts to the first shooting scene as if her “real” human body were shot. She screams in pain and falls to the floor. Blood comes out of her wound and covers her hands. Someone runs over and indicates that she does not de-rez. The camera looks down at Tamara, who cries in pain and holds her hand over her stomach. The camera cuts away, and, when we return to the scene, we see Tamara lying on a couch still holding the wound on her stomach. She pulls her hand away to reveal blood. Vesta says, “The pain should zap you out of the program and you have to re-launch your avatar. But you...” (“There is Another Sky”). Tamara interrupts and says, “Can’t...”, and Vesta finishes with “You don’t have to” (“There is Another Sky”). Pain is a unique bodily experience for the holliband user, as it is the only thing that disrupts the virtual experience. The technology that allows people to enter V-World connects them to avatars through a biofeedback-type mechanism. Plainly put, people feel the experiences of their avatar in their “real” bodies. To step out of V-World

people normally disconnect their holliband by simply removing it. Pain is the only sensation that involuntarily disconnects the user from their avatar.

Drew Leder suggests that pain is often thought of as that which brings us back to an otherwise absent body (4). Sara Ahmed echoes that by stating, “the intensity of feelings like pain recalls us to our body surfaces” (26). Interestingly pain’s opposite, pleasure, does not hold the same power. Viewers learn early in the series that one of the first industries to capitalize on the holliband technology is the porn industry. Operators can experience intense moments of pleasure without reverting back to the real world. This suggests that pain is a unique bodily experience, one capable of shocking the system in an unparalleled way. Scarry similarly differentiates pain from pleasure. She identifies the pre-linguistic screams of pain as uniquely animal-like and inhuman, but does not acknowledge that screams of pleasure could just as easily be said to evidence a similar pre-linguistic state. Something about pain, for Scarry, Leder and Ahmed, as well as for the creators of *Caprica*, holds a unique power to bind us to our bodies. This reading, however, comes just as much from culturally constructed understanding of what pain means as it does from any inherent attribute of pain’s physiological experience. Ahmed points out, in uncovering a politics of pain, that the important question is not what pain *is* but rather what pain *does* (27). I carry this focus into my reading of *Caprica* to argue that the show uses pain not because it is inherently a human experience. Rather, the show uses pain because it humanizes. Pain acts upon the players within V-World in order to bring them back to their human bodies. Rather than seeking to define pain, the more productive theoretical endeavor aims to map out just how pain accomplishes its humanization.

Vesta explains to Tamara that pain breaks the fantasy of V-World because it brings the person back to reality. Vivian Sobchack (2004), in her critique of Baudrillard’s glorification of the techno-body, argues, “there is nothing like a little pain to bring us back to our senses” (167). For

Sobchack, pain represents the ultimate bodily experience that stands in direct in opposition to the technologically mediated (enhanced) body that Baudrillard writes of. Sobchack reflects a broader theoretical belief that pain somehow represents a hyper or ultra “real” experience because pain, as Scarry suggests, brings the focus entirely onto the body. Sobchack finishes the above statement with, “nothing like a real (not imagined or written) mark or wound to counter the romanticism and fantasies of technosexual transcendence that characterize so much of the current discourse on the techno-body that is thought to occupy the virtual cyberspaces of postmodernity” (167). Sobchack suggests that pain can transcend the virtual “technosexual transcendence” of writing about bodies mediated by technology. She ultimately wishes Baudrillard a bit of pain to counter his romanticization of the techno body. *Caprica* offers a fictional version of Sobchack’s position. It presents V-World as a hyper sexual (or technosexual) world that people escape into to express their (sexual) fantasies, consequence free. Pain (markedly not death itself) is what brings a player out of this fantasy world. The show critiques the virtual world as an escapist fantasy world that prevents people from living in the real world.

Tamara’s character chides Hercules later in the episode for spending all his time in V-World at the expense of “being something out there” in the real world (“There is Another Sky”). Pain brings people back into their “real” *human* bodies. The show relies on the “realness” of pain to construct a stark separation between the virtual and the “real” world. In this separation, pain not only belongs within the real world, it is the mechanism that separates the avatars from the humans. It affects this separation precisely because of the cultural assumptions about realness, pain and humanness. In other words, while a focus on what pain does highlights the way that culture (or in this case *Caprica*) deploys it for particular purposes, we can not move entirely away from a discussion of what pain is because what pain does relies so heavily on cultural assumptions of what

pain is. Within the world of *Caprica* pain both humanizes and is somehow representative of a greater realness that allows that humanization process.

3.6 **Second Shot**

Caprica capitalizes on the “realness” of pain in order to mark Tamara’s transition away from her humanness. The second time Tamara gets shot, she appears slightly more machine-like than human. The scene develops as follows: Tamara deliberately puts herself in harms way as part of a deal she makes with Vesta. If she helps Heracles steal something for Vesta, then Vesta will help Tamara get out of V-world. Tamara enters into a bar and approaches a man sitting at a back table. She opens fire on a group of men in the bar in order to create a distraction so Heracles can steal the code to the man’s avatar. She gets shot in the shoulder and immediately falls to the ground with a thud. The camera initially looks down at her from the point of view of the man who shot her. Her legs are bent outward at the knees, highlighting her awkward fall. She cries out in pain as the man and the remaining members of his entourage approach. Heracles gets what they came for and then the camera cuts to them running away. Heracles carries Tamara in his arms as she cries out in pain. At this point in the narrative, the show still depicts her as experiencing intense pain from getting shot.

The next scene, however, opens with Tamara getting up from a bed. The jacket she wore in the bar has now been removed, revealing her bare shoulder where she was shot. Ahmed tells us, “the sensation of pain is often represented – both visually and in narrative – through ‘the wound’ (a bruised or cut skin surface)” (27). The first shooting scene caused Tamara to bleed and scream out in pain. The blood functions within this sequence to represent the pain she feels. However, when the scene cuts back to Tamara shortly after that, the wound closes itself off. Her clothes are still blood stained, and she has a hole in her stomach marking the traces of the wound, but the wound itself

disappears. Unlike the bullet wound from that scene, this wound has not fully healed yet. We see a hole in her skin that reveals a red, flashing patch. The show uses a similar red pattern of small boxes layered on top of one another to indicate to viewers that the characters have entered into the virtual world. The pattern that appears under her skin in lieu of a gunshot wound highlights Tamara's virtuality. She approaches a mirror to examine the wound herself. Heracles follows her and the camera focuses on the image of the two of them in the mirror. The mirror mediates between their image and the viewers. We see them only through their reflection. This choice of camera angles recreates the distorted, virtual and representational nature of V-world. The camera shows Tamara and Heracles to us through the mirror to highlight their virtual nature.

As Tamara and Heracles examine her wound, it quickly closes up and heals itself. Whatever healing that Tamara's body does in the first shooting sequence takes place without notice. The narrative draws out both Tamara and the other characters' shock when Tamara takes her hand away to reveal a healed wound in the first shooting sequence. The second shooting scene, on the other hand, highlights the surreal moment where Tamara watches her body heal itself in order to draw attentions to the virtual, machine-like nature of her body. Tamara's cool and unaffected expression while she watches her body close up signifies her journey toward fully embracing her virtualness. *Caprica* uses the narrative convention that Ahmed identifies (of focusing on the wound to give form to the pain) in order to call attention to Tamara's inhumanness. The wound, as a narrative entry point into pain, effectively highlights Tamara's virtual nature. Her cold affect as she watches her body close up signifies her difference from earlier in the episode.

Moreover, Ahmed suggests that pain re-focuses our attention to our bodily surface. She writes, "Pain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside" (27). The wound represents pain so effectively because it gives form to this transgression of bodily

boundaries. It visualizes the breaking down between the inside and outside. Tamara's gunshot wounds particularly highlight this openness. Leder argues that pain causes the body to close in on itself (74-5). He understands this turning inward as a mechanism of re-establishing the body's borders. The first shooting sequence features Tamara, turning inward. Her body "properly" closes itself off again (even if this closing off happens much more rapidly than it would in the "real" world). The second scene, however, highlights Tamara's lack of proper closing off. Her interior – marked by the red patches of the virtual world – matches the exterior world she inhabits. Her body literally embodies the blending of Tamara with V-world. Her body's failure to properly close itself off and restore the boundaries between the self and the exterior world identifies Tamara as increasingly inhuman.

3.7 **Third Shot**

Caprica marks the complete blending of Tamara with the virtual world through the third shooting sequence. Tamara and Heracles enter a vault to steal game points kept there. As Heracles collects the points, the vault alarm sounds. Guards rush around the corner toward them. Tamara pushes Heracles down and turns to face the guards as they begin to shoot. The camera cuts to a long shot of Tamara from behind, and as the bullets hit her, she leans backward from the impact. The camera cuts briefly to the guards and then to a close up of Tamara's hand. It shakes slightly from what we assume is the pain of the gunshot. But instead of crying out, Tamara closes her hand into a fist. The camera then refocuses so that her hand is in the foreground but out of focus and the guards are in the background, in focus. As Tamara closes her fist more tightly the guards de-rez. The camera then cuts back to Tamara falling backward. She pants out of exhaustion, and as the camera pans out Heracles says, "What are you?" ("There is Another Sky"). Through subsequent dialogue we learn that because the guards are not actual players of the game but part of the V-world program,

Tamara is able to manipulate them. She taps into the code and makes them disappear. Tamara has greater access to the code within the virtual world because she is not grounded in a “real” body. The third gunshot not only marks her transition into the virtual world, it signifies her blending with that world.

Having completed her task for Vesta, Tamara returns to collect on Vesta’s promise to help her get out of V-world. Vesta presents Tamara with a newspaper clipping indicating that she died nearly a month earlier. Tamara takes a moment to collect herself before grabbing two guns from Heracles and killing everyone in the bar except Heracles and Vesta. Of course, Tamara only kills their avatars, but the intensity of the sequence still signifies her transition. At the beginning of the episode, Tamara is a sweet and out-of-place girl. Here, she embraces her new life as an avatar by taking control of the guns and turning them on others. She tells Heracles to go back to the real world and find her father. After he leaves, she walks up to Vesta and points the gun at her. Vesta asks her: “What are you?” (“There is Another Sky”). The camera cuts to an image of Tamara from Vesta’s point of view, looking up. Tamara raises the gun a little higher to aim it directly at the camera. She says in response to Vesta, “I’m awake” and pulls the trigger (“There is Another Sky”).

Until this point in the story, Tamara has assumed that she’s been sleeping and/or in a coma and that is why she cannot get out of V-world. By stating that she’s awake, Tamara claims her identity as a virtual being. She throws off the hope of waking up in her “real” body and suggests that now that she knows the truth, she finally wakes to reality (or at the very least her reality). The episode ends with Tamara walking down the street away from the bar. The camera pans backward and away from her. She holds a machine gun in her right hand and walks forward in a perfectly straight line. She wears heels and a cocktail dress. Her image calls up the femme fatale character of film noir and presents a stark contrast to the scared and frightened girl at the beginning of the

episode. The camera pans further back to reveal Tamara walking toward the skyline of New Cap City (V-worlds game-like remake of Caprica), and the viewer gets the sense that Tamara now fits into V-world. The camera uses a filter that washes out the color of the image, giving the picture an overall grey tone. This contributes to the film noir feel, but it also helps to blend Tamara into the background of the city streets. She wears a purple dress that is almost indistinguishable from the grey of the concrete street below her. The camera pulls further and further back, but the episode ends and the screen cuts to credits before she disappears entirely into the cityscape. Tamara becomes part of the virtual world. Her transition into full machine or full code is complete.

The show uses Tamara's experience of getting shot as a way to take her through a journey toward acceptance of her new cyborg-ness. Similarly, the show uses her experiences and expressions of pain as a way to signal her transition to the viewer. The show depicts Tamara as scared and confused at the beginning of the episode. She reacts to the gunshot in a recognizably human (expected) way. She cries out in pain. The gunshot enters her body and blood marks the wound. The second time she gets shot, she reacts similarly in the moment, but before she can fully heal, we get to see the virtual version of her underneath the flesh. This exposed "leakiness" of the borders of her body through the wound highlights her blending with the virtual world and elicits an almost uncanny reaction in viewers. Seeing the body opened up – revealing its virtual nature – highlights Tamara's inhumanness. She stares at the hole with perplexed interest; her head cocked to the side slightly. Her perplexed look indicates both a lack of pain and a distancing from her human self. The third shooting scene shows a blending of Tamara and the virtual world. Tamara uses the pain as a way to access the code of the program and manipulate it. Rather than causing her to de-rez and zapping her out of V-world, the pain empowers Tamara.

Tobin Siebers argues that many theorists of pain offer it up as a transformative experience (*Disability Theory* 62). He calls for a greater engagement with impairment because he sees this “misrepresentation” of pain as fitting into the ideology of ability that marginalizes people with disabilities.²³ Siebers contends, “the health of a body is judged by the ability not only to surmount pain, illness, and disability but to translate by force of will their effects into benefits” (*Disability Theory* 77). Siebers wants to see a theoretical (and popular) understanding of pain that moves beyond the imperative to overcome it and translate it into something empowering.

The show similarly depicts Tamara’s pain as empowering in the final shooting sequence. She takes the pain from the gunshot wound and translates it into a force that allows her access to V-world’s code. But the show links Tamara’s ability to use her pain with a decreasing sense of humanness. In other words, at the point in the narrative where she is able to transfer pain into power, she becomes almost unrecognizable as a human. She overcomes her pain, but only because she is more machine than human. Heracles and Vesta both ask Tamara, “What are you?” at the end of the episode. This echoed question indicates that they do not recognize Tamara as a human. She ceases to become a “who” and becomes a “what”.

In comparison to the images featured in the *Time* magazine articles discussed in the previous chapter, “There is Another Sky” presents a much more complicated picture of pain. “There is Another Sky” reflects the cultural assumption that pain is the cause of dehumanization, but unlike the *Time* articles, *Caprica* troubles the inhumanness of pain by presenting pain as something that actually reflects humanity. Moreover, both *Time* and *Caprica* use pain to tell a particular story and

²³ Siebers carefully qualifies the implication that there is a proper way to represent pain by calling for a new realism of the body, which does not construct the body (and by extension pain) as something real that can be properly represented or misrepresented. Still, he contends that the representation of pain as something always transformative constructs a limited view of pain, which falls into the ideology of ability.

rely on cultural assumptions about the nature of pain to do so. Therefore, uncovering how pain functions within both narratives can illuminate its constructed nature.

3.8 **Zoe: From Machine to Human**

Caprica uses pain as a marker of humanness most strikingly in “Ghosts in the Machine” through a series of tests that Zoe’s father subjects Zoe to. Zoe starts as a digital copy that the “real” Zoe makes. While the “real” Zoe is alive, the avatar version stands clearly as a machine projection of the original. The show opens by asking viewers to see the copy of Zoe as both her and yet not her. The avatar is an exact replica of the “real” Zoe, made through a composite of computerized information, but it is still an inferior or childlike version of the “real” Zoe. After her death, however, the avatar version of Zoe begins to transition into a much more complex human version of Zoe.²⁴ Zoe’s father, Daniel, traps the avatar version of her into a futuristic equivalent of a flashdrive, which he then downloads into a machine body. However, during this process, he thinks something went wrong and he lost her, but Zoe has been hiding in the Cylon body. Over the course of several episodes, Daniel begins to suspect that Zoe is still in the machine and he devises a series of tests to expose his daughter. These tests employ both emotional and physical pain to uncover Zoe’s presence. Daniel believes that he will be able to prove Zoe is in the Cylon because he knows that the Cylon should not feel pain. If his daughter is in the Cylon body, she will react to the pain and expose herself.

3.9 **Test One**

The first test begins when Daniel repeatedly orders Zoe (the Cylon which I will from here forward simply call Zoe) to take apart and put together a machine gun. During this exercise Daniel

²⁴ While this narrative could be unpacked to reveal a rich commentary on the nature of life versus death and reality versus representation, I will confine my examination here to the use of pain as a narrative tool used to reveal Zoe’s humanness.

takes out a pack of cigarettes and some matches. He proceeds to tell Zoe that his daughter hated that he smoked, and that ever since a fire broke out in their family home when she was small, she has been terrified of fire. He tells Zoe that she was trapped in the burning house as he holds out a match. The camera cuts between Daniel and Zoe. Zoe's appearance alternates between the Cylon and Zoe, the human, with every few cuts. The show uses this alternating technique to show viewers that Zoe resides in the Cylon and that the world around her sees her as the Cylon. This editing technique helps to highlight the ambiguity of Zoe's personhood, continually keeping her humanness in question but also continually calling into question the machine-ness of the Cylon.

As Daniel holds the match out, it burns to the point of burning him. He cries out in pain and drops the match. We see Zoe, in human form, in the left foreground of the picture. The camera then cuts to an image from Daniels point of view, looking at Zoe, in Cylon form. When he cries out in pain, Zoe accidentally pulls the trigger on the gun. It is not loaded, but we hear a click and Daniel freezes. The camera cuts back to him for a second and then to Zoe, in human form. She closes her eyes and bites her bottom lip. Daniel takes a deep breath in and then responds, "Well...look at that" ("Ghosts in the Machine"). Zoe cringes and the two pause. Daniel takes her reaction as indicative of her presence. Like the Terminator, Zoe's reaction to human pain marks her humanity and humanness. *Caprica* establishes Zoe's humanness through her recognition of Daniel's pain.

The scene then cuts to Zoe in V-World (she can come and go between V-World and the Cylon body). She sits with her friend Lacy, discussing her father's test. Zoe says that she knows he was trying to test her. Lacy asks what she plans to do, and Zoe tells her that she will, "Turn me off. Just be the robot" ("Ghosts in the Machine"). Lacy asks her if that is even possible anymore, suggesting that the integration between Zoe and the robot is so complete that she may not be able to separate the two. Zoe responds by saying that she will have to try. Separating herself from the robot,

even as the show questions that separation, suggests to the viewer that there is a distinction to be made between Zoe and the machine. While the robot is the machine, Zoe is the human within the machine. Or, as the episode's title suggests, she is the human ghost in the machine. The show implies that Zoe is more than the machine that she embodies, and pain facilitates this indication.

3.10 **Test Two**

The next test even more directly employs pain as a means of rooting Zoe out of the machine. Daniel brings Zoe out to the backyard of their house. He orders her to stand still while he grabs a can of gasoline. He tells Zoe that he knows it is not exactly his daughter that is inside the Cylon, but that the avatar is still the only part of Zoe that he has left, and he will do whatever it takes to flush her out. Daniel tells Zoe that he "knows what the robot's tolerances are" and he bets that they exceed hers ("Ghosts in the Machine"). Zoe looks on in horror as Daniel pours gasoline in a circle around her body. He tells her that she need only step out of the circle, but he will order the robot to stay so that if she does move, he will know for certain that she is inside the robot's body. Daniel throws a cigarette on the fire, and the camera cuts to an image of Zoe as the Cylon. We see Daniel staring at the machine as the flames rise up around it. He turns away, which suggests that he knows what he does must be tortuous to his daughter. Zoe stares at Daniel through the flames, holding his gaze as if in total determination. The camera cuts back to show Zoe's (machine) hand flinching briefly, but she does not move. The fire eventually dissipates and then Zoe reappears in human form, breathing heavily and still holding her gaze on her father.

The majority of this sequence takes place with Zoe in machine form, suggesting that she is able to, in part, turn off her human self to maintain her cover. She relies on the machine-likeness of herself to be able to withstand the pain. However, as the sequence cuts back to her, we see her obvious distress. She breathes heavily, almost panting. The camera focuses in on her face, hard with

both anger and determination, to close out the scene. While Daniel's test ultimately fails to prove Zoe's humanness, the show leads us to believe that this failure is due more to Zoe's determination than it is to her lack of humanness. Her cyborg nature might aid her in transcending the pain, but the show asks viewers to see Daniel as the one who behaves inhumanely here. The use of these tests within the narrative draws the correlation between pain and humanness for the viewer. While Daniel might not be fully convinced of his daughter's presence, the viewers become increasingly convinced of Zoe's humanness.

3.11 **Test Three**

The third test takes Zoe and Daniel back into Daniel's basement laboratory. Previously, we have seen the family dog sniffing at Zoe's feet and bringing her a ball to play fetch with. The show depicts the dog as having a kind of sixth sense that tells him that Zoe is inside the machine. The series plays on this narrative convention to help draw out the drama of the third test. Daniel sits in a rocking chair with the dog next to him. He has a gun on his lap. His tie hangs loose around his neck, and he looks generally exhausted and disheveled. He stands up and tells Zoe that they will have one final test. Daniel says, "I love my dog, but I love my daughter more" ("Ghosts in the Machine"). He explains that he will sacrifice his dog for the chance that even a small part of Zoe is in the machine. At this point in the testing, Daniel more decisively identifies Zoe as his daughter. In the previous sequence, he maintains the separation between Zoe the avatar and the "real" Zoe. Daniel hands Zoe a gun and tells her that he is about to order the Cylon to shoot the dog.

Daniel believes that Zoe's humanity will prevent the Cylon from pulling the trigger. He orders the robot to shoot the dog at the count of five and then begins counting. Zoe, in human form, stands with her hands on her hips. As viewers, we watch in horror with Zoe. Her father has put her in an impossible situation, and we see the tension build as the camera focuses in on her lips quivering

and her breathing quickening again. When Daniel counts to five, the camera pulls back to reveal Zoe, in machine form. The machine raises its arm, aims the gun and shoots. We hear several gunshots and the dog whimpers. At the second shot the camera cuts to an image of Zoe in human form. The camera shoots her from below, at a high angle. It frames the gun in the center of the shot, just below Zoe's face. Her lips are closed tight; her eyes are squinting and distant. She looks both cold and pained at the same time. The camera cuts and pulls back to show Daniel, looking defeated. It pans behind Zoe to reveal the dog, still sitting in the same position, panting away as if nothing has happened. Daniel tells the robot that it did not miss. He filled the gun with blanks.

The dynamics of the scene get inverted when the gun goes off. Zoe appears to be emotionally cold and machine-like after shooting the dog, while Daniel appears to be the true human that put in place safeguards to ensure that the dog was not hurt. Zoe's reaction to her father's pain, and her panic and anger in response to the pain of the fire set up her humanness, but this shooting puts it in question. However, the episode ends with Zoe and Lacy in V-World again. Zoe sits in the center of a windowsill, legs crossed and arms outstretched on either side of her to prop her up. The stained-glass window behind Zoe lets in strobe lighting from a dance club. The lighting offers a mechanized background against which Zoe's newly mechanized (or re-mechanized) self sits. Lacy expresses her disgust at Daniel's actions and asks how Zoe knew that the gun was not loaded. She implies that Zoe never would have shot the dog had she not known, and Zoe confesses, "I didn't know. The robot did" ("Ghosts in the Machine"). She tells Lacy that the robot sensed that the weight of the gun was off by a fraction. The show reassures the viewers that Zoe knew that she was in no danger of killing the dog. It is the Cylon's ability to feel the weight difference that allows Zoe to keep her humanity in the viewer's eyes. Interestingly, it is her inhumanness that helps to ensure her humanness.

While the first test employs Daniel's physical pain and the second test inflicts both physical and psychological pain, the pain evoked in this scene could arguably be identified as Daniel's psychological pain. He is clearly exhausted and pained by the fact that the Cylon/Zoe did not hesitate to shoot the dog. The scene calls attention to the pain that Zoe feels as Daniel continues to count down as well. The expression on Zoe's face – which alternates between cringing and opening her eyes wide in a plea to not have to shoot the dog – reflect that as much as Zoe wants to turn off the “me” inside and let the robot take over, she struggles to do so. The audience stays connected with Zoe in her struggle to stay hidden from her father. We literally see the pain on her face as she is torn between revealing herself and following her father's order. (Zoe believes that her father will never see her as truly his daughter, and if she were to reveal herself, he would merely make her do more inhumane/inhuman things.) We lose connection with her character only for a moment when we think she shot the dog, but the (notably almost immediate) redemption of her character allows the audience to move from the pain she feels in the moment of the shooting to the anger she feels for her father. Zoe tells Lacy that if the gun were loaded she would have turned it on her father. Even in this moment, the audience still identifies with Zoe. We recognize that she acts both rashly and in response to the pain that her father has caused her. Lacy chastises her, and Zoe then pleads with Lacy to get her away from her father's house before she does something she will regret.

“Ghosts in the Machines” does not necessarily take Zoe from machine-like to humanlike in the course of this single episode as “There is Another Sky” does for Tamara. The series lets this transition unfold over a longer period of time, but just as pain helps to signal Tamara's transition away from humanness, pain functions here as a mechanism that reveals Zoe's humanness. The show acknowledges the importance that pain plays in defining humanness in these test scenes. For Daniel,

the robot and Zoe have distinctly different pain thresholds. The series suggests that the Cylons do not have a pain threshold. They merely have a programmed self-preservation function.

In the “Introduction,” I argue for a careful attention to the differences between physical and psychological pain. Yet, so far, I have collapsed the two in this section of the analysis because both kinds of pain serve the same narrative function. They both humanize Zoe’s character. In calling attention to the differences between physical and psychological pain I do not mean to suggest that these terms represent distinct “kinds” of pain or distinct ontological categories that should be classified and separated. Physical pain often comes with what we might traditionally call psychological pain and psychological pain can manifest itself in very physical ways. The distinctions between these two categories (if we can even call them that) break down under any sustained or critical scrutiny.

Rather, in calling attention to the differences between the two I want to highlight the different cultural understandings and representations between them. Despite the fact that many kinds of physical pain are not visibly apparent, physical pain often takes visible form while psychological pain is often understood to be less visible both within representation and within the cultural imaginary. Take the analysis of Tamara’s wound in the first section of this chapter. The physical pain, as embodied by the wound, represents a sense of reality or realness that the series relies on to highlight Tamara’s humanness. The show then subverts that representation through the unclosed, virtual wound. The show frames Zoe’s pain as largely psychological. The tests that Daniel puts her through test her willpower and call up the trauma of her childhood to reveal her humanness. Here, psychological pain serves the narrative function of the episode. Much like Zoe herself cannot be seen, the psychological pain of her trauma cannot be seen. The show uses this particular kind of pain to root out Zoe’s humanness because with its invisibility comes a certain amount of ambiguity.

Non-apparent or invisible pain leaves little outward, visible trace of its presence. As such, its presence often gets called into question.²⁵ This calling-into-question serves as a management technique that retains both the illusory distinction between healthy/unhealthy and disabled/nondisabled bodies and the belief that medicine can objectively find evidence of bodily damage. Because there is no measurement tool to quantify pain, its presence is often met with skepticism from doctors (especially when doctors cannot discern a clear cause, as is often the case with chronic pain).²⁶ Unlike the visible wound, the pain of trauma lurks under the surface and therefore fits the narrative purposes of “Ghost in the Machine,” which draws its suspense from the question that Zoe’s humanness raises. The ambiguity over the “realness” of her pain lends itself to the unfolding narrative because it matches the ambiguity of her humanness. The narrative reassures viewers of Zoe’s humanness by having her articulate the “realness” of her pain to her friend Lacy. At the conclusion of the tests Zoe narrates her pain to Lacy. This narrative technique gives her pain textual form and puts the ambiguity of her humanness to rest.

Caprica calls up different types of pain for Tamara and Zoe’s stories because each type of pain carries with it different cultural connotations and assumptions. The show uses those connotations within the narrative to guide our understanding of the character’s humanness (or lack thereof). Tracking these different uses and the different ways that pain marks these characters’ humanness establishes the importance of excavating the different cultural understandings of pain. Just as pain humanizes Tamara and Zoe differently, we can equally imagine that the differing cultural assumptions about physical pain and psychological pain dehumanize in different ways.

²⁵ For a discussion of questioning that comes with non-apparent disabilities, see Wendell (4). For a discussion of the questions that pain’s non-apparent nature calls up, see Jackson.

²⁶ See Jean Jackson’s first chapter “A Baffling Phenomenon” for more details and for testimony from individuals in pain about the difficulty of speaking to doctors about their pain.

However, if disability studies and philosophers of pain continue to imagine pain as a singular experience, then they will continue to obscure the unique ways in which these differing cultural assumptions work to dehumanize disabled people. And, if that is the case, then any attempt to work against this dehumanization will inevitably fall short.

3.12 **A Ghost Under the Surface**

I laid out both the dominant discourse that positions pain as a dehumanizing experience and the way that pain emerges in cyborg representations as a kind of litmus test for humanness. However, the cyborgs in this chapter arguably remain inhuman. Tamara starts out as an avatar, even if she thinks that she is human. Zoe starts out as a computerized copy of the “real” Zoe, and the show develops her character to approach humanness. Still, Zoe remains a computer amalgamation of data trapped in a machine body. Zoe appears as human-like through Daniel’s tests, and Tamara’s painful expressions mark her humanness (or transition from humanness), but the show does not represent either as definitely human. It does, however, call into question the very category of the human. Unlike *Terminator 2*, where the line between the human and the machine remains rigid and clearly defined, *Caprica* troubles the very distinction between humans and machines through the introduction of Zoe’s technology and the development of Zoe and Tamara’s characters.

The tests that Daniel performs on Zoe call into question his humanity just as much as it does Zoe’s. Similarly, Tamara’s plea for Heracles to go find her father at the end of “There is Another Sky” suggests that while she accepts her cyborg self, she will continue to reach out into the “real” world. Zoe and Tamara’s characters force the viewers to ask what makes a human, human. The show arguably sets up Zoe (and to a lesser degree Tamara) as the most identifiable characters of the series and asks viewers to connect with them in their struggle to determine where/how they fit in the world. The series ends after only one season and leaves Tamara’s story largely unresolved. Tamara and Zoe

work together to destroy New Cap City and rebuild it into what they call their fortress, a place of beauty. The narrative leaves Tamara in this fortress, and the last several episodes focus entirely on Zoe's character, who eventually reconciles with Daniel (and her mother). The final episode suggests that Zoe and her parents will work together to eventually build Zoe a more human-looking body so that she can enter into the real world.

The final scenes of the series function like a fast forward and lay out the narrative trajectory that the show would have taken had it not be canceled. The Cylons become fully integrated into society in just a few years. They work in construction, as nannies and as police officers. Zoe gets her "real" body and moves through the world as a "skin job" or a Cylon that looks human. The series closes with an interview with Daniel on a local radio station. He fields questions from a reporter asking if they are not heading toward a future where humans will be so integrated with Cylons that they will begin to fall in love and want to get married. Daniel assures the world that people understand the fundamental difference between humans and machines. The narrative then transitions to a scene with Cylons and Zoe sitting in church, listening to a sermon about the importance of recognizing that Cylons are just as much human as humans are.

This final scene foreshadows the world that leads into *Battlestar Galactica* where the Cylons rebel against their human masters and claim their freedom. *Caprica* asks viewers to consider whether or not a machine can be human if it feels, acts and thinks that it is human. Even in the foreshadowed world, Zoe appears as an exception next to the other Cylons. She appears most human-like not just because she wears the outer skin of a human, but also because of her

ability to feel pain. Where the machine Cylons cannot feel pain, the “skin jobs” can (as we learn in *Battlestar Galactica*).²⁷

In many ways, disability has served as the ghost lurking beneath the surface of this chapter. Neither Tamara nor Zoe are disabled. I do not directly engage with representations of disability in *Caprica* (though there are some). However, the series uses pain in a way that I find particularly informative for disability studies scholars. In the first chapter, I argue that disability studies needs to find a way to challenge the exclusion of pain from the realm of human experiences. Contemporary (U.S.) culture constructs pain as something not only exceptional but something impossible for humans to experience (for long) because of the advances of modern medicine. In order to make room for narratives of pain, we must counter this belief. If we take *Caprica* as an example, we might start this challenge by first deconstructing the category of the human to remake it into a more inclusive (and painful category).

The figures of Tamara and Zoe present narrative examples where pain challenges us to open up our understanding of what it means to be human rather than close it off, as the *Time* magazine articles effectively do. Like Haraway’s vision of the cyborg, the women both – in perhaps different ways – suggest an understanding of humanness as increasingly expanding to incorporate new amalgamations of human and machine. Rather than eliding pain, as Siebers charges Haraway’s version of the cyborg with doing (*Disability Theory*), *Caprica*’s cyborgs become human through their experiences of pain. In this way, so too might those living in pain challenge the understanding of the contemporary human as one who lives (who is compelled to

²⁷The series first hints at the Cylons ability to feel pain in the pilot episode when Caprica 6 (one of the Cylons who look human) murders a baby and we see her pained expression (*Battlestar Galactica: The Miniseries*). However, Cavil, another human-appearing Cylon, directly discusses the pain of being shot left for dead by a human (“Exodus Part 2,” 2009).

live) without pain. Yet, as instructive as these representations might be, the question remains: how do we begin to effect this change?

To begin to answer that, I will turn to a representation of a disabled character within *Battlestar Galactica (BSG)*. I look at the ways that *BSG* uses the pain that comes with a character's disability as a narrative device to first align that character with a broader sentiment and then individualize that character's experience. I look to *Battlestar Galactica* not only because – being within the same universe as *Caprica* – it similarly calls into question what it means to be human. I seek to uncover places where the individualized narrative of pain and the deployment of pain as a narrative device begin to break down in an effort to return to the above question: how do we re-engage with pain against the dominant cultural narratives.

4. PAIN MOTIVATES: DISABILITY, QUEERNESS AND A MILITARY COUP IN *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*

This chapter examines how the SciFi show *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*) (2004-2009) uses pain within a narrative about a human rather than a cyborg. Much like *Caprica* (which was a spinoff/prequel of *Battlestar Galactica*), *BSG* troubles the very distinction between the human and the machine. I look at the series because, while it offers an example of the humanized cyborg, it exemplifies the use of pain as a narrative device to convey meaning on screen, and it challenges the very category of the human. The show features a disabled character that experiences significant pain after his leg is amputated. The series uses the progression of pain as a mechanism to track Lt. Felix Gaeta's increasing alienation from the rest of the fleet. I argue that *BSG* both exemplifies the narrative convention of using pain as a tool of character development (i.e. marker of humanness) and challenges the trend that I have been laying out by calling into question the effectiveness of pain as a narrative tool. I trace the way the show uses Gaeta's pain to trouble the rigid divide between the human and the inhuman, but I ultimately ask whether this troubling actually opens up space to speak about and reengage with pain.

I will first examine the narrative arc within what I will call the "main narrative" of the series (the episodes featured on SciFi channel as part of the series of *Battlestar Galactica*). Within this narrative, Gaeta gets his leg shot and eventually amputated, setting him on a narrative trajectory not unfamiliar to disability scholars. He dons a prosthetic leg and goes from being a loyal military man to an embittered and mutinous officer who leads a military coup and eventually dies for his disloyalty.²⁸ *BSG* uses disability as a form of characterization to mark Gaeta first as a symbol of

²⁸ Gaeta exemplifies the "Obsessive Avenger" stereotype that Martin Norden lays out in *Cinema of Isolation*. He "suffers" an injury, which inevitably causes him to turn bitter and seek revenge against those that he perceives did him wrong.

fleet-wide discontent.²⁹ By highlighting Gaeta's pain, the series then calls up broader cultural understandings of physical pain as an individual and isolating experience to separate Gaeta from the fleet and individualize his motives for starting the coup. This individualization process, I argue, locates Gaeta's motives firmly within his bodily pain and allows the series to neatly wrap up the conflict by effectively removing Gaeta from the narrative.

Meanwhile, situated safely within the confines of a tangential web series called *Battlestar Galactica: Face of the Enemy* (2008), two queer love stories involving Gaeta unfold. The webisodes aired on the SciFi website in the middle of the fourth season, between when Gaeta sustains his injury and the development of the mutiny arc. During the ten webisodes, the web series reveals that Gaeta is involved with another male officer (Hoshi) and a (female) Cylon. Despite his name (pronounced Gay-ta), the main narrative of *BSG* makes no reference to Gaeta's sexuality (either in the three and a half seasons leading up to the military coup or in the episodes composing this mutiny arc). This "queer narrative," however, complicates the depiction that *BSG* lays out in the main narrative of the series by offering an alternative explanation for Gaeta's actions and role within the coup. The webisodes suggest that Gaeta starts the military coup because of betrayal and sexual confusion rather than disability.

Both of these narratives take place against the broader anxiety over the meaning of humanness. These narratives illuminate the use of pain as a tool to mark character development and offer a way to think beyond or move beyond the representation of pain as intricately tied up with and codetermining of humanness. I explore the way that both *BSG* and *Face of the Enemy*

²⁹ Emily Russell (2011) details the pervasive use of the disabled body as a signifier of problems within the social body or the body politic. See her introductory chapter for more information, and for a historical look at the construction of the social body see also Mary Poovey's (1995) *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830 – 1864*.

utilize the pain of Gaeta's disability and his queer sexuality (respectively) to accomplish the same narrative function. Each explains Gaeta's role as the leader of a military coup, ostensibly offering a reason or justification for his disloyal actions. Reading these two narratives together, I argue, undermines the use of pain/disability and sexuality as narrative explanations in either of the singular narratives. Viewing both layers of the narrative presents a tangentially queer, disabled character that arguably exceeds the stock characterization offered in each individual narrative.

4.1 **Queer/Crip Textual Practices**

Narratives that depict disabled queer characters often either use disability as a mere extension of and metaphor for queer sexual difference (see Davidson 2008) or use queer disabled characters to shore up able-bodied heterosexuality (see McRuer 2006). Carrie Sandahl (2003) lays out the practices of queering and criping in her article "Queering the Crip and Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." She suggests we might queer crip images and crip queer images. Sandahl states, "[q]ueering describes the practice of putting a spin on mainstream representations to reveal latent queer subtexts" while "[c]ripping spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions" ("Queering the Crip" 37). Together, queering the crip and/or crippling the queer is an (arguably hopeful) practice both exposing the able-bodied and heterosexual assumptions underlying representations and practices and looking for points of rupture embedded in the often politically whitewashed characterizations of plucky crips and unthreatening queers; it is a practice of reading against the network television and mainstream film versions of what Robert McRuer calls "flexible heterosexism and ableism" that *tolerate* disability and/or queerness on

screen as long as they serve a function for the straight, able-bodied characters and narratives (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 16-28).

In what follows, I “crip” *BSG*’s use of disability by examining how the show constructs Lt. Felix Gaeta as the embodiment of broader social tensions *and* personalizes Gaeta’s motives for starting a military coup. I argue that for disability to function in this dual way (as both an embodiment of broader sentiments and as an intensely personal motivation), the series must first invest Gaeta with the tensions of the fleet and then divest him of this broader significance through a process of individualization. This chapter specifically examines the role that pain plays in this individualization process. I then “queer” *Face of the Enemy*’s use of what I will call a (sort of) queer sexuality to justify Gaeta’s mutinous actions to argue that the show introduces these relationships to personalize his motives.³⁰ Finally, I examine the two narratives together to argue that the addition of *Face of the Enemy* to the *BSG*-verse signals a place where stock characterizations of disability begin to breakdown. By examining this breakdown process, I argue, we can get at the heart of why pain functions as such a powerful narrative tool.

Robert McRuer’s discussion of “flexible heterosexuality” and ability guides my reading of Gaeta’s queer and disabled characterization. McRuer suggests that able-bodied heterosexual subjects – within a postmodern landscape and following liberation movements of the 60’s and 70’s – no longer constitute their subjectivity in direct opposition to disabled and queer subject positions (*Crip Theory* 18). Rather, the contemporary heterosexual and able-bodied person must be *flexible* enough in their subjectivity to embrace (or at least tolerate) queerness and disability.

³⁰ By this designation I do not mean to suggest that “queer” stands for something singular that this representation approximates. As Giffney and Hird explain, “provisionality characterizes uses of the world ‘queer’ and ambivalence marks attachments to it as an identity category” (4). In other words, queer is always already a qualified term. Giffney and Hird go on to suggest a focus on what queer *does* instead than what queer *is*. In that sense, I use the qualifier “sort of” as a means of marking the limits of what the representation *does* rather than an approximation of a particular identity or coherent category.

This flexibility manifests itself in representation through the inclusion of disabled and queer characters. McRuer suggests, however, that this flexibility not only remains a constitutive force of heterosexuality and ability, but it also works to construct new forms of heterosexism and ableism (*Crip Theory* 18-19). Much like Foucault argues docile bodies are preconditions for capitalism (Rabinow 17), the flexibility that McRuer describes plays an essential role in neoliberalism and neoliberal policies.³¹ Foucault identifies docile bodies as bodies that can be manipulated and molded, allowing them to be more easily deployed by power structures (as in the way that the military trains soldiers) (“Docile Bodies” 182). Similarly, neoliberalism requires flexible bodies and flexible subjects to facilitate productivity, efficiency and flexibility.

McRuer argues that neoliberalism uniquely in-corporates differences (like queerness and disability) (31). He sees neoliberalism’s flexibility at work in the film *As Good as it Gets*, and he suggests that the film includes queerness and disability as a way of calling up and then solving the crisis that both queer and disabled subjects provoke. In other words, neoliberalism uses flexibility as a tool to optimize its own expansion and effectiveness. For McRuer, flexible heterosexism and ableism reiterate the dominance of heterosexuality and ability through the invocation of the difference against which they are defined.

The way that flexible heterosexuality and ability functions also echoes Agamben’s discussion of *bios* and *zoe* from the first chapter. Agamben identifies a false binary between *bios* and *zoe*, and he argues that this binary serves to obscure the ways that *zoe* has come under the domain of *bios*. Similarly, McRuer suggests that neoliberal policies of inclusion might actually be more repressive (or at least repressive in different ways) to queer people and people with

³¹ See also Lisa Duggan’s *Twilight of Equality* (2003) for a description of neoliberalism as a cultural, political and economic system. Duggan specifically argues that neoliberalism relies on cultural and identity politics (xii).

disabilities because they obfuscate the exclusionary practices at work amidst (and because of) this flexibility. The *Time* feature stories on pain discussed in the first chapter exemplify this trend. They make visible a previously invisible disability, chronic pain. The very presence of a *Time* cover stories suggests that chronic pain has reached a certain level of cultural capital (enough to get on the cover of an internationally circulating magazine). However, the visibility that the magazine brings functions to make those with chronic pain less apparent, less credible and all the more subject to medicalization.

The flexibility that McRuer describes calls for us to be cautious in the launch forward to reengage with pain. I have argued throughout this text that rather than being unrepresentable, representations of pain permeate our cultural landscape. These representations are arguably a kind of flexible inclusion that serves to police the borders between ability/disability and the human/inhuman. *BSG*'s representation of pain does not depict Gaeta's pain as an entirely dehumanizing experience, as other representations of disabled people in pain do. In fact, the series provides an example – in Gaeta if not in other characters – that delinks pain from humanness all together. Yet, pain still functions within the narrative to reiterate disability stereotypes, guide viewers toward an easy acceptance of the disabled character's (satisfying) death and mark the borders between the human and the inhuman.

In other words, *BSG* exemplifies flexible ableism at work on-screen. The series appears to challenge the representational link between pain and humanness by featuring pain as just another part of disability, but it actually uses Gaeta's pain to facilitate an ableist politics and to differentiate between the humans and the Cylons. In keeping with Sandahl's project of queering the crip and crippling the queer, however, the production history of the series, as well as the intertextuality of the queer and crip narratives, offer a way to work against this flexibility. Or at

the very least, they offer a potential way out of the ever adaptable, ever changing, ever expanding cultural politics of neoliberalism

4.2 **Battlestar Galactica: Background and Bullets**

Battlestar Galactica depicts a dystopic, post-apocalyptic future where humans face near annihilation at the hands of machines called Cylons. The Cylons wage a surprise nuclear attack on the humans and force the few survivors to flee their planetary homes and seek refuge in space. These survivors form a makeshift fleet, which is protected by the only remaining military ship, the *Battlestar Galactica*. The series tells the story of their journey through space as they hide from the pursuing Cylons and search for a mythical planet called Earth where they can make a new home. There are twelve different Cylon models (and multiple copies of each model). Part of the show's drama comes from the suspense of uncovering the identity of the Cylons, some of who reside undetected in the human fleet. Adding to the suspense, some of the Cylons are programmed to think that they are human. The narrative tension derived from this plot structure provides the background to the mutiny narrative arc. A remake of the markedly less successful 1978-1979 television show with the same name, *Battlestar Galactica* aired a total of 73 episodes.³² It garnered (and continues to garner) scholarly, critical and fan acclaim for its gritty realism, sharp writing and dedication to creating complex characters (the use of disability as characterization notwithstanding).³³

At its simplest, *BSG* uses Gaeta's disability as a "material metaphor" for the tensions the fleet feels over the proposed alliance with the Cylons (Mitchell and Snyder 48). Gaeta's injury

³² This number does not include *Battlestar Galactica: The Miniseries* (2003). IMDB lists the miniseries as separate from other 73 episodes and for consistency sake I adopt this demarcation as well.

³³ For critical essays on *BSG* see Potter and Marshall as well as Steiff and Tamplin. To convey the extent of its popular acclaim: The series was nominated for 3 Primetime Emmys, named the top television series of 2005 by *Time* magazine, took home the prestigious Peabody Award in 2006 and received an additional 22 awards. All in all the show was nominated for a total of 46 awards.

and the subsequent prosthetic leg he uses depict the painful coming together of humans and machines. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder explain that narratives use disability because, “[p]hysical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a ‘tangible’ body to textual abstractions; we term this metaphorical use of disability the *materiality of metaphor*” (47-8). Gaeta’s injury gives form to a textually abstract anxiety that a proposed alliance between the humans and a group of Rebel Cylons (who separate from the other Cylons after a civil war) induces in the human fleet. The proposed alliance comes after three seasons of attacks, an apocalypse and a brutal military occupation, all at the hand of the Cylons. Therefore, the alliance proves hard for the characters (and the audience) to accept. However, the military and civilian leaders believe that the alliance offers the best chance of survival. Gaeta becomes the figurehead of those who believe otherwise.

Gaeta sustains the injury that causes his disability in the episode where the alliance is first proposed, setting up the correlation between his disability and the alliance. A crew of military officers separated from the rest of the fleet search for an alternative route to Earth. Tensions run high among this frustrated crew, eager to return to the fleet. A Cylon boards the ship and proposes that the humans and Cylons work together. He promises the humans help finding Earth in exchange for their help fixing a broken ship. The ship’s captain, Starbuck, agrees, but the rest of the crew demands that they return to Galactica. A fight ensues, and as tensions boil over, the crew attempts to relieve Starbuck of command. Gaeta, supporting the rest of the crew, tries to direct the ship back to the Galactica, but a crewmember loyal to Starbuck shoots him in the leg to stop him (“Faith” (4.6) 2009).

BSG draws out this shooting scene in order to visually embody the damage the conflict causes. When the gun goes off, the camera cuts to show the gaping hole in Gaeta’s leg, the protruding bone, the oozing blood and the frantic attempt to patch him up. Emily Russell argues

that narratives often frame the body (specifically relying on blood and pain) as a conduit to the real (70). The visceral/visual representation of Gaeta's injury conveys the seriousness of his wounds and thereby the seriousness of the conflict. Moreover, lingering on Gaeta's wounds allows the camera to redirect the viewer's gaze onto Gaeta's body. While the preceding sequence of camera shots cut from Starbuck to the dissenting crew members in quick succession, allowing the tension to build between them, the camera shots focusing on the wound cut between various focal points on Gaeta's body. The site of the tension becomes Gaeta's body rather than the less tangible tensions between Starbuck and the rest of the crew.

As the crew stabilizes Gaeta's leg, the tension dissipates. Several crewmembers move Gaeta (off-screen) to a bed. Starbuck then admits her mistake. She separates herself from the crew by taking a smaller ship to the Cylons, which allows her to accept the alliance but not risk the crew. Her decision temporarily tables the conflict that the alliance poses. Much like Gaeta's removal from the visual field of the screen, the immediate impact of the proposed alliance gets removed as Starbuck sequesters the "threat" of the alliance to a single ship; a threat that now visually resides within Gaeta's body. After Starbuck, the separated crew and the Rebel Cylons return to the fleet, *BSG* solidifies the link between Gaeta's injury and the alliance with a series of cuts between Gaeta in the hospital area of the ship and negotiations between the Rebel Cylons and humans. The first sequence back aboard the *Galactica* shows medics rolling Gaeta into the hospital area of the ship. The camera then cuts directly to the Rebel Cylon leader sitting before the Admiral (the ranking military officer) and the President (the civilian leader). She tells them of the Cylon civil war that fractured their fleet and offers a truce. The show cuts between the dramatic tensions of the hospital room as viewers wait to see whether Gaeta will "lose" his leg and the less visible tension of the conversation discussing the alliance. By paralleling these two

scenes, the show gives the viewer a visual marker through which to read the unfolding drama between the Cylons and the human leaders.

BSG positions Gaeta's amputated leg as a metaphoric amputation of the human fleet, which loses an essential part of its humanness (its distinctiveness from the machines) by integrating with the Cylons. Much like the integration of the Cylons into the human fleet, the site where Gaeta's leg meets his prosthetic causes significant pain. The series uses that pain as a way of giving materiality to the struggles that follow the alliance. *BSG's* representation of Gaeta's leg reflects both Siebers's and Erevelles's critique of Haraway's cyborg theory. The show highlights the pain that the prosthetic causes and draws attention to the materiality of the prosthetic experience. However, rather than challenging the myth of the power of the cyborg, the power of pain or even the representation of disabled characters in pain, the series incorporates Gaeta's pain into the narrative in a way that uses that pain to further both a stereotypical portrayal of disability and a naturalized understanding of pain as a highly individual and corporeal experience.

Schleifer (2009) suggests that "pain [is] the most corporeal sensation, precisely because with it...there is nothing but body" (Schleifer 150).³⁴ The series invokes pain as the ultimate corporeal experience in order to work through the less tangible pain of the alliance by transferring it into corporeal pain within Gaeta's amputated leg. However, this transfer is not as simple as setting Gaeta up as a material metaphor and then letting that metaphor run its course. Rather, the series deploys specific cultural assumptions about pain – that it is a deeply individual and personal experience (see Scarry 1989) – in order to both set up Gaeta as the embodiment of

³⁴ See also Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) and Jean Jackson's "Camp Pain": *Talking with Chronic Pain Patients* (2000).

less tangible pain *and* to individualize Gaeta's motivations for the mutiny arc. The narrative can only resolve the conflict that the alliance proposes by locating the conflict entirely within Gaeta's character. The show accomplishes this precisely through featuring a disabled character in pain on screen.

4.3 **A Military Coup: Corporeal Pain/Corporal Punishment**

Gaeta's job as a communications officer makes him the literal voice of the fleet. For the three and a half seasons prior to the Galactica mutiny Gaeta has vocalized the status of the fleet. He tells the Admiral (and the viewers) when Cylons approach and if there is a problem aboard Galactica (or other ships in the fleet). His position makes him a natural representative of the fleet's temperament. Nicole Markotic and Sally Chivers (2010) argue, "the disabled body often exists primarily as a metaphor for a body that is unable to [move forward]" (2). Gaeta's disabled body represents not just the inability of *a body* to move forward, but also the inability of *bodies* to move forward. However, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson tells us, the disabled body stands in opposition to other, normative bodies. She writes "the very act of representing corporeal otherness places [disabled characters] in a frame that highlights their difference from ostensibly normate characters" (Garland-Thomson 10). Garland-Thomson suggests that this marked difference from the normate or able-bodied (i.e. normal) characters makes iconic disabled characters like Captain Ahab and Tiny Tim easily identifiable and memorable. In order to construct the mutiny as widespread and Gaeta the representative of widespread feelings, the series has to work against prevailing notions that disability signifies a very personal and private

tragedy.³⁵ For as much as *BSG* links the tensions of the alliance to Gaeta's body, as the mutiny plot begins to unfold, the show deemphasizes his disability in order to deliberately link his feelings with others in the fleet.

Anne Waldschmidt (2005) describes the (re)integration of disabled people back into society as a process of flexible normalization. She argues, "Flexible normalization strategies allow people to leave boundary areas of abnormality and return to the center of society" (Waldschmidt 195). Rather than signaling the achievement of liberationist politics, Waldschmidt suggests that this normalization merely increases the responsibility of the newly incorporated individual to adhere to the standards of normality. Like McRuer, she advocates for a more nuanced understanding of how politics of inclusion play out and a greater attention to the effect that this normalization has. Applying both McRuer and Waldschmidt's works to *BSG*'s representation of Gaeta's pain, I first describe the way that the series incorporates or aligns Gaeta's pain with the other characters in order to unpack how this alignment facilitates the show's individualization of Gaeta's motives.

The show configures Gaeta's pain as the fleet's pain most strikingly in a scene between him and Starbuck. The two sit in a mess hall with a crowd of people around and almost instantly begin to quarrel. Starbuck admonishes Gaeta for his "bad attitude," which she blames on his disability. She says, "fifty billion people are dead and I'm supposed to give a frak about your leg?" ("A Disquiet Follows My Soul" (4.12)). Gaeta responds by just smiling and glossing over the comment. He tells Starbuck that soon there will be a reckoning for those that collude with the Cylons. This response aligns Gaeta's disability with the coming reckoning/mutiny but does so in

³⁵ For more on the social perception of disability as an individual problem and personal tragedy see Longmore ("Screening Stereotypes" 34), Norden (*Cinema of Isolation* 4) or Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (*Extraordinary Bodies* 22).

a way that minimizes Gaeta's personal anger. He barely reacts to her repeated references to his disability throughout the exchange but keeps returning back to the topic of the alliance. Starbuck verbally identifies Gaeta's anger with this leg in order for Gaeta to disavow this reading with his continued focus on the fleet's anger over the alliance.

Moreover, Gaeta remains seated throughout the exchange. The only visual sign of his disability in the entire scene is when he sits down at the table. Even then, the camera shows his crutches only briefly. We never see his prosthetic or his leg and as soon as he sits he discards the crutches under his chair. For the most part, all corporeal traces of disability from this scene vanish. As Starbuck walks out of the room (followed by only two people), the rest of the crew remains and looks to Gaeta. He tells one of them to shut the door and the scene ends with the camera looking in on the group as the door closes. Ronald D. Moore indicates that the director carefully constructs this scene in order to convey just how widespread the frustration that Gaeta represents is (Podcast Commentary on "A Disquiet Follows My Soul"). I would add that the director accomplishes this by deliberately framing Gaeta in such a way as to minimize his disability.

Similarly, in a scene where Gaeta sits in a meeting with the leading military officers discussing the integration of Cylon technology into the human fleet (a meeting that Gaeta arguably would not otherwise be part of), *BSG* downplays Gaeta's physical presence and instead highlights his voice in the scene, constructing him as the voice of the people. The Admiral, his son, two Cylons and a man married to a Cylon discuss a deal that the Cylons propose. They offer to give the humans their technology in exchange for citizenship status within the fleet.³⁶ The

³⁶ Though clearly not part of this paper, this citizenship narrative offers an interesting and complex critique of U.S. discourses and debates about citizenship within the context of 'illegal' and 'alien' immigration.

camera looks in on the meeting, focusing on the Admiral and the other military officers who discuss the request and the resistance within fleet that they will surely face. Gaeta sits in the background of the scene. He interjects into the conversation only to express his disbelief that the Admiral even considers the proposal. Like the scene in the mess hall, the camera features Gaeta primarily from the waist up, disembodied him in a way that almost removes his disability from the frame.

Thematically, *BSG* complicates rigid lines between humans and Cylons. Characters whom we recognize as human for three seasons suddenly turn out to be Cylons, and Cylons in the series often act more “human” than some of the human characters. The mutiny arc develops in a way that reiterates this overall thematic message. Gaeta stands for an antiquated view of human/Cylon difference that the series wants to move beyond. Therefore, for as much as the series invests in constructing Gaeta as the voice of the fleet, it equally divests him of that symbolic meaning in order to advance the narrative. The series accomplishes this by refocusing on Gaeta’s corporeal body, and it uses disability to do so. As the mutiny takes shape, the camera frames Gaeta’s prosthetics with low angle and close-up shots in order to draw our attention to Gaeta’s disability and create a visual correlation between it and the mutiny plot.

We see this most clearly in a scene where Gaeta officially acts on his (and the fleets) angst. He meets with a man named Tom Zarek, a malcontent criminal/revolutionary turned Vice-President whom the show constructs as the embodiment of bad politics, power hungry behavior and morally ambiguous ethics.³⁷ The meeting between the men opens with a shot of Zarek washing his hands. The camera faces him as he talks about the costs and consequences of a revolution. Zarek steps away from the sink to reveal Gaeta, who sits on a chair in the center of a

³⁷ Simply pairing Gaeta with Zarek signifies to the viewer the danger that Gaeta and the fleet are in.

prison cell (where Zarek is currently being held for his own efforts to resist the alliance). At first, the viewer sees Gaeta in profile and Zarek stands, blocking Gaeta's prosthetic from view. As Gaeta replies to Zarek, saying, "I've thought about the consequences," Zarek steps away to reveal Gaeta's prosthetic ("A Disquiet Follows My Soul").

The director visually reveals Gaeta's disability in this moment in order to establish Gaeta's leg as both a consequence of the alliance that has already been paid and as a tool of characterization that marks Gaeta as the figurehead of the mutiny who will carry out the consequences of aligning with the Cylons. Furthermore, Gaeta's prosthetic limb angles toward the camera while his other leg angles away. This makes his prosthetic loom disproportionately large and draws the viewer's eye to it. The menacing portrayal of Gaeta's prosthesis here works to belie the menacing nature of Zarek and Gaeta's meeting. It also serves to reintegrate Gaeta's body into the mutiny narrative. His disability becomes the foremost important visual marker of the scene.

As the mutiny sequence unfolds, *BSG* increasingly highlights Gaeta's corporeality by highlighting his pain. In a series of scenes interspersed throughout the *Galactica* mutiny arc, Gaeta reaches down into the leather attachment of his prosthetic (which unrealistically fits so loosely that he can reach his hand inside) to scratch the flaking and irritated skin. The series uses these moments of expressed pain to signal Gaeta's increasing isolation from the fleet. For instance, before the mutiny develops, Gaeta sits in the ship's hospital waiting for the doctor. The camera closes in on Gaeta's leg at the amputation site. He scratches and winces at what we visually see as the cracked and red stump. The camera, however, does not linger on the leg. Rather, it moves up to frame Gaeta above the waist in order to draw focus on his verbal complaint that the leather attachment for his prosthetic chaffs and hurts. When the doctor's

assistant, Layne Ishay, tells him that he will have to wait because the doctor is busy treating two Cylons, Gaeta expresses his frustration with the doctor's priority ("A Disquiet Follows My Soul").

The Galactica command (represented by the doctor) ignores a human's pain in order to treat (read: accept, help and comfort) the Cylons. In response to Ishay, Gaeta lists the problems of the fleet, saying sarcastically, "The fleets a mess. But hey, gotta make sure the Cylons are taken care of" ("A Disquiet Follows My Soul"). He chides the doctor for ignoring his pain, and the show plays up this ignored pain to show Gaeta's growing discontent. However, this scene only briefly shows Gaeta's leg. It focuses primarily on Gaeta's expressed pain and Ishay's response to it. She empathizes with him and apologizes for both his suffering and the inattention of the doctor. Ishay witnesses Gaeta's pain and frustration, validating it and reaffirming Gaeta's position as spokesperson for the fleet. Sara Ahmed contends that the act of witnessing pain grants it "the status of an event, a happening in the world, rather than just the 'something'" that the body feels (29-30). Visually representing this act of witnessing, the show calls forth Gaeta's pain into an event that Gaeta and Ishay share. Gaeta's pain happens not just within his body but also within the world of the show. However, as the mutiny develops, the series decreases the empathy reflected back at him, increasingly containing Gaeta's pain within his body.

Early in the mutiny, Gaeta and Zarek walk down the hall with a group of armed officers. The viewer sees Zarek in the background looking with concern when Gaeta stops to rub his leg. The other officers pause at Gaeta's wince. The men take visual notice of his pain but do not verbally acknowledging it as Ishay did. Still, the other mutineers reflect Gaeta's discomfort back to him and call forth (if slightly less prominently) his pain into the world and into the moment of the mutiny. However, the camera pulls back from this scene to reveal all of Gaeta body as he

lumbers down the hall, wincing with each step. By the end of the mutiny, the camera entirely isolates Gaeta's expressions of pain from the rest of the crew. Alone in the Admiral's quarters (which for this brief moment belong to Gaeta), he sits down and unbuckles the attachment for his prosthetic. Gaeta cringes as he removes the metal leg. The viewer takes in his isolation through seeing him alone with his pain. Cultural understandings of pain configure it as an intensely personal experience, and the show capitalizes on these assumptions within this scene.³⁸ The camera pulls back to show the empty room around Gaeta, accentuating his isolation in the scene.

The fleet would not be able to move forward, more united than ever, if Gaeta ends the mutiny serving the same metaphoric purpose that he does when it starts. When Admiral Adama – held prisoner and awaiting execution – regains control of his captors, he gives them the option of joining him in retaking command. With the exception of one character (who symbolically refuses) they all join Adama in a march back to the command center. The quick shift in allegiance reflects the reunification of the fleet. Individualizing Gaeta's action makes this shift both possible and plausible. The more attention that the episodes call to Gaeta's leg pain, the more the audience associates this pain as the source of his actions rather than recognizing him as the symbolic representation of the human's losses.

Admiral Adama and the supportive mob marching behind him storm the command center and re-take control of the *Galactica*. The Admiral orders Gaeta and Zarek taken away and executed.³⁹ As Gaeta awaits execution, he smiles and talks easily about his life before joining *Galactica* and before the Cylon attack. He expresses resignation, saying to another character "I'm

³⁸ See Tobin Siebers ("In the Name of Pain") for a more specific discussion of the ways that cultural discourses configure pain as an individual problem.

³⁹ I have refrained from discussing Zarek's role in the mutiny for brevity's sake. However, it is worth noting that the show carefully separates Gaeta and Zarek, at times showing Gaeta adamantly opposed to Zarek's methods (especially when Zarek order the entire Quorum executed). This separation allows Gaeta to remain a sympathetic character even as the viewer may disagree with his actions.

fine with how things turned out” (“Blood on the Scales”).⁴⁰ Gaeta appears calm even as the scene cuts to him and Zarek tied to two chairs facing a firing squad. Gaeta looks down at his leg in his final moments before death. The camera cuts to reveal his cracked and flaking stump. The director features Gaeta without his prosthesis here to signify a moment of entirely “human” corporeality. Gaeta sheds the (painful) metallic prosthesis in death, highlighting his anti-Cylon position. After lingering on his leg, the camera pans back up to Gaeta, who says, “It stopped” (“Blood on the Scales”). The gunshots go off as the screen cuts to black.

We can read the significance of Gaeta’s final utterance on several levels. One might suggest that the pain stops because the anxiety that it signifies has been exercised. “It stopped” simply marks that resolution of the conflict. Gaeta’s leg, free of the painful prosthesis, stops hurting and the fleet stops hurting, having now fully embraced the alliance. While this certainly resonates with the construction of Gaeta’s leg as a metaphor, a fuller reading locates Gaeta’s death within a broader context of disabled characters either being cured or killed at the end of narratives.⁴¹ The series works so hard to divest Gaeta from this symbolism that his final utterance solidifies the process of individualization by suggesting that, for Gaeta, death is the only relief from his anguish. Gaeta’s loss (of limb) and the loss of Gaeta satisfy the need to acknowledge the “cost” of the alliance in a way that the viewers feel satisfied with. The show acknowledges the weight of the decision to align with the enemy through Gaeta’s death.⁴² And by ultimately constructing Gaeta’s motivations as personally situated within his disability, the viewer feels

⁴⁰ Gaeta utters these words to Gaius Baltar. Baltar’s significance in this scene should not go without mention, as he plays a morally suspect character throughout the show. Gaeta almost kills Baltar (twice) because of Gaius’ morally questionable actions. Yet, in the end, Baltar sits with Gaeta and shows him empathy, marking Gaeta’s fall from grace (so to speak), but also softening this scene with an air of intimacy between the men.

⁴¹ See Longmore for a discussion of the “Better dead than disabled” sentiment in film (137).

⁴² While Zarek died along with Gaeta, the show asks us to see his death as justifiable because Zarek murdered the Quorum (the show’s version of Senators) in an effort to consolidate his power. Viewers accept his death as punishment for this act, whereas we are meant to read Gaeta’s death as tragic but necessary.

good about a death that brings him relief. Disability (and the inevitable death that follows) allows the story to neatly wrap up. All in all, if *BSG* provides an illustrative example of *how* the narrative use of disability works through the representational bind that emerges when a disabled character individually embodies broader social conflicts, Gaeta's disability ultimately appears onscreen as just another narrative device and/or example of stock characterization.

This seemingly inclusive representation of a disabled character in pain, rather than breaking down disability stereotypes, actually works to facilitate the same ableist politics that manage the "problem" of disability off screen and out of the narrative. *BSG* does not depict pain as an utterly dehumanizing experience that drives the disabled character to seek death as in *Million Dollar Baby* or *Whose Life is it Anyway*.⁴³ His pain does not even work to shore up his humanity as it does for Zoe. Instead, the series represents Gaeta's pain as just a part of his life with a newly acquired disability. On the surface, the show seems to normalize Gaeta's pain within the narrative. However, the series actually integrates Gaeta's pain within the narrative to affect a process of individualization that locates his motives for the coup firmly within him and his body. Moreover, the mutiny arc leads to the same end as *Million Dollar Baby* and *Whose Life is it Anyway*. The narrative resolves the problem of disability through death. *BSG*'s use of Gaeta's pain signals the limits of any simple reincorporation or reengagement with pain as part of the disability experience, especially within a neoliberal context of flexible ableism that will just as easily utilize that pain for an ableist politics

⁴³ These films both highlight the psychological pain over the physical pain, however the difference between the films that I want to draw out does not come down to the type of pain. Rather, it comes down to the process through which the characters end up dead.

4.4 (Sort of) Queer Love

The (Emmy nominated) webisode series *Battlestar Galactica: Face of the Enemy* aired on the Sci-Fi website between December 12, 2008, and January 12, 2009, (after Gaeta's injury but before the mutiny arc). Much like episodes from a television show, the webisodes aired serially during this time. *Face of the Enemy* features Gaeta and several other characters from *BSG* and serves as an extra-textual narrative connected to the *BSG*-verse. Most simplistically, *Face of the Enemy* presents two love stories that complicate Gaeta's disability as motivation for the coup by presenting an alternative narrative explanation for his actions. Notably, while the webisodes aired between the first half of season four (marked 4.0 on the DVD) and the second half (4.5), it was written and filmed after the entire fourth season had been filmed (Podcast Commentary on "A Disquiet Follows My Soul"). The writers and producers of the series fail to comment on the reason for the addition, but the content of the webisodes suggests that it fills a narrative gap left by *BSG*. *Face of the Enemy* evidences the inadequacy of disability to account for a major character shift. Gaeta transitions from a dutiful colonial officer and generally likable supporting character to a mutineer whose death the viewers easily accept. Although *BSG* makes no direct reference to the webisodes, these love stories infuse Gaeta's actions with the ghost of an alternative explanation for his mutinous actions that undermines the function disability plays.⁴⁴ However, like all ghosts, *Face of the Enemy* is haunted with its own stereotypical conventions, as it constructs Gaeta's queer sexuality as little more than an opportunistic narrative device (similar to its use of disability) to further individual Gaeta's action.

⁴⁴ There is no way to know how many *BSG* viewers saw the webisodes (or when they viewed them). The links to the webisodes are still live on the SciFi website, and viewers can also access them through *Battlestar Galactica: Face of the Enemy*'s IMDB page (at the time of writing this: 1/30/13). However, this number ultimately proves secondary to what its addition signals: a narrative gap left by disability's use as metaphor.

Face of the Enemy opens with Colonel Tigh, the ship's second in command, ordering Gaeta on a mandatory rest-leave to more fully recover from his injuries. He reluctantly leaves on a small transport ship that, due to a system's malfunction, leaves Gaeta, three other humans and two Cylons (both Sharons) lost in space.⁴⁵ With limited oxygen and no promise of rescue, one of the Sharons begins secretly killing crewmembers. We learn through a series of flashbacks that this particular Sharon (each copy has its own unique experiences) had a relationship with Gaeta.⁴⁶ During that relationship, Gaeta unknowingly gave Sharon sensitive information that leads to the deaths of untold humans. Gaeta learns of her betrayal during the course of *Face of the Enemy* and subsequently attacks and kills her. Eventually Gaeta returns to the fleet, changed by this betrayal and motivated to start the mutiny that follows. Again, I reiterate that *BSG* makes no mention of this betrayal because, practically, they did not conceive of or write it until after the *BSG* narrative was completed.

In "Episode 1" the viewer learns that Gaeta and Hoshi are lovers. *BSG* makes no direct reference to Gaeta's sexuality in any of its 73 episodes. Yet *Face of the Enemy* reveals two relationships in its ten-webisode run. The show codes both relationships as (sort of) queer and uses them to frame Gaeta's motivations for starting the coup.⁴⁷ For instance, Sharon seduced and tricked Gaeta into helping the Cylons and this revelation constructs Gaeta's distrust of the alliance and his mutinous actions as resulting from her betrayal. Shira Chess (2008) contends that *BSG* depicts all Cylon/human relationships as queer because the fleet ostracizes humans who

⁴⁵ There are many copies of each of the 12 Cylon models so there are hundreds of Sharon's in the Cylon fleet.

⁴⁶ Gaeta and Sharon were together during the New Caprica Cylon occupation. Gaeta gave Sharon the names of human resistance fighters that the Cylons captured because she told him that she wanted to help set them free. Instead, she used the list to determine whom the Cylons would kill, assuming that the names Gaeta gave her were high value resistance fighters.

⁴⁷ I add the qualifying "some way" to acknowledge both the contested definition of queer and to draw attention to the ways that the show attempts to normalize the queerness it presents.

have sex with Cylons through labels like “toaster lover” (Chess 88).⁴⁸ Gaeta’s relationship with Sharon carries the same transgressive valence. Similarly, I also cautiously call Gaeta’s relationship with Hoshi queer because it is only one of two acknowledged gay or lesbian relationships within the world of *BSG*.⁴⁹ Notably, both of these relationships appear outside the main narrative of the series (both were revealed in extraneous storylines). This alone could make Gaeta and Hoshi’s relationship queer (as in non-normative).

However, I qualify my use of queer because the show deliberately normalizes both relationships in a way that attempts to make them less queer. Moreover, I do not want to simply label a non-normative relationship queer because doing so elides the politics that undergird queer.⁵⁰ Judith Butler suggests that “queer” is a site of collective contestation (228). Queer connotes affiliations across identity categories made in order to, as Butler suggests, contest norms. In other words, just because something defies normative heterosexual representations does not mean that those representations inherently challenge that norm (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 29-30). Rather, the normalized queer relationship mirrors the flexible heterosexism that McRuer discusses, which tolerates queerness as long as it falls within certain boundaries of flexible normalization (McRuer, *Crip Theory*; Waldschmidt 192). As such, labeling either of Gaeta’s relationships as queer without qualification fails to recognize the political connotations of the

⁴⁸ Chess’ analysis only focuses on human men who have sex with Cylon women rather than women who have sex with Cylon men. This is hardly due to an oversight by Chess. Rather, *BSG* features only two sexual relationships between Cylon men and human women. Notably, these two relationships were established before the two men were revealed to be Cylons. Sam and Kara’s relationship was essentially over when the series revealed Sam to be a Cylon and Chief Tyrol’s marriage to a human woman deteriorated once he learned of his Cylon status. While outside the scope of this paper, there’s a rich reading available in the show’s depiction of these sexy, forbidden and transgressively heterosexual female Cylon and male human relationships, which speaks to the assumed male viewer in a titillating way.

⁴⁹ The other relationship was between Admiral Caine (commander of the Pegasus) and a Six, which was also revealed outside of the main narrative of *BSG* in a 2-hour *BSG* special *Razor*. Their relationship ended when Admiral Caine discovered that the Six was a Cylon and she subsequently ordered her tortured.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on the depoliticization of gay politics see McRuer, *The Queer Renaissance*.

term. More importantly, *Face of the Enemy* deliberately depoliticizes both of these relationships, making them only “sort of” queer.

Face of the Enemy uses a narrative of romantic love and care between Gaeta and Hoshi in order to normalize their relationship.⁵¹ When Gaeta’s ship goes missing, Hoshi convinces one of the commanders to give him a ship to search for Gaeta. Having no idea where to look, Hoshi (along with his pilot) randomly search for Gaeta and the lost ship. Hoshi believes that the universe will guide him to Gaeta, and the narrative plays this belief out to suggest that Hoshi’s love literally saves Gaeta. The show combines this overly romanticized rescue with little physical affection between the two men to present what we might call an acceptable gay relationship (i.e. one overly romantic and sexually passionless). Benshoff and Griffin (2006) argue that films often present overtly gay characters (when they appear on screen at all) as “desexualized, depoliticized, and removed from any sociocultural context” (262). *Face of the Enemy* attempts to similarly naturalize Gaeta and Hoshi’s relationship by presenting an already established romance. While this presentation resists the traditional (often tiresome, tedious and trite) “coming out” narratives found in mainstream LGBT representations, *Face of the Enemy*’s integration of their relationship obscures any political position or challenge to heteronormativity. The men share only one kiss on screen, and the actions that buttress the kiss (the looks that they exchange, a hand on Gaeta’s cheek, a smile) do more to establish their intimacy than the actual kiss, but even this intimacy belies care more than it does passion (“Episode 1”).

By downplaying the kiss, the scene effectively whitewashes the couple of any passion and sexual intimacy. This contrasts with the markedly more passionate kiss that Sharon and

⁵¹ For a discussion of the way that the ideology of romantic love mitigates the narrative effects of queerness see Kateřina Kolářová’s “Havelock Ellis, the Ventriloquist and the Lesbian Ghost.”

Gaeta share. Sharon and Gaeta kiss in a flashback scene where candles line the frame. The lighting is dim and they slowly move toward one another in a scene that draws out the sexual tension between them. Similarly, Gaeta and Sharon's kiss aboard the lost ship takes place in equally dim lighting. They each lean in to kiss one another. They pause while Gaeta tells her that he has someone in his life and then move in for an intense and passionate kiss. In some ways, their passion helps to neutralize the relationship between Gaeta and Hoshi by shoring up Gaeta's sexual desire for a woman (though the show eventually undermines this reading).

Moreover, in looking at *Face of the Enemy* in conjunction with *BSG*, we see that Gaeta's character shores up the able-bodied heterosexuality of the fleet. As mentioned, *BSG* depicts the fleet in disarray before the mutiny. The figurative mother of the fleet, President Laura Roslin has effectively abandoned her duties as president, leaving the fleet's figurative father, Admiral Adama, to hold the fleet together. He proves inadequate to the task without her. The mutiny threatens the family unit (the fleet) and both Roslin and Adama rally to defend it. In an overly dramatic and romantic scene Roslin flees Galactica for the safety of a Cylon ship (where she can regroup to challenge the mutiny) while Adama stays to defend the ship ("The Oath"). Gaeta's death at the close of the mutiny allows the heterogeneity of the fleet to be retained, as exemplified by the reunification of Adama and Roslin at the end of "Blood on the Scales." Roslin returns from the Cylon ship to Adama, who stands ready to embrace her.

4.5 **Culpably Gay and Betrayal as Justification**

Much like the presence of disability on screen, queer sexuality requires a narrative explanation, and both of these relationships are no exception. Gaeta and Hoshi's relationship presents a backdrop to Gaeta and Sharon's relationship. Despite the passionate kiss that Gaeta and Sharon share, *Face of the Enemy* quickly concedes that Gaeta is unequivocally gay. Gaeta's

transgression with Sharon (giving her the names of human “resistance fighters” during a several month long Cylon occupation on a planet the humans deemed New Caprica) is cast as a mistake of bad judgment. As *Face of the Enemy* develops, Sharon suggests to Gaeta that she tricked him into helping the Cylons. She chides him, saying, “I’m a woman. And a Cylon. I didn’t seduce you. Hope did” (“Episode 9”). Sharon’s censure suggests that Gaeta should have known better than to fall for her because she was a Cylon *and* because she was a woman. Not only does the series foreclose any chance of fluid sexuality, it suggests that Gaeta should never have been tempted by Sharon’s seduction because of his sexuality. Sharon’s reproach (and Gaeta’s sexuality) constructs Gaeta as naïve, but naïve in a way that makes him culpable for his actions. If he were a heterosexual male character, the (presumably heterosexual male) audience could sympathize with and understand this seduction. *Face of the Enemy* introduces Gaeta’s gay sexuality in order to take away this identification and implicate him in the deaths on New Caprica, which ultimately facilitates the ease with which *BSG* literally discards Gaeta (and his body) after the *Galactica* mutiny.

While *BSG* constructs Gaeta’s disability as the “reason” or “justification” for his mutinous actions (as Ronald Moore explicitly states in the podcast commentary of “Blood on the Scales”), *Face of the Enemy* presents Sharon’s betrayal as his “real” justification. It draws a distinct difference between Gaeta’s feelings about Cylons before and after Sharon reveals her betrayal. Before the transport ship leaves the *Galactica*, Gaeta displays annoyance at another human crewmember that bemoans the presence of Cylons on the ship. Gaeta looks disapprovingly as the man calls the Sharons boarding the ship “toasters” (“Episode 1”). Yet, at the end of *Face of the Enemy*, Gaeta expresses outright anti-Cylon sentiment. Colonel Tigh tells Gaeta that the Admiral will not investigate the deaths aboard the lost ship because he does not

want to risk the alliance. Gaeta responds by emphatically telling Tigh that there should not be an alliance. Then Gaeta demands to speak with the Admiral directly. Tigh questions why, and Gaeta responds by telling him, “Because you’re a Cylon, Sir” (“Episode 10”). His blatant refusal to speak to Tigh (the same commanding officer whose orders he obeyed just days earlier) marks the beginning of his shift toward the leader that he becomes in the *Galactica* mutiny arc and locates that shift firmly in response to Sharon’s betrayal. Just as the show incorporates Gaeta’s pain to individualize his motives for the coup, the series introduces his sexuality in order to instill personal responsibility for Sharon’s deception, rewriting his history as tainted with a questionable character, thereby making his role in the coup more believable.

4.6 **Crip/Queer Futurity**

In splitting my analysis between *BSG* and *Face of the Enemy*, I do not mean to suggest that the webisodes do not address (i.e. use) disability. Gaeta’s disability facilitates *Face of the Enemy*’s narrative by providing the propulsion for the storyline: Gaeta must take a leave from work to recover from his injury, which puts him aboard the lost ship. The webisodes establish the care and intimacy between Gaeta and Hoshi through a scene where Hoshi speaks about the lengths he went to in order to get morpha (the show’s equivalent of morphine) for Gaeta. Each time Gaeta injects himself with morpha, *Face of the Enemy* transitions into a flashback. Here the pain of Gaeta’s disability (quantified through the frequency he uses the morpha) serves a similar function as pain does in the main *BSG* narrative. It individualizes Gaeta’s motives. The painkillers cause Gaeta to slip into a dreamlike state that facilitates the flashbacks through which Gaeta (and the viewer) learn of his relationship with Sharon, the relationship that leads Gaeta to start the coup.

In discussing disability in theater, Victoria Ann Lewis suggests that parallel constructions of disability and race, class and/or sexuality provide a dramaturgical strategy for combating stereotypical and stigmatizing representations of disability by presenting complex and multilayered characters (527). *Face of the Enemy* arguably complicates Gaeta's character by conferring sexuality onto a disabled character. My initial reading suggests that the extra-textual nature of this narrative undermines the effect of this addition. The addition of two (sort of) queer narratives does not necessarily destabilize the stereotypical use of disability to propel narratives forward and give materiality to nonmaterial tensions. Rather, these narratives illustrate the process of flexible normalization that McRuer and Waldschmidt lay out, as they integrate the differences of disability and queerness only to then manage those differences away. *Face of the Enemy* introduces queer narratives in order to facilitate another narrative of ostracization. The addition of Gaeta's sexuality merely reiterates the individualized narrative that *BSG*'s use of disability creates by further placing blame on Gaeta for his actions in starting the military coup.

Still, *BSG* and *Face of the Enemy* do represent the *possibility* that parallel constructions of disability and sexuality offer. Though the two narratives work together to present little more than a tangentially gay, disabled character, the texts open up a space to imagine more complex queer, crip characters. The addition of the webisodes implies that the process of normalization that *BSG* enacts fails in some way. The narrative of pain and disability as motivation does not fully account for his actions, necessitating the additional narrative. While the webisodes launch their own process of normalization, the very need for the webisodes suggests a *possible* breakdown in flexible normalization. If part of the cultural politics of neoliberalism is its ability to continually shift with the market and cultural trends, then perhaps working against those politics calls for both an excavation of these shifts and an equal flexibility capable of adjusting to

processes of normalization just as quickly as they can be deployed. *BSG* and *Face of the Enemy* exemplify one such place where flexible normalization fails and where the narrative must shift to affect its normalization. The addition of *Face of the Enemy* signals a failed normalization where the main narrative of *BSG* does not quite solve the problem that disability poses (or it does not solve it in a satisfactory way). Exposing such moments destabilizes the seemingly neutral (or even “positive”) politics of inclusion.

Similarly, countering the processes of flexible normalization calls for an equal amount of flexibility. Jose Munoz (2009) suggests, “we gain a greater conceptual and theoretical leverage if we see queerness as something that is not yet here” (22). Munoz argues for a queer relationality grounded in a future collectivity. He advocates squinting – straining our vision beyond the here and now to locate glimpses of this queer futurity (22).⁵² Reading Gaeta’s (sort of) queerness from this position challenges us to squint through the deployment of sexuality as a narrative device to locate a complexity in Gaeta’s sexual desires. It challenges us to “queer” Gaeta in a way that sees sexual desire both within Gaeta’s kiss with Sharon *and* within the care shared by Gaeta and Hoshi. Moreover, it fosters a crip/queer collectivity to do so, relying on crip theory and crip perspectives that recover sensuality and sexuality within acts of care like those between Hoshi and Gaeta. A crip/queer futurity resists the processes of normalization that desexualize Gaeta’s character and also invites us to read the passion that Gaeta shows for Sharon as casting doubt not on his sexual desire for Hoshi but on the possibility of containing sexuality within rigid identity categories. It excavates the potential for a crip/queer collectivity where a disabled character can have fluid sexual desires and express them in acts of care, even if that potential (for now)

⁵² Notably, Munoz does not see this queer futurity as a distinct site as much as a continual process of working toward a “better” future through on-going critically queer engagement with oppressive forces.

remains sequestered within the extra-textual webisode narrative. Focusing on a queer/crip futurity can work to evade processes of normalization by employing its own form of flexibility that never stops imagining the future it wants to see.

I argue above that these acts of care obscure or preclude any sexual desire between Hoshi and Gaeta because dominant culture frames care as inherently non-sexual. However, a crip intervention in this narrative would not only expose this assumption as problematic, but it would also claim acts of care as (potentially) part of a complex spectrum of sexuality, desire and intimacy. A crip/queer futurity would imagine an exchange between the two men that highlights the erotics of the intimacy in the moments of care between Hoshi and Gaeta. An orientation toward a queer/crip futurity would draw out the *possibilities* that Gaeta's character in *BSG* and *Face of the Enemy* signals and work toward developing those possibilities. For instance, the webisodes themselves (much like fan fiction, comic books and video games based on television or film narratives) open up an increasingly expanding space for characters to exist beyond the confines of the network television show. These additional narratives sanction viewers to imagine rich lives for characters beyond those offered within the text. It is worth mentioning, also, that while video games and comic books form a large corner of the media industry's market, many fans publish and circulate fan fiction outside of the neoliberal market that directs flexible normalization. Similarly, *Face of the Enemy* invites viewers to imagine a life for Gaeta beyond the episodes of *BSG*, beyond the sexually neutralized portrayal of disabled characters and beyond the oversight (read: controlling, calculating and editing) powers of network television. The webisodes suggest that Gaeta's character exceeds (or can exceed) the (sort of) queer, disabled narrative offered. It provides us with just the hint of a queer crip character that might be subject

to forms of flexible normalization but in whom we might just as easily locate a way beyond the redundant (and often oppressive) use of disability and sexuality as narrative devices.

However, this call for a queer/crip futurity capable of countering flexible normalization is not without its own problems, particularly when we return to the materiality of the disability experience. Calling for flexibility capable of countering flexible normalization invokes a particular kind of (able-bodied) mind/body. Even just talking about pain. Pain can limit the flexibility of bodies as well as the flexibility of routines. Moreover, Munoz's queer futurity requires a level of continual contestation, an engagement that requires levels of energy and focus that may be inaccessible or unsustainable for many disabled people. Then again, a queer/crip futurity might just require a different kind of flexibility, the kind of flexibility that comes with making what little resources (energy, money, access) we have last; a kind of flexibility that relies on collective forms of contestations; a kind of flexibility that people with disabilities are used to employing as techniques of daily survival.

5. CONCLUSION

In many ways disability studies has always been a discipline operating with an eye toward a crip futurity. Early scholars and activists within the field imagined a future with greater access on the social, physical and attitudinal level, and we continue to work toward and for that future. Though a world of universal access might seem like a more concretely imaginable future than the queer futurity that Munoz lays out, it is no less utopian within the current neoliberal context of budget cuts and increased privatization. In continuing to imagine a crip futurity, it is equally important to value the processes of contestation that Munoz speaks about, especially with relation to discourses of pain where the barriers to speaking about pain seem so immovable and the silence within the field of disability studies seems so great.

In the initial stages of this project, I sought to uncover what makes the figure of the suffering cyborg capable of achieving humanness through its suffering. I saw the humanizing function of pain within these narratives as signaling a potentiality that disability studies might borrow from in its attempts to re-engage with pain. I may have even looked to the image of the suffering cyborg as an avatar from this as yet imagined crip futurity that could help map out our efforts to speak about, write about and theorize pain. Yet, in reflecting further upon the potential of the representations I examine, I would perhaps temper my celebration of the suffering cyborg.

In the first chapter, I lay out the discourses that construct experiences of pain as entirely inhuman. I contend that the cultural logic of euthanasia that Garland-Thomson articulates operates (albeit in more veiled ways) within the *Time* magazine articles on chronic pain. The second chapter argues that the humanized suffering cyborg opens up understandings of what it meant to be human to include experiences of pain. I argue that the figure of the suffering cyborg teaches us that if pain is something that dehumanizes then we need to challenge the definitions of

what it means to be human. Munoz similarly contends, “queerness in its utopian connotations promises a human that is not yet here, thus disrupting any ossified understanding of the human” (25-6). For Munoz, the act of imagining a not-yet-here human can disrupt the exclusive and rigid category of the human. The figure of the suffering cyborg does serve as a site where cultural producers (and consumers) can work through the complex relationship between humanness and pain. In doing so, the figure arguably challenges viewers to imagine a more expanded, open and “as yet” human. Yet, even as *Caprica* challenges the nature of the human, it leaves the relationship between pain and humanness intact. The narrative still uses pain as a marker of the human, imbuing it with the same level of significance that it holds within popular discourses.

Examining the first two chapters of the thesis together, I proved merely that pain designates inhumanness in the *Time* magazine articles and humanness within *Caprica*. In both examples, the relationship between pain and humanness remains unchallenged. Tobin Siebers highlights the tendency to see the disabled body and the body in pain as more real, more nature and more authentic than their opposites (*Disability Theory* 67). *Caprica* and other examples of the suffering cyborg rely on pain’s supposed realness to humanize. In other words, pain makes the human-appearing cyborg a “real” human. Leaving aside the problems of granting disability and pain a realness separate from other bodies and other bodily experiences, both *Time* magazine and *Caprica* use pain to place value on the lives of those experiencing it. The nature/quality of the value seems irrelevant when pain is used in both circumstances to mark out the limits of the human.

Battlestar Galactica similarly uses pain to mark the borders between humans and machines, even as the narrative collapses those borders. Gaeta’s pain signifies the naïve view that there is an essential difference between the Cylons and the humans. As the narrative of the

series comes to a close and the differences between the Cylons and humans disappear, so does Gaeta and so does his pain. In the moment before his death Gaeta declares the pain “stopped.” The end of Gaeta’s pain (and the pain of the fleet) reflects a transition into a more evolved humanity. This evolved humanity incorporates the non-threatening Cylons into the fleet. The show challenges what it means to be human, but the newly imagined human still does not allow for pain. The techniques of flexible heterosexuality and ableism might invoke pain and challenge the category of the human, but eventually both the pain and the challenge to the human fold into the redefined and reestablished categories of able-bodiedness and humanness.

Likewise, while Zoe might epitomize the suffering cyborg, her suffering actually ends after the series establishes her humanness. It might be more accurate to argue that *Caprica* humanizes Zoe through her *potential* to feel pain. Once the series establishes her humanness, Zoe’s character does not continue to experience pain. Daniel’s tests establish her ability to feel pain, but do not leave her in pain. In other words, pain might humanize the inhuman, but only in its acute and transient form. Sustained, chronic pain like the pain experienced by Gaeta must be dismissed from the narrative in order to re-establish borders between the disabled and able-bodied or the human and the inhuman. Similarly, *Time* magazine, even as it calls attention to the millions of people living with chronic pain, effectively dismisses those experiencing that pain as little more than apparitions.

In the end, the suffering cyborg, like the human, can only suffer pain for a certain period of time before the pain ceases to serve its function. Each of the narrative examples I have examined reflects, in its own way, techniques of (flexible) normalization. *Time* makes visible experiences of pain but only in order to call those experiences into question. Fictional narratives like *Caprica* and *Battlestar Galactica* feature characters in pain, but ultimately dismiss the pain

and the pained character after they serve their narrative function to re-establish categorical boundaries between humans and inhumans or the disabled and able-bodied. The limits of these representations call into question the promise of Haraway's cyborg myth by suggesting that the cultural politics of neoliberalism will eventually find ways to incorporate the differences that the cyborg embodies. Whatever boundaries the figure of the cyborg might break, the processes of flexible normalization will merely expand its boundaries to include the cyborg. Moreover, the processes of flexible normalization suggest the limits of reengaging with pain within a cultural landscape poised to redeploy those discourses for an ableist politics.

5.1 **Re-engaging, Re-covering and Re-conceptualizing Pain**

The dour landscape does not, of course, suggest that we should abandon our attempt to reengage with pain as part of the disability experience. It just means, as I suggest in the last chapter, that we need to find ways to work within and around such techniques of normalization. Petra Kuppers (2009) offers a way of conceptualizing pain that counters the dominant construction of pain as inhuman and builds in the kind of ambiguity necessary for working within the cultural politics of neoliberalism. She argues for a rhizomatic model of disability (built from Deleuze and Guattari) that acknowledges the multiple, simultaneous and rhizome-like experiences of disability that incorporate pain, joy and a multitude of other experiences. She suggests "thinking pain with a Deleuzoguattarian toolbox, a thought, a movement or a state can code-switch, move simultaneously on different tracks, one 'with pain' (as in, 'in pain'), the other 'with Pain,' as a companion, an observer onto the self" ("Towards a Rhizomatic Model of Disability" 227). This understanding of pain as a companion figures it as a prominent phenomenological experience of disability while not invalidating the person who experiences pain. Kuppers' suggestion offers a solid theoretical starting point for rethinking disability

studies' theoretical models to account for pain. Koppers makes sense of the me/not me dichotomy that Jackson discusses by conceiving of pain as a sensation that exists concurrently with other experiences. Koppers' account of pain affords it the significant place that it often has for people with disabilities while still allowing other experiences to emerge.

Tobin Siebers critiques current body theory for rarely acknowledging pain as a physical experience (*Disability Theory*). He maintains that theorists like Butler and Haraway (and I would add Drew Leder and even Sara Ahmed to this list) conceive of pain as that which brings the body to the surface. Siebers, responding to body theorists like Butler, argues, "They present suffering and disability either as a way of reconfiguring the physical resources of the body or of opening up new possibilities of pleasure. Pain is most often soothed by the joy of conceiving the body different from the norm" (*Disability Theory* 62). Siebers maintains that the depiction of pain as an advantage essentially obscures the reality of disabled bodies and disabled people and can serve to de-politicize rights and access campaigns (*Disability Theory* 63). He suggests that this position creates equally pernicious effects as the construction of pain as life shattering. Siebers contends, "Physical pain is highly unpredictable and raw as reality. It pits the mind against the body in ways that make the opposition between thought and ideology in most body theory seem trivial" (*Disability Theory* 64), and he wants to see a new realism of the body emerge. This new realism, as Siebers offers it, recognizes the importance of more fully theorizing and understanding how bodies exist in the world and supports excavating understandings of pain but also resists the temptation to see the disabled body as somehow more real or more representative of reality than non-disabled bodies.⁵³

⁵³ For a more thorough discussion of Siebers' new realism of the body see "Body Theory: From Social Construction to the New Realism of the Body" in *Disability Theory*.

As useful as Siebers's new realism of the body and Koppers's Deleuzoguattarian conception of the disability experience are, no theoretical model of conceptualizing disability and/or pain will make it any easier for society to understand and accept disabled people's pain if the cultural discourses remain the same. The dominant discourses of pain preclude the possibility that pain can be acknowledged as one of many bodily experiences that some disabled people have. To truly begin to speak about our pain we must first challenge dominant discourses of pain. In order to do this, we must expose those discourses as culturally and socially situated and mediated. Both Siebers and Koppers propose models for thinking about pain that focus on what pain *is*. Siebers seeks to challenge how we theorize the body in a way that accounts for what pain *is* while not reifying the "realness" that disability and pain culturally represents (*Disability Theory*). Koppers similarly challenges understandings of pain as dehumanizing and life shattering by positing that pain *is* a fellow traveler. Neither of these theoretical models attends to what pain does within the cultural sphere.

Kateřina Kolářová (2010) contends, "[i]n approaching pain as [a] cultural and social practice, the question no longer focuses on what pain is and how or where it is felt. Rather, it shifts into the area of what pain does. What effect does pain bring about?" (Kolářová, "Performing the Pain" 47). Kolářová writes specifically about the ways that performance artists Bob Flanagan and his partner Sheree Rose reconfigure pain as *practice* that can bring pleasure in their S/M play and performance art. The potential that Kolářová sees in Flanagan's and Rose's work outlines a conceptual shift necessary within the field of disability studies. She credits Flanagan's and Rose's work with refocusing the discussion of pain away from *definitions* of pain and toward a *practice* of pain. Similarly, my thesis offers an assessment of the ways that discourses of pain (within the three examples I examine) *practice* a(n) (ableist) politics or a

politics that uses pain to place value on the lives of disabled people. Both dominant cultural and cyborg narratives use pain to affect how we value the lives of those experiencing pain. In other words, pain affects the representations by signaling human status or divesting human status.

Only by shifting our focus from what pain *is* to what effects pain creates can we begin to combat the link between pain and humanness. Moreover, this conceptual shift exposes the ways that the cultural politics of neoliberalism deploys pain. The processes of flexible normalization that incorporate pain as a feature of the disability experience to further marginalize disabled people seem to be the most pressing target of intervention for disability studies scholars interested in making space for narratives of pain. Until we can deconstruct the process through which discourses of pain are represented, reincorporated and redeployed within the cultural politics of neoliberalism, we will arguably be caught within a continual trap of weighing the benefits of reengaging with pain against the risks that our narratives of pain will be used to further ableist politics.

Perhaps it is a bit utopian to imagine that simply pointing out processes of normalization would work against what seems like the immovable force of neoliberal politics. And perhaps it is equally utopian to imagine a future where disabled people can speak about, theorize and share their experiences of pain without those theories and narratives finding their way into broader ableist discourses. All the same, it is a utopia that we should continue to work toward. Moreover, examining what pain *does* rather than what it *is* provides us with a significant vantage point from which to better imagine what this (somewhat pained) utopia might be like. It allows us to imagine a utopia not as a place of perfection, which inherently excludes people who experience all varieties of pain, but as a place that includes, accommodates and accepts those in pain.

If disability studies has been working toward a crip futurity, then it has simultaneously been engaging in a process of imagining a disability utopia. However, this utopia – and this is what Siebers sees as so problematic – posits a neutralized body. In imagining a future where spaces accommodate the difference of disability, we run the risk of imagining a future where disabled bodies, minds and experiences are also neutralized and incorporated as just another type of human experience. In other words, disability becomes a difference that makes no difference. A crip utopia, however, would work toward creating spaces that retain the differences of the disability experience and resist the efforts at incorporating disability. Imagining a painful crip utopia, I would argue, helps to facilitate that future.

In keeping with Munoz's attention to the processes of contestation, I want to end by arguing that the narratives I examine throughout my thesis offer specific cultural locations where the relationship between pain and humanness is already being contested. The problem with these sites of contestation is that we do not see them as such. Even within disability studies, we too often conceptualize pain as an inherently medical and apolitical bodily experience, which prevents us from attending to/taking part in these contests. In imagining a queer, crip futurity that works toward reengaging with pain as something that does cultural (and embodied) work – it shapes our cultural understandings of disability/humanness and our embodied experiences – we might begin drawing out future avenues of research that can help get us there.

David Morris's *The Culture of Pain* broadly maps out cultural understandings of pain. He suggests that those understandings have given way to a predominantly medical concept of pain, and he argues for a return to the culture of pain. Morris's text, rather than providing a definitive text on the subject, signals the pressing need for further research within the same vein that excavates contemporary cultural frameworks of pain. As I have argued, future research needs to

consider what those cultural concepts of pain do rather than looking to cultural discourses to determine what pain is. Moreover, future research needs to pay particular attention to the processes of flexible normalization that both direct and deploy those discourses. Finally, because of the historical way that pain has been used to devalue disabled lives, it is imperative that this research utilizes a disability studies analysis in order to pay particular attention to how those discourses impact (or might impact) the lives of disabled people. Moreover, we need to do this work within a context of continually imagining a painful crip utopia that understands experiences of pain as worth retaining, not because they are inherently powerful or transformative, but simply because they are ours.

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VITA

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EDUCATION:

- 2009-Present PhD Student in Disability Studies
University of Illinois, Chicago
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- 2006-2009 Non-Degree Seeking Masters Student in Women's Studies
University of Arizona
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HONORS:

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS:

- 2009-Present Graduate Assistant, The Program of Disability Arts, Culture and the Humanities, Department of Disability and Human Development, UIC.
- 2009-Present Teaching Assistant, Disability in American Film, Department of Disability and Human Development, UIC.
- 2010 -Present Instructor, The History and Philosophy of Medicine, Medical Humanities, UIC.

MEMBERSHIPS:

- 2009 – Present Society for Disability Studies
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PUBLICATIONS:

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- 2013 (anticipated date) "Recovering a Cripistemology of Pain: Leaky Bodies, Connective Tissue and Feeling Discourse." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*.