Visions of the Future:

Analysing Non-Binary Characters in Contemporary Science Fiction TV

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Introduction

A young man starts to seize inside the contained medical room of a spaceship, and the onlookers immediately call for Zayn Petrossian, the medical officer on board of the Salvaris. As Zayn lays the man on his side we hear ‘’It’s okay, it’s okay. Sasha. It’s okay. I got you.’, before the young man grabs Zayn’s throat, threatening hir life in an attempt to make sure he is killed before they reach their destination. This scene from *Another Life*, the new Netflix science fiction show, is the culmination of a season-long struggle between alien and human life. If that sounds confusing, do not worry: it is. The show itself consists of a messy pile of science fiction tropes and clichés, but that does not make it any less interesting to analyse for this essay, as I attempt to create a strong analysis of, among others, Zayn Petrossian: medical officer, therapist, and non-binary crewmember.

Over the last few decades, non-normative gender identities have started passing from the private into the public space more and more. The western construct of the male-female gender binary was never fully applicable even to western society, and many other cultures had different understandings of gender (Richards, 13). However, as Western society colonized other countries and started forcing their own culture on the people they colonized, the colonizers started erasing and displacing indigenous traditions, cultures, and beliefs (Singer, 2). The colonized places systemically came to internalize the Western ideas of gender and sexuality (6). Recent history, however, has seen the growing understanding and tolerance for people who do not identify with this binary idea of gender, and society has started developing labels for these non-normative gender identities to be used internationally (Richards, 95). Examples of such non-normative gender identities are ‘agender’, ‘pangender’, ‘genderfluid’, and more. There are also more whimsical terms such as ‘genderfuck’ or ‘gender terrorist’, though these are less prevalent in mainstream society. This paper will focus specifically on the non-binary or genderqueer gender identity: identities that do not adhere to the gender binary, and often exist outside of it. There are many labels that would fit under this, but the research will be aimed at the non-binary or genderqueer identity as both exist as umbrella terms

and independent identities. But how do these gender identities pass from the 'private' to the 'public' space? How does a society begin to recognize and understand something previously unknown?

Global media, internet, TV, and literature play a huge role in society's understanding of the world. The rise in interest and acceptance regarding non-normative gender identity seems directly linked to the growing international network people have established: connections made between people from all over the world, regardless of any geographical boundaries or distance, have allowed us as a society to not only learn more about the experiences of individuals outside of our direct environment, but also connect us with people who might share the ideas and struggles an individual entertains only in private. This international connection allows for different online communities to develop as people who question their gender identity find support with people from all over the world. In understanding each other, TV plays an incredibly important role nowadays: it exposes the public to lives, identities, and cultures they might not be familiar with or have known about otherwise, and in doing so has the power to normalize the non-normative. What we consume on a daily basis informs our ideas of the world, and that is why this paper will focus specifically on TV characters and their representation of non-binary gender.

In addition, I will focus specifically on the genre of science fiction and analyse how it represents and places non-binary and genderqueer characters in their works. The non-normative is a major subject in science fiction, and the genre is well known for its representations of space, aliens, monsters: it often focuses on the representation of the unfamiliar and explores the identity and position of who we in contemporary society consider to be the 'Other'. Alexander Shafer argues that the genre criticizes systemic hierarchies and thus exposes power structures that may not have been visible to the public before. Science fiction is a genre that explores the world, society, and individuals as we know it – but in different conditions than we know them in. Science fiction writers can use our idea of what is normative and twist it in their newly built worlds, thus giving social and cultural

commentary on contemporary society, as well as expose societal power dynamics that were previously unseen by its audience.

The aim of this research is to look at the representation of non-normative gender in science fiction, focussing specifically on non-binary characters. The research question of this paper is as follows: how are non-binary characters represented in recent works of televisual science fiction? This is important to research because non-normative identities, be it gender or otherwise, are still heavily underrepresented on TV and their characters can easily represent certain biases or stereotypes that are harmful to the community. Sporcic calls the underrepresentation of marginalized groups 'symbolic annihilation' (54). She quotes Michael Morgan's article where he argues that when people are not represented, the inherent message is that they do not count; that there is something wrong with them. Sporcic also points out that not only those who identify as non-binary would profit from non-binary representation on TV: an increasing number of people have reported to feel 'dissatisfied with and oppressed by the gender binary' (53). Representations means normalization, and normalization means acceptance. Through the denormalization of the male-female gender binary, and acceptance of difference/fluidity of gender, the dominant heteronormative rhetoric of society would no longer be sustainable. The power given to someone by birth depending on their genitalia would have to be redistributed in a way that could allow for a more equal society. As argued by Kellner, media culture has a huge influence on the beliefs and actions of its consumers through medium such as TV or film (3). Their influence on the meaning-making process of an audience regarding normative ideology makes it possible for TV to start this process of a societal reconstruction of gender.

To answer the research question, I will discuss the modern discourse surrounding non-binary gender identities and science fiction, as well as analyse relevant contemporary TV shows using a semiotic approach. When we look at the representation of non-binary people in science fiction, we can categorize them in three ways: human, post-human, and non-human. The first chapter will discuss the role and use of coding when dealing with genderqueer characters and science fiction.

The codes inherent to each subject will be explained and contextualized, and the connection between the different codes will be further analysed. The second chapter will analyse the role of non-binary humans on TV and how they are represented. What codes do we see reoccur with non-binary characters? How are the characters styled? The characters of interest in this chapter are Zayn Petrossian from *Another Life* and Lommie Thorne from *Nightflyers*: two Netflix science fiction shows that appeared in the last year. Finally, the third chapter will analyse the post- and nonhuman characters in science fiction television that are often used to represent non-binary gender identity. This chapter will map out different examples and interpretations present in the previously-mentioned shows, underlying implications, and the overall role these figures play in the science fiction genre. I will again apply and research the codes established in chapter 1 when analysing these characters, looking at both appearance and characterization.

The distinction between human, post-human and non-human, though seemingly clear, is one that is incredibly muddled in science fiction. Because most stories take place in the future, writers try to imagine the way humans have developed, and often marry the organic with technology of some kind: this can be machinery, genetic engineering, or just body modifications. The question of how *human* non-binary characters is presented is important because often they still fall in the shades of grey between human and posthuman. A lot of research on non-binary individuals in science fiction surrounds the humanoid figure, rather than the human, but is still presented as being human. I considered the list of non-binary science fiction characters on TV that could be seen as fully human, and originally intended to do a cross-examination of four works. This was not possible due to the fact there were no such four works. Non-binary characters that have been confirmed (not coded/implied) to be non-binary in science fiction TV are still rare, despite the ample praise of the genre's possibilities regarding the representation of the non-normative and the general belief of its progressive culture. The shows featuring these characters are *Another Life*, featuring non-binary character Zayn Petrossian (Ze/Hir), *Gen:Lock*, featuring Val/entina Romanyszyn (He/She), and *Nightflyers*, featuring Lommie Thorne (She/Her). Being able to count the amount of non-binary

characters in science fiction TV on one hand is not a sign of a progressive genre, nor of ample representation, especially when genres such as Fantasy, Drama, or Comedy (or a combination thereof) seems to have more (though not a lot) representation of non-normative gender identities. With this list we see Sporcic's symbolic annihilation as a fact rather than theory, and the implication is that non-binary people, even in the future, do not deserve acknowledgment or screen time.

Literature Review

The genre of science fiction started as a rather conservative genre until the so-called New Wave in the 1960s, when writers began to explore and critically address subjects such as social hierarchy, race, gender, class, and the connections between them (Shafer 8). During the New Wave writers began experimenting with how science fiction portrayed the world; in the true spirit of modernism, the literature that was meant to be purely empirical became entrenched with the questioning of reality and ontological doubt (Broderick 62). This new attitude, the questioning of reality and society, became an inherent part of science fiction. Anamarija Sporcic discusses that, since science fiction is not restricted by the limitations of social conventions or social rules, they are free to explore and criticize conventional ideas as much as they want without it being jarring for the reader (53). Introducing thought experiments or different social norms is part of the genre and gives it its unique position to normalize the non-normative for people unfamiliar with it. She adds that "The role of science fiction as a playground for thought experiments is, in fact, the genre's main advantage in exploring non-binary identities and their position within society" (59). Sporcic argues that science fiction is ideal for normalizing the non-normative due to the fact that its existence is dependent on this non-normative representation, and the audience has this expectation of viewing the non-normative that makes them more susceptible to normalizing the Other that is shown on TV. Science fiction enables its audience to manipulate, decode, and reinterpret their perception and understanding of gender (Sporcic 59).

One of the strengths of science fiction, as pointed out by Shafer, is its ability to make the unfamiliar familiar. However, Melzer also criticizes this use of Othering in science fiction: though the familiarization of the Other helps society become more aware of non-binary or non-normative existences, it also reaffirms the existence of these non-normative identities as *being* Other. The non-binary identity remains firmly attached to being non-normative, strange, or 'not one of us'. Coding nonhuman or posthuman characters as non-binary or genderqueer does not allow an audience to relate, as they tend to gravitate towards the human characters. This coding also reinforces the idea that non-binary people are not (fully) human. The human non-binary character is often still distinguished as Other, as often audiences can see the boundary writers make between the 'normal' and the 'new', if not through a queer narrative then often through their embodiment. The science fiction stories that attempt to criticize the hierarchical and social systems of contemporary times, or denaturalize the heteronormative structures currently present in society, cannot normalize an identity that they present as Other.

Sporcic, in her paper on the relevance of science fiction for non-binary readers, addresses this problem as well. She states early in her article that the importance of literature in the legitimisation of non-binary identities cannot be underestimated, as fiction is an 'active contributor to societal and cultural context(s),' (54). The goal, as Sporcic describes it in this passage, is not to immediately normalize non-binary gender but to create a more varied and fluid framework for people to use in their understanding and discussion of gender. However, to do this science fiction has to move away from the binary it uses to establish the Other: the use of androgynous characters, for example, do transcend established perceptions – but they also exist because of the binary division of gender. This reiterates the idea of a 'two-gender truth' (60). Sporcic attributes this two-gender truth to the cultural and historical contexts of the genre that anchor them in this hierarchical idea of gender (63). Although it does attempt to transcend this, and experiments with gender, Sporcic claims the genre pushes the non-binary identities into Other because of its inability to let go of these conservative roots.

Though science fiction was developed as a literary genre, as the movie industry rose so did the collaboration between science fiction and TV. As a genre, science fiction televisual works are still left largely unexplored however, and it has been found hard to recognize a unilateral framework which can be used to analyse science fiction on TV. Writers from literary science fiction emphasize themes such as conflict between science and humanity, technology and nature, or matters of spatial and temporal displacement (Kuhn 5). Science fiction films are regarded as reflections of contemporary society and social norms, as well as a medium for represent cultural repression (Kuhn 10). The over intertextual structure that allows science fiction to interact with other genres, and makes it such a difficult genre to define, is also essential to its form. Recent films have started exploring more complex narratives, often collapsing memory, time, and language together in the narrative to allow for a more disjointed and ambiguous story (Smelik 115). This blurring of lines allows science fiction to push contemporary normative ideas and understanding more, and to challenge the audience in their thinking and viewing of the world.

Chapter 1: Prepare for Take-Off

This chapter will define the framework that will be used for the analysis in chapter 2 and 3. Important in this analysis is the ability to 'read' gender, which is possible through different codes. Codes are used for expressing gender identity/markers, but also to identify genres. Stuart Hall explains that culture exists of shared conceptual maps and shared language systems, and it is the codes who make the relationship and translation between the two possible. They stabilize meaning and link that meaning to signs we hear or read. Codes translate our conceptual system to our linguistic system, and vice versa. They also reflect society, its values, and its ideologies, and can thus be used to analyse political and social ideas and beliefs. These ideas and beliefs are also reflected in fiction. Each genre uses its own unique code to identify itself. The norms and beliefs reflected in the text are big indicators of what type of story you are reading. For example, the codes needed for a murder mystery novel would not work within the genre of a romantic comedy; though both are stories focussed on individuals in a (often) realistic setting, everything needed in a murder mystery novel would negate the atmosphere and general message of the romcom text. By looking at codes and what they represent, we can learn a lot about how a genre sees societal and ideological beliefs, and how they choose to operate within or outside the social conventions of our own society.

What are Codes?

Attebery explains that, in order for a code to exist, several things need to happen (18): there must be 1. recognizable signifiers (i.e. sounds, gestures, images etc), 2. a systematic set of rules or a grammar that combines the signs into messages, along with rules that allow interpretation of the messages, and 3. at least two people who can send or receive said messages thanks to their understanding of these rules. It is through establishing these codes that tropes can develop: the invocation of social questions/criticism and the scientific curiosity of the reader allows for the narrative figure of a trope to come into being. This is of significance in science fiction (SF for short) because these tropes fuse character and concept together, allowing new meanings and

interpretations for its audience. The code allows a way to read this literature; tropes then allow us to interpret these codes on a deeper level (Chandler 151). Tropes can also be used to reinforce or question biased ideas of society and/or social issues that might arise in an SF text. Though tropes are of significance within SF, the focus of analysis for this paper will remain on the use of coding present in SF TV. The codes that will be of interest are the SF code and the genderqueer code. I specify genderqueer because this essay focusses on the non-normative gender identities. Gender coding focusses for the majority on binary-reliant genders, and queer coding tends to emphasize sexuality, hence the specification of genderqueer coding.

The genre SF is strongly rooted in Gothic fiction (Brantlinger 30). Because of this, we see parts of the Gothic fiction code reflected in the SF code, and in the way they structure their story and atmosphere. An important part of Attebery's explanation of the process that creates (new) codes is the fact that, much like a new literary genre, a code can reuse parts of existing ones. He argues that often people don't realize a new code has developed itself until it is established and discovered by people analysing the genre. The question that arises is of course: what is the SF code exactly? How does an audience recognize a work as SF? Before this question can be answered, it must be understood that although one can recognize certain formulas created by and for SF, the genre itself rarely adheres to recognizable rules or formulas (Thiess 5). As Attebery says; "[SF] spills over into other genres, such as fantasy and historical fiction; it freely exchanges techniques and ideas with nonfictional forms such as scientific popularizations and utopian tracts." (3). There is not one specific coding sheet that can be applied to every SF work, but rather different codes that overlap between works. The inability to identify a core of SF works is not unique to the genre, as this is a common issue among film genre theory. Traditional film genre theory focused on a work's textual dimensions, through questions of definition, questions of interpretation, and questions of history (Mittell 5), scholars attempted (and often failed) to identify a solid framework. It is also pointed out that texts become recategorized as social and political practices change (Mittell 6). Frow defines genre as "a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and

interpretation of meaning." In this definition he places the importance of genre on *how* a reader reads and interprets rather than how a text is meant to look, putting more stress on the audience's responsibility. This would apply well to works of SF, as although it is impossible to construct a framework of how to make an SF work, we do see an influence on the works from its audience. SF works because its audience is willing to suspend their disbelief: and they are willing because they know they are reading SF. As such, SF is not a genre which core elements can be identified, but which can be understood through its interactions with the audience.

Gwyneth Jones argues there is one feature exists in all of SF: the construction of another world with new conditions (163). This does seem to be an inherent part of SF works, as a lot of them deal with the 'what if […] happened?' question. As mentioned, SF tends to expose invisible power structures in society, and juxtaposing contemporary society with a fictional universe that is 'our' world but with some changed features, allows a reader to more clearly see these comparisons and flaws the author tries to expose. Another essential feature in SF that can be considered part of its code is the representation of the Unknown; SF almost always investigates a subject that we are unfamiliar with, though in whatever form this Unknown comes can differ per work. The interaction with the audience allows for this unfamiliar exploration to be much more deepened, as readers can have more influence on what and who is reprsented. This means that in my analysis, I will be paying attention to the world building and how the Unknown is featured, as well as its social implication.

Gender and SF: Locked and Coded

Understanding the relationship between gender and SF is essential when it comes to understanding the genderqueer in SF. SF's ability to render the unfamiliar familiar allows its audience to understand the shades of grey that can be part of one's gender identity. When it comes to approaching gender, SF can represent different lifestyles, bodies, or characters than what society is used to. Attebery refers to the category of 'thirdness' when discussing the destabilization of the

binary (8). Writers make use of gender miscoding, androgyny, 'thirdness', or a (dis)ordered society to represent societies unlike our own, where gender seems to be taken as a concept much more layered or much simpler than how we know it. This is of course not the case with every SF work, as many mainstream SF works rely on existing gender ideologies/norms. However, the question of gender is no longer one that cannot be addressed by SF creators, as the choice to use contemporary gender roles is just as much a choice as choosing to eliminate gender altogether (Sporcic 7). In other words, the 'non-choice' of adhering to normative standards has become a choice. It is pointed out by several academics that SF is the best form of fiction to explore the queer form in due to its unique position within fiction as a genre that explores and normalizes the non-normative. Sporcic points out that SF is a genre of innovation; it has introduced countless new beliefs, words, and definitions into the mainstream, and (can) continue(s) to do so as we progress into a society with a more complicated understanding of gender (6).

Much like the SF coding, the role of gender in SF is not a concept that can be captured in a simple definition. Although SF is not a genre of singularities, it can be argued to be a genre of extremities. SF's start as a conservative genre, heavily influenced by male writers, male audiences, male publicists, and male expectations, forms the basis of one such an 'extreme' (Attebery 56). Largely, Frankenstein is established as the first official SF novel, and despite being written by a woman, sets this precedent for an exploration of masculinity in the genre (Attebery 34). The genre grew in terms of concepts, but firmly remained within the confines of the conservative/masculine social system until the 1960s: the New Wave of SF (Shafer 7). Feminist writers started exploring themes of race and sexuality and gender in SF texts, and in doing so began a revolution in the literature regarding their understanding and representation of social issues and norms. Parrinder explains why SF seems to exist in extremities: SF is a genre in which people can find liberation from the normative, as well as a genre that allows audiences comfort in the continued existence of the social norms. Due to the juxtaposition of these two goals of SF, the texts created can only exist on one end of the spectrum.

Keeping this in mind, the representation of gender in SF is dependent on which side of the spectrum its writer leans towards. Attebery makes a distinction here between hard and soft SF: hard SF focusses on technology and physical sciences; it is aimed at the broadest, most mainstream audience possible, and tends to follow the conservative ideology of SF. In doing so, it tends to emphasize the more rigid gender norms we see in our contemporary society (Attebery 5). Soft SF, on the other hand, often has a smaller audience and emphasizes themes of human biology, sociology, perception, and strangeness/Otherness. Often these audiences are more experienced and adventurous in their reading of the genre and seek out novels that challenge gender normativity. Notable authors in the rise of gender-critical SF novels are Ursula Le Guin, Samuel Delany, and Octavia Butler. What these three authors have in common is that they were all born into a heteronormative, white, male-dominated society where they were not part of its norm; all three authors expressed criticism and addressed issues of gender, race, sexuality, feminism, and other social issues in their works. Le Guin was a white woman born in 1929, Samuel Delany is a black gay man, and Octavia E. Butler was a black woman[1]. Together, they presented and explored new ways to write and read SF works, which can likely be attributed (in part) to their social and political standing being non-white, non-male, or non-heteronormative.

The gender code is strongly intertwined with linguistic codes. We use masculine or feminine or neuter pronouns and indications for almost everything related to language, including grammar (Attebery 3). Attebery points out that the gender code makes use of both verbal and nonverbal signs; the verbal signs can be found in our language, and the nonverbal in the representation of our bodies. Verbal signs or gender coding can be done implicitly and explicitly. A work can use language and descriptors to explicitly state gender conventions, or represent cultural or social traditions that would implicitly allow the audience to understand its norms. With non-verbal signs, the context and way in which a body is presented can indicate feminine, masculine, or neuter identities: this is done

[1] Though there is speculation about her sexuality, nothing has been officially confirmed by Butler during her life. Dr. Ron Buckmire allegedly wrote in his blog that she was a close friend of his and identified as a lesbian, but there are no official sources to back this claim (Maglott, 'Octavia Butler')

through clothing, hair, grooming, etc.; “Within this code, the body itself becomes a sign.” (3). Rudnick, in his dissertation, agrees with this belief of embodying one’s identity through visual references. Rudnick focusses on the act of queer signalling: signs (codes) used to identify yourself as queer. These physical signs, or codes, are applicable in both gender and queer coding.

Taylor, in his analysis of gender ideology as a code, refers back to Judith Butler’s explanation of gender as performative. Butler explains gender is a practice or an act: it is not an inherent identity, but rather something we do, and in doing it we can *be* it. Gender, she claims, is not inherent but taught and practiced by humanity. This principle is important due to the fact that, when looking at any non-normative gender identity, the idea that gender is a performance stands central. We learn gender by being exposed to it from the moment we are born, and we teach gender by internalizing and practicing the gender roles we were exposed to. This continuous cycle of observing gender roles, imitating them, and teaching them has made society believe that these practices are inherent rather than socialized: gender is a normalizing principle (Butler 51). In our continuous practice of it, we normalize it to ourselves and to those around us. This naturalization reduces and limits gender, Pearson (76) argues, and emphasizes the normative belief in the binary as part of our culture. Attebery points out that unchallenged assumptions in a text reinforce existing patterns of social arrangement and associations, such as the gender roles and norm associated with the gender binary (34).

Non-normative gender identities challenge these ideas, as there is no gender norm or role assigned to them: their existence is a rejection of those norms. This makes recognizing a code for non-binary people a lot harder, as recognizing what they are not is easier than what they are. However, looking at the representations is important for this exact reason, as this group of marginalized people could easily be put into a box of traditional/harmful coding. Looking critically at representation of non-binary people allows us to interact and influence the way society becomes familiar with them, and hopefully can allow for a more fluid and complicated understanding of

gender for cis people as well. Taylor makes the argument that such gender codes are internalized by the general population as part of their gender ideology. Heck points out that people might not even be aware how their perceptions are being structured by the ideological ideas of contemporary society – for example, through the media or entertainment industry's portrayal of gender. Her argument aligns with Butler's theory on gender performance, though she emphasizes the media influence of it more: through social processes people determine their "spontaneous perceptions"- except they are not spontaneous, because people have been trained through media exposure and repeated practice that this is how one should perceive the world (2). This is important because not only does it underline the way society has developed itself into a strictly ordered, defined, and binary community; it also explains how people see these standards as part of human nature/biology, rather than social constructs. Furthermore, we see the importance of representation in these (non)spontaneous perceptions, as it causes people to interpret subjects or issues without having been exposed to them. With non-binary representation, there is already so little that every bit of representation counts in informing people's opinion and perception.

So how does a queer person 'perform'? What is the queer social script? Rudnick, in his dissertation, refers to queer identities as performative accomplishments (34). He makes the argument that queer people assume new cultural scripts of identity which challenge the idea of the normative cis- or heterosexual identity. Rudnick argues that queerness is often signified through decorations of the body; coloured hair, glitter tops, bracelets, etc. These signifiers are then reflected in works of fiction, which allows the audience to read characters as queer without the character having to come out. The fact that such stylistic choices are interpreted as non-heteronormative reemphasizes Butler's argument of performance: one can be seen as queer by their blue hair, despite it not being an inherent or biological trait. Society associates gender norms with genitalia, and the defiance of these norms 'outs' a person as non-normative or queer.

Rudnick's research on queer signalling is based on the experiences and choices of people in their daily lives. Though this does not make it less applicable to fiction (as fiction reflects cultural codes), it does contextualize the ways in which these codes have developed. Rudnick calls this queer signalling due to the fact that these signals are intentional: recognizable for those that understand the language, but not for people outside of it. This is because queer people still are at risk in contemporary society and have a long history of violence at the hands of a heteronormative society. Outing oneself in public can be dangerous; signalling (or hinting at) one's identity less so. These intentional signals are often expressed through someone's style, hair, accessories, or other patterned associations (Rudnick 119). In other words, much like gender, queer signalling is a performative accomplishment (33). One of these performative acts that is nowadays easily recognized is the act of gender inversion: wearing social/cultural symbols of masculinity or femininity on a presumably 'wrong' body. The melding of gender and sex through the act of androgenising one's style and defying gender norms reads as a conflicting cultural script, giving the wearer an undertone of queerness (126). In televisual works, there is a huge overlap between gender inversion and gender miscoding, and often they interact in their expression of non-normative characterization.

A point of criticism regarding the practice of gender inversion is that its existence relies upon the (defiance of the) heterosexual script: without it, gender would not be seen as an inherent trait, thus there could be no inversion. After all, how can you defy something while denying its existence? Or, how can we criticize its existence while relying on it? Though this is an important question to consider, we also see it used as an excuse *not* to include queer characters: some writers claim making a character queer would imply their identity still being a social issue when it is not (Pearson 15). This, also pointed out by Pearson, is of course a rather weak argument against the representation of queer characters; if bigotry no longer exists within your universe, having a character with a same-sex partner or gender non-normative identity would not reintroduce it. What this does show is the reluctance to represent queer identity as normative even in a universe in which

it is claimed to be. Though a work claims to deviate from contemporary social norms, writers seem hesitant to actively *show* this deviation, especially in the context of queerness[2].

The earlier mentioned lack of 'non-choice' regarding gender in SF makes gender performativity a much more deliberate act: if our own performance, which is influenced and informed by existing gender scripts that we observe from day one, produces our own identity (Rudnick 32), then how does one approach that in this new world? How would this gender script be created, observed, and imitated in these worlds unlike our own? When keeping in mind the strong roots of binarism and femininity vs masculinity within the SF genre, very often these new gender scripts are still reliant on the gender binary. This means that the masculine and feminine code are of immense importance when looking at SF works that defy their binaries. To defy these codes is to signal a character as (possibly) queer: methods such as gender inversion or gender miscoding are often used for this. On masculine bodies, we see feminized features: on feminine bodies, we see masculine features: by contrasting these binaries, creators attempt to androgenize a character while still adhering to strict gender binaries. The conflation of masculinity and femininity becomes a code for queerness. In SF, where everything is meant to be futuristic, this is no different: androgenization still often depends on the defiance of masculine/feminine boundaries, rather than invent a new category.

It is due to the gender binary, and SF's struggle between masculinity and femininity, that the genre was able to grow into the form that now allows critical assessment and representation of non-normative gender identities. As a result, however, it is necessary to clarify the masculine and feminine codes that are used within the genre, in order to establish how writers defy these expectations and create a non-binary character. For this, I will be looking at the following

[2] Queer identities are not the only groups that are often denied representation. People of colour, disabled people, Muslims, as well as many other minorities, fall far enough outside of the 'heterosexual white' narrative to be heavily underrepresented. The identities of these groups are inherently politicized due to their 'deviation' of the norm.

codes/signifiers during my research[3]:

	Masculine Codes	
Performance/character		Physicality
Dominant, strong, assertive, brave		Muscular, athletic
Intelligent, ambitious, rational, analytical		Natural (no make-up or accessories)
Competitive, independent, active, insensitive		Confident, strong posture
Sexually aggressive, achievement		Direct eye contact
	Feminine Codes	
Performance/character		Physicality
Submissive, receptive, weak, cooperative, dependent, timid, passive, content		Small, thin, (hint of) breasts in view
Unintelligent, emotional, intuitive, sensitive		Use of external factors to become prettier/more pleasing to the (male) eye (make-up, hair products, hair removal)
Sex object, attractive		Dressed in accordance with the male gaze
		Often canting to the side, uncentred/small posture

[3] I use Taylor's coding sheet and the codes identified by the Good men Project, as well as Vrugt & Luverink and Toerrie and Wilkinson for more precise feminine codes.

In the shows, I will be using these codes to look at the use of gender miscoding for the non-binary characters, as well as compare this with how they represent other characters. How is the non-binary character represented? What gendered aesthetic are they presenting? Kaplan and Sedney define androgyny as "the combined presence [within a person] of socially valued, stereotypic, feminine and masculine characteristics." (6). There has not been established a clear code for analysing non-binary people on TV, likely due to the fact that these characters have only started appearing and being acknowledged on TV very recently. Because of this, I will rely on the feminine and masculine gender codes to establish defiance, since I cannot create a coding system for non-binary people myself due to time constraints and limited representation. Gender miscoding will be my main consideration in the analysis, and I will look at how their feminine and masculine codes are combined, as well as what kind of implications that has in regard to the person and representation of non-binary gender identity.

A lot of this chapter discusses the literary coding and analysis of SF, despite the fact that this research is aimed at SF TV. The reason for this is that SF is rooted strongly in literary traditions, and to understand its codes one must understand the origin and presentation of these codes in SF works. Translating these literary codes to film analysis is not as difficult as it may sound, as much SF and genderqueer coding is dependent on the work's use of themes and representation. SF televisual works are, like their literary counterpart, impossible to pin down with a few codes/rules (Kuhn 1). The fact that only few scholars seemed interested in studying SF's genre theory certainly has not helped build a framework for SF coding (4). There is a clear imbalance between non-normative representation in literary SF works and televisual. This also makes the analysis of televisual non-binary characters much harder, since not only are they not made visible *for* research, there are simply not enough characters *to* research. Though I was unable to find literature or research on this subject, I did notice during my own research that specifically this difference made between hard and soft SF makes it difficult for televisual works to represent such non-normative identities. The hard SF is much more mainstream and easier to consume, whereas soft SF really criticizes and challenges its

audience: in a consumer/capitalist society, it makes sense that networks give preference to shows that will not cause too much friction. Removing the social or political elements would make that easier, and relying on unchallenged norms – such as the binary – allows for an easy story. Literature, especially after the New Wave, was much less restricted as it was produced in a movement that specifically existed (and was consumed) to look critically at these social constructs. Having that base laid out for SF literature allows that tradition to continue now, but televisual SF's roots are in hard SF. To create more socially critical works, it would need to divert from the expected frameworks of its genre, which means networks are less likely to air it on their channel.

Ultimately, the thematic narratives and use of SF icons will be most important to my research to identify the genre. The icons of SF refer to spaceships, robots, computers, aliens – all motifs that can be grouped together as the motif of the Unknown Other – are visually appealing and recognizable in SF cinema. The two shows that will be analysed are both futuristic shows that deal with space travel, and these iconographic motifs are certainly recognizable in them, and will be discussed where relevant. I will also be paying attention to two qualities of SF that I identified early in the chapter: its worldbuilding and its thematic exploration of the Unknown Other. Both of these subjects are enhanced by linguistic and visual cues, and can thus be found in film and literature alike. In my research, I will (attempt to) distinguish a clear Other or 'unfamiliar thing' in the shows that is the subject of their exploration/curiosity, and specify how the non-binary characters are (un)familiarized. For world building I will be looking at explicit and implicit presentation of cultural and social traditions within the established universe. What is shown to be non-normative/unfamiliar in these shows? How is the audience informed of non-normative practices or identities in the show – if at all? By analysing the thematic narratives and visual presentation present in these SF shows, I will be able to analyse the role of the non-normative within visual SF works.

Finally, the question that remains is: why is SF so uniquely qualified for this kind of discourse? An essential part of SF is the dichotomy between the Self and the Other. The Other can be anything non-normative, referencing gender, class, sexuality, race, disability, or other (Merrick

241). The Self/Other dichotomy began as man vs woman – or rather, man vs not-man (Attebery 8). Merrick points out that that the presence of 'woman' in SF, be it literal or symbolical, reflects 'cultural anxieties about a range of 'Others' imminent in even the most scientifically pure, technically focused SF.' (241). Nowadays, this Other still represents marginalized groups. The process of understanding the Other is already referred to earlier in this paper: familiarizing the unfamiliar, normalizing the non-normative, denaturalizing the natural, etc. This shows two main functions of the Other: firstly, to represent something non-normative that has become normative, thus allowing us to question (invisible) social structures of contemporary society, and then secondly to act as a foil to the exploration of the Self/the human. Either way, it seems the Other is used as a way to advance the characters/story around them rather than be able to exist as a person.

The Self/Other dichotomy is one of the key codes in SF. It presents itself in every work of SF, though it takes on different forms: often personalized in the alien and the human, SF addresses social issues of gender, race, class, disability, sexuality, and others. Ziauddin Sardar calls this an integral part of SF; in order to explore ourselves (the Self), we are in need of an Other, which is then (often) in the form of an alien (5). "They are the dark antithesis that illuminates the patches of light within the structure of stories, throwing into relief what it is to be human" (6). However, this dark antithesis has social and political implications: sometimes it does not come in the form of an alien, but simply a non-normative human. Sometimes, the alien represents the non-normative human. With this analysis, we see the importance of non-binary being presented not as an Other, but as a Self: as long as they are not, their humanity is delegated to a lower position. The "human relief" is what the audience will identify with, and in order for non-binary people to be allowed a voice and place in society, they should be recognized as part of that. Their experience with gender *is* part of what it is to be human.

When looking at the different codes of SF and the genderqueer, Attebery's description is relevant to keep in mind: "[codes are] cultural systems that allow us to generate forms of expression

and assign meanings to them." (2). This means, as mentioned before, that codes not only indicate forms of genre, but also reflect parts of society in the text that are relevant/thematically important within the genre. SF is a genre that addresses many different societal issues within its text, making its coding inherently political. Recognizable themes are, as mentioned earlier, the construction of a new world, and the exploration of something unknown, but these vague terms could be applied to many other genres as well. The SF shows this paper will take into consideration will have been confirmed to be of the SF genre by its writers/creators, and I will look at their world construction and how they approach the Unknown.

Chapter 2: Humanity's Finest

This chapter focuses on the analysis of two human non-binary characters in the TV shows *Another Life* and *Nightflyers*. The reason for this distinction is due to the fact that there is a big grey area in SF where non-binary people are represented as humanoid, but fully human representation remains scarce. Analysing and criticizing their portrayals is critical to developing more human non-binary characters in the SF genre that would place and normalize their identities, rather than place them in the position of alien(ish) Other. I will first look at *Another Life*'s Zayn Petrossian, then *Nightflyers*' Lommie Thorne. I will consider the Unknown in both series, and finish with a comparison of the two characters.

Another Life

Another Life is a show that centres around a mysterious alien artefact that has come to Earth. No one seems to be able to understand what it is, or what the aliens want from them, so after months of research a crew is sent into space to travel to the origin of the alien artefact, Pi Canis Majoris. The captain of this mission, Niko Breckinridge, is awoken from soma sleep too early because the ship is off course, and she wakes the rest of the crew so they can recalibrate and get back on track. As can be expected, throughout the series things keep going wrong, such as mutiny, an exploding moon, an airborne virus, and essentially being space drugged by an alien that wants to blow up the ship – but they manage to make it to Pi Canis Majoris and find out the aliens who sent the artefact – the Achaia – are not friendly and want to destroy everything. On earth, Niko's husband is the lead scientist trying to communicate with the artefact (they lost communication with Earth pretty shortly after they got off course), and is able to make enough progress that they established some communication: however, it is their understanding that the Achaia are friendly and want to help Earth. The series ends with Niko's husband entering the Achaia ship with their ill daughter while Niko watches the Achaia blow up another planet.

The character of interest for this research in the show is Zayn Petrossian, the medical officer on board of the spaceship the Salvaris. I will start this analysis by looking at hir physical appearance and character construction. Then, I will look at how ze is treated in the context of the show: use of pronouns, gender discussions, or power relations between hir and the rest of the crew. Finally, I want to consider what tropes/stereotypes we see represented in Zayn.

(Zayn Petrossian, "Across the Universe" *Another Life*. Perf. JayR Tinaco. 35:34)

Zayn, upon our first time seeing hir, immediately establishes hirself as non-normative through hir appearance. Ze has a body that would conventionally read as male to an audience, but hir appearance is strongly feminized through the use of makeup, hair products, and clothing. Hir voice adds to the ambiguity ze is presented with: it can either be understood as a feminine low voice or a masculine high, though ze nearly always talks in soft tones that make hir appear more feminine due

to the sensitive emotionality it presents. The gender miscoding of Zayn relies heavily on the binary stereotypes I have typified in my methodology: hir character is permeated with patterns of femininity and masculinity, and as such the audience is informed ze is not a character belonging to either end of the binary, but rather both. In doing so, Zayn's non-binarity is most strongly signalled to the audience through this gender miscoding that directs attention away from the normative status ze might otherwise be placed in. Hir posture and movements further emphasize this gender miscoding: ze has a lean and vaguely athletic body and is smaller than most of the crew. The small- and leanness of hir body gives off a more feminine impression, but the athletic body the show hints at as well as hir confident posture again contradicts that impression.

Zayn's character is not any less mis-, or cross-coded. As the crew's medic, we see hir constantly taking care of others, both physically and mentally. Ze has the feminine coding of a character who is intuitive and sensitive, cooperative, and communicative. However, in hir actions we also see strength and assertiveness, intelligence, rationality, and independence: clear masculine coding. I use cross-coded because these characteristics are constructed in a way that hir personality does not contradict itself; the masculine and feminine codes compliment each other, creating a seemingly perfect character. Ze is literally the best of both worlds. However, by constructing hir character through these gender norms, Zayn's non-binary identity is restricted to a combined gender binary rather than an independent gender identity.

(from left to right: Bernie Martinez, Zayn Petrossian, and Javier Almanza. “Nervous Breakdown”. *Another Life.* Perf. A. J. Rivera, JayR Tinaco, and Alexander Eling. 44:05)

In addition, Zayn’s ‘perfect’ characterization make him an incredibly flat character. Throughout the show we learn nearly nothing about hir, whereas other characters are shown to have backgrounds, families, hopes, fears, dreams – or even mistakes with dire consequences. Though this of course varies per character, as an audience we learn the least about Zayn. There are two scenes in which we see Zayn portray an emotion other than serene problem-solver: ep. 8, when ze discovers hir ‘medical breakthrough’ was ungrounded (space drugs, an SF staple), which is quickly solved by his love interest Bernie Martinez, and episode 10. Episode 10 gives us more insight into Zayn’s character than the rest of the season combined. In episode 10 the crew was almost killed by Sasha, the human ambassador, and they discover an alien has implanted itself into Sasha’s brain, influencing his actions and thoughts. While Sasha is sedated in the medical lab, Zayn shows a silent fury when ze proclaims; “if Sasha dies, we’re studying that thing.” When Bernie tries to argue with hir, Zayn further explodes that “[..] because I would rather die than allow an alien into my brain!”. Zayn’s anger contrasts starkly with hir usual sanguinity and calmness, but interestingly enough this

heated exchange further emphasis Zayn's feminine coding despite anger being a (typically) masculine emotion: hir voice rises to a high pitch, ze has tears in hir eyes and a crack in hir voice, and after exclaiming why ze is upset, ze storms off to go help someone else.

An interesting trope we see repeated with Zayn is the *Damsel in Distress* trope, which again serves to further Zayn's femininity. Ze does not need to be saved constantly, but enough to clarify hir character as more submissive/weak than the others. We see it established already in ep. 9 when the ship is shut down, and Bernie is asked to attempt something dangerous and possibly fateful: upon expressing his hesitation the captain asks Zayn if ze can do it, but Bernie interrupts before Zayn can answer that he will do it. Of course, this can be attributed to the urge of a lover to keep their (possible) partner safe, but it also establishes their relationship as Bernie being the protector between the two, despite having been portrayed as a clumsy and friendly, teddy-bear like guy. This trope is more clearly expressed in ep. 10, in the scene we open this paper with: Sasha starts seizing, Zayn runs in to help him and is immediately captured, and Sasha threatens hir life to force Bernie to shoot him. While Zayn is held up by hir throat, gasping for air, the focus is mostly on Sasha's fear of living as a lab rat – and even when Zayn is saved, the focus shifts to Bernie for being brave and managing to shoot his friend for Zayn. The use of this trope, combined with the coding of hir appearance and character, frames the character in a feminine narrative over a masculine one. Though we do see masculine coding as well, the overall writing seems to emphasize Zayn's feminine code over hir masculine code.

Throughout this research I have used Ze/Hir pronouns when referring to Zayn. I have chosen to use these pronouns due to the fact these reoccur the most in interviews, and are the pronouns listed on Zayn Petrossian's *Another Life* wiki page[4]. However, I was unable to find an official source confirming any kind of pronouns, and interviews with the actor use both Ze/Hir and They/Them pronouns. Most strikingly, hir pronouns are never used in the show itself: people refer to Zayn only

[4] The *Another Life* wiki is not the same as the Wikipedia page, where hir pronouns are not included.

by name, and often ze is not referred to at all when not part of the scene. This not only excludes Zayn from the main narrative, as ze seems to not be important when not present in a scene, but also erases part of hir identity. Though the audience can read hir body and actions as gender miscoded, meaning some kind of non-binary, we do not get the vocal confirmation. More importantly, Zayn is not granted the same respect every other character on the show is. By neglecting hir pronouns and excluding hir from scenes as a consequence, Zayn is not just labelled as non-normative, but also as not important enough to be recognized by the audience/rest of the crew. More problematic is the fact that despite acknowledging hir non-normativity through hir appearance, ze is not made Other *or* Self. Ze is not made familiar to us. The audience does not get to engage with Zayn in a way that allows us to relate to hir, but the show insists on placing hir as a Self without addressing matters of gender or sexuality. The choice not to include that, some might call progressive. The show does not establish what is culturally considered to be non-normative, and Zayn is given a work status equal to that of hir cis co-workers. However, in the light of Zayn's pronouns being non-existent in the show, I would argue that this show makes use of non-normative gender identity and sexualities to emphasize its futuristic atmosphere, as well as attempt to seem progressive in ways they are not willing to follow up with, rather than present a world where these identities are not important anymore. Erasing someone's identity while physically coding them as non-binary is not progressive; it is just an empty gesture.

Nightflyers

In *Nightflyers* we are presented with a grim vision of the future where a virus is wreaking havoc and Earth is running out of resources to sustain itself. A group of scientists partner up with the captain of the Nightflyer in an attempt to contact an alien race that they know to be more sophisticated/developed. However, the aliens never reacted to any initiation of contact, and so this group flies out to intercept their ship while they happen to circle Earth. On the way there, we learn

more secrets about the scientists, the ship, its crew, and how Earth and its inhabitants have developed over the years. Over the months in space, the focus of the scientists seems to each shift in different directions: one starts a family, one becomes obsessed with dissecting a piece of alien technology, one tries to lose herself in the digital world, and one becomes romantically involved with the captain. At the end of the season the trip takes a dramatic and dangerous turn as an unknown sickness kills three people on board, driving one of the scientist's mad enough to chase people down with an axe, and two other members of the group receive psychic signals from the aliens that are impossible to deal with together, resulting in one suicide. Amidst this chaos, they arrive at the alien ship, and the show ends with the lead scientist taking off in a small space craft on his way to make contact, while the rest of the crew attempt to survive a nuclear shutdown.

Our focus in this show is on Lommie Thorne, a genderfluid cyber technician who is able to connect directly to the computer's data using a device called 'neuroport', which is installed in her arm. When this port is connected to the ship's hard drive, she is transported into this digital world where she is able to 'talk' to the ship. In this analysis I will again focus first on the coding in her appearance, movements, and character. Then I will discuss how gender is acknowledged in the show, and how Lommie is positioned in relation to the other characters. Finally, I will consider the use of TV tropes and/or stereotypes in Lommie's story.

(Lommie Thorne, "All That We Left Behind." *Nightflyers.* Perf. Maya Eshet. 48:32)

The gender miscoding we saw present in Zayn's appearance is not so easily recognized in Lommie. Her look is not consistent of contradicting masculine/feminine codes, but rather could be attributed to Attebery's category of 'thirdness': not reliant on binary codes, but reminiscent of something existing outside of it. Her stature is small, and the clothes she wears are often loose-fitting and hide the shape of her body. The clothing she wears is mostly practical (though there are

exceptions), but never stylized in a way associated with femininity or masculinity. Products to enhance appearance, such as for hair or makeup, are also never applied to Lommie: we only see her with neat hair once, in ep. 7. We see her in the digital world she created for herself, and we can assume this is how she wants to look, as this world is designed completely in accordance with her wishes and hopes. Even in this scene, however, there is no obvious feminine or masculine coding in her appearance. The lack of feminine codes could argue in favour of her appearance being masculine coded, but that would then argue in favour of the normative dichotomy male/not-male. The only masculine coding from the sheet I can apply to Lommie is that of a 'natural look', meaning no makeup or accessories.

(Lommie Thorne, "Transmission." *Nightflyers.* 11:20)

Lommie's posture does tend to reflect some feminine coding, as we often see her canting or hunched over, making herself smaller. She seems to avoid eye contact most of the time. We rarely see her take on a confident stance, except in the scene above when she is in the digital world where she has total control over what happens. Interestingly, though we can apply feminine coding to her posture, her movements do not match up with the idea of femininity: there is no inherent weak/submissive attitude even when she is hunched over, but there is also no masculine

competitiveness or confidence either. Because of this, her coding does not seem to match with either category: however, her character does seem to match with autistic coding.

A person is diagnosed with autism based on their behaviour since there is no test or scan that can 'prove' or 'identify' autism within the human body (Mullis 152). Because of that, characteristics inherent to autism are often important in the (also low) representation of people with autism. This means that the way TV characters move are important in recognizing possible signs of autism, and Lommie seems to adhere to these signs. Traits strongly associated with autism are lack of eye contact, difficulty with sarcasm/social cues, fidgeting, awkward posture, and a love of routine (Mullis 152). We see Lommie make eye contact only rarely, fidgeting constantly (and more as she gets more nervous), and her awkward posture has been described above. Rather than an association with the masculine or feminine, then, we see a connection made with autism. The implications of this are twofold: on one hand, the representation in no way demonizes Lommie's gender or mental health, despite the mistakes we see her make. She is not labelled under any negative stereotypes, nor does her character arc indicate that she is in some way unequal to her colleagues. However, on the other hand, we can question why the only non-binary character was also assigned other non-normative characteristics, whereas we see most of the crew live and act in a more normative way. I will note there is researched overlap between people with autism and people who do not conform to normative standards of gender, so it is not a reach to portray her as such (Schalkwyk, Klingensmith, and Volkmar): at the same time, it can be questionable to assign one character several non-normative characteristics while the rest adheres to (SF standards of) the normative.

Just like *Another Life*, *Nightflyers* chooses not to discuss non-normative subjects such as gender or sexuality, arguably to portray them as normative in this future timeline. Instead, the non-normative is redirected to 'advanced' humans such as the two characters who have psychic abilities and the captain, Roy Eris, who was genetically engineered. These 'evolved' humans are shown to be

considered non-normative in the society presented in the show. Lommie is portrayed as introverted and awkward, but it does not reflect on her gender identity, nor do we see her having 'the gender conversation' with any of the character or the audience: she is just portrayed as being like this. Notable, however, is the use of She/Her pronouns in this context: these are the only pronouns used for Lommie throughout the entire show, and combined with the lack of discussion or acknowledgment of her gender identity, it once again effectively erases her gender fluid identity. While there are plenty non-binary or genderfluid people who use feminine or masculine pronouns (making Lommie a good representation for them), the audience is in no way informed of her gender identity. Though her appearance does allow the audience to understand her as non-normative, this is not distinctively read as non-normative gender.

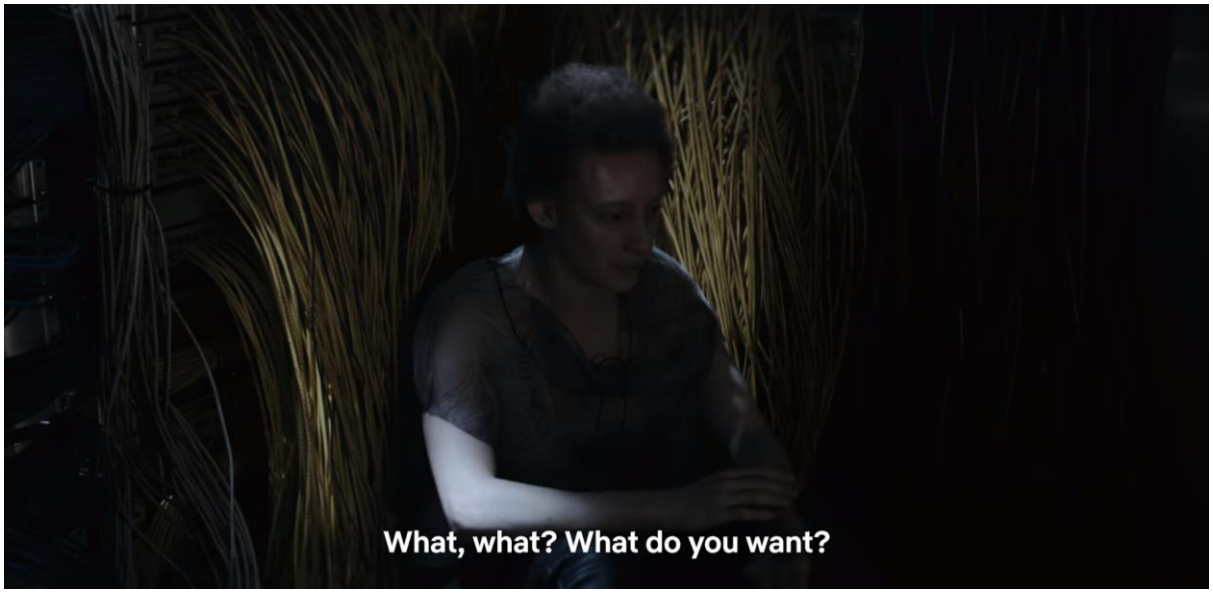
Lommie's status among the crew is in no way damaged or less-than any of her fellow scientists. The job she performs is unique and can only be performed by her, though that is also due to the fact she is the only one who has a neuroport installed. The context of this neuroport is not further explained in the show, so it can either be a normal body modification or something only few can get. As we see Lommie's memories of childhood, we can deduce the neuroport was installed after she left her home planet. This technological link combined with her own admissions of not understanding other humans serves to further her autistic coding (Ghosal 277). However, we also see her interact confidently and strongly with her colleagues, and we see her develop and end a relationship with Melantha. At the start of the series, Lommie is clearly part of a well-oiled machine of scientists, and she seems at ease with them. Though this does lessen as the series goes on, it does not reflect on her personal arc, but rather the overall plot where the scientists all seem to drift apart from each other.

There are no notably coded tropes or stereotypes attached to Lommie's character, but there is certain imagery used for her job that is worth further examining, as it has quite negative implications. The first time we see Lommie plug into the computer is in episode 1. The neural port is

situated in her lower right arm, a round tube with a hole that the computer needs to be plugged into. She inserts the plug into the port in her arm, leans back, and seemingly loses herself in the digital world.

(Lommie Thorne, "All That We Left Behind." *Nightflyers.* 37:09)

The imagery that is presented is strongly similar to that of a heroine user shooting up. Though the first time we see it happen her entrance into the cyber world is presented calmly, over the course of the series we see Lommie become more and more dependent on being able to escape to the digital world, to the point where she has several neuroports installed. The transition into the digital also becomes less controlled, more desperate, until at the end of the show we see her holed up in the bottom of the ship, plugged into the mainframe and surrounded by cables.



(Lommie Thorne, “Transmission.” *Nightflyers.* 22:24)

This use of imagery creates a comparison to a heroin user in a drug den. It implies a dependency on unhealthy coping mechanisms (she started increasing her time online after her breakup with Melantha) and unresolved trauma (she recreates her lost family in this world to interact with them) that she apparently is not able to handle in reality. Lommie also has body modification that look like tattoos, as can be seen in the picture showing her neural port. These are found in places that are suggestive of self-harm behaviour. The design itself is comparable to the Japanese practice of kintsugi, the art of repairing broken pottery with golden lines. This has become a popular tattoo choice for people with self-harm scars due to the fact that this practice teaches that even when something has been broken, with time and care it can be remade into something even more beautiful. The suggestion of drug use combined with remnants of self-harm, even when it is just used in imagery, ultimately paint a broken character that cannot seem to save herself. In the season finale she even admits that she does not mind if she does not survive as she attempts to fix her mistake, though we do not find out who survives.

The Unknown

Neither shows present their non-binary characters as part of the Unknown. The Unknown in these shows is delegated to the alien lifeforms: in *Another Life* the main Unknown revolves around the Achaia and their intentions, which is the driving force behind the plot. There are smaller 'Unknown' incidents throughout the show as a threat in single-episode storylines, such as the mysterious disease they encounter in episode 3, and these also lead back to some kind of alien interference. *Nightflyers'* main Unknown is also the aliens they are chasing. The Volcryn are a mysterious and advanced society, and as we get closer to their ship we are shown a more complicated and confusing picture of their nature. A good example of this is when they send back a piece of technology the scientists sent their way. Not only is it filled with data that should have taken millenia to collect, they have given it life: they used the DNA from the lead scientists to create flesh, and combined the technological with the organic. The two groups have not met, nor do we know how they identified the lead scientist, and they do not find out either as it is near impossible to decipher the improved technology for our scientists.

These subjects of the Unknown seem mostly used for intrigue and suspense, rather than social criticism. The role of the Unknown is to *remain* unknown, and we as an audience learn little to nothing about the alien races throughout the series. Social commentary is not possible when there is no connection between our society and theirs. The complete lack of information the audience is given makes it impossible to create connections between the role of the Unknown in these shows, and the issues of gender we are attempting to analyse.

Human Reflections

There are many more dimensions that would be possible and interesting to analyse for these characters, but due to the limitations of this research we remain focused on the characters' overall

coding and position within the show. What we ultimately see are two non-binary characters where, although their outwards appearance and movements/posture read as non-normative, are not confirmed to be non-binary in any way. The shows' refusal to engage or acknowledge possible gender discourse essentially erases their non-binary identity. The writers seem to mean to imply that these matters are undiscussed because they are normative in the future, but for audiences (especially non-binary audiences) this is just an empty act of activism.

Zayn's character is more traditionally non-binary coded in the sense that ze is reliant on masculine and feminine coding to present a character that does not adhere solely to either. Zayn seems to have stronger feminine coding, which could be due to the fact that hir body might read as male to an audience, and the creators are trying to counter that by explicitly gender miscoding hir. However, this reliance on feminine/masculine coding restricts Zayn's non-binary identity to binary boxes waiting to be ticked, rather than an independent gender identity that actually exists outside of the binary. For Lommie, this is better developed as she clearly steps outside the binary representation and instead becomes 'uncoded'. Within the show she is not treated as a non-normative Other. The use of drug imagery and autistic coding makes Lommie a complicated, rich character, and we get to know her to an extent Zayn is not afforded: we see her flaws, mistakes, past, and more. However, the heroin user imagery has negative implications that deserves more detailed research, and the show's lack of acknowledgement regarding non-normative gender once again gives no room for Lommie to exist as herself, instead censoring her for the audience to not be challenged in any normative beliefs.

Chapter 3: 'tis All Alien To Me

Within SF, the dichotomy of Self vs Other is possibly the most inherent and important theme to explore, but the issue is that you cannot construct an Other without personal political bias or implications seeping through. The Other is often a physical representation of what the writer considers non-normative: they use this figure to distort the world they are creating and explore whatever part of our world is foreign to them. Most often, this dichotomy is presented by the figures of the alien (Other) and human (Self). Last chapter, we considered human non-binary characters in SF, but non-binary characters are more often represented as alien than human: the alien Other is used to juxtapose and contrast the human Self, essentially serving as a foil to the (human) protagonists rather than existing independently. The alien Other can be most easily distinguished using two specific categories: the posthuman and the nonhuman. The analysis of this chapter will look at the figure, implications, and roles of these characters in their shows.

One might question why representing non-binary identities through nonhuman or posthuman characters is something worth criticizing, as it is argued that any representation is good representation. However, as the Other is an inherently political figure, the presentation and role it is given influences audiences on the political issues/identities they are meant to represent[5]. This is no different for gender non-conforming identities. Sporcic's criticism of the alien non-binary characters sums it up best: "The main issue with the existing science fiction production that deals with questions of gender, […], is that the authors, in most cases, exhibit a tendency to ascribe non-binary gender identities to alien races, automatically pushing them into the inferior category of the Other." (54).

The alien body in SF is rarely presented as Self: Thibodeau, in her research into this subject, points out that the alien body is used simultaneously as a way to create an Othered identity while at

[5] Identities are not inherently political, but many marginalized groups are made into political identities due to their presumed non-normativity.

the same time familiarizing the audience with this identity in a way that makes that Other seem intimate (155). The alien body was, for a long time, used as an allegory for the utopian ideals of work and class struggles following the Cold War, but in the 1970s this changed along with the modernist invasion of the genre: the alien body became, and still is, (often) an allegory for gender, sexuality and race (157). This not the only nonhuman body used as an allegory for non-normative gender: we see it reoccur with almost all non- or posthuman forms. What is often seen is that contemporary society's understanding of gender (heteronormative vs the rest) is juxtaposed with this alternative society's understanding of humanity (human vs the rest). The posthuman or nonhuman forms are used to abstract the notions of the Self and the Other, and allows us to think differently of the human body (Shafer, 95). Interestingly, these forms all represent different non-normative identities, thus allowing different understandings and criticisms of societal constructs.

Though my main concern in this essay is the representation of non-binary gender identities, I must also take a moment to acknowledge the racial dimension inherent to non-normative gender presentation. Due to limitations, I cannot discuss all the social dimensions related to non-normative gender, but race plays an incredibly important role in the embodiment and portrayal of the figure of the alien Other. I want to acknowledge the role and influence race has on how society views the Other, and how this relates to our view of the genderqueer Other. Scholars have made the argument that race, like gender, is a performance informed by the experiences that are unique to people of colour (Johnson 8). However, race also has a physical or phenotypical component, as we do not read someone with a white skin as being 'black' even if they had lived the exact same life (Snorton 88). This combination of embodiment and social construction resulting in an identity that is not accepted as the norm is exactly how we distinguish genderqueer or non-binary people. There is a stark difference between how the different groups embody themselves, as for people of colour it is most of the time not a choice to 'look' like their racial identity, but for both this embodiment expresses their identity. Snorton argues "[…] trans – in permutations – finds expression and continuous circulation within blackness, and blackness is transected by embodied procedures that fall under the

sign of gender.". There is not just an overlap, but there is a conversation and articulation between the two. In the introduction, I refer to literature that shows the cultural construct of Western gender identity, as there have been many other cultures with different relationships and understandings of gender. What must be noted further, however, is that when we look at marginalized groups such as people of colour or non-binary people, they are essentially all relayed back to the category of 'non-normative'. They are not the white, hetero, cis, able-bodied narrative that has taken over society since colonialism, and thus are both redirected to the same category. Snorton compares gender and race through the way they are viewed as objects and/or interchangeable (6). When bringing the body back to analyse the simplicity of 'the flesh', issues of race and gender are projected upon both: the flesh of (specifically) black people in the wake of colonialism and of non-binary people are parallel in the way society views and constructs them. They are ungendered and crossgendered, but not gendered according to Western norms (56). This is relevant because in this chapter, where we look at the posthuman and nonhuman, the matter of race is one that must be kept in mind since the Other is not just non-normative: it is almost always racialized, and because of that we view the social issues they embody within a racial context.

Post- and nonhuman characters are staples of the genre: they are the so-called icons of science fiction (Jones 163). These include figures such as the alien, the robot, the digital human (nonhuman), or the cyborg, the hybrid, and the clone (posthuman). All of these figures can be used to analyse the gender context of non- and posthuman representation within SF. In this analysis, I will be looking specifically at how these characters are used in *Another Life* and *Nightflyers*, first by analysing the nonhuman characters and then looking at the posthuman characters. I will use relevant literature to relativize these analyses, as there is more scholarly research on the non-normative gendering of non- and posthuman figures then with human figures.

Nonhuman Negotiations

The most famous nonhuman character in SF is the alien: a character continuously used to illustrate, compare, or emphasize the Self/Other dichotomy. Thibodeau refers to the alien body as 'a screen upon which to project desires or fears, [..].' (154). Every work of fiction assigns a different meaning to the alien. Social criticism is one often projected onto the alien, as it is easier to criticize existing power structures through an outsider character. When looking at the relation between gender and aliens, we see a recurring pattern of social criticism against different forms of the gender hierarchy: feminism studies, gender studies, and queer studies all show different (and valid) readings of the alien body in SF – and these are just the examples relevant to this analysis. What we see in soft SF is often the exposition of the contemporary sex/gender system using alien species, simultaneously making the unchallenged assumptions visible to its audience, and critiquing the social conventions it has chosen to expose.

There are two alien species that are important to the story of *Another Life*: the Achaia and the Zakir. The Achaia are the aliens who sent the mysterious artefact; the crew is looking for their home in an attempt to make contact. The Achaia, as we learn at the end, are an evil race that intend to destroy the Earth. It is said '[the Achaia] only want one thing. Destruction.' (08:36, ep. 10). They have abilities far beyond ours and are placed high upon the evolutionary food scale. An important part of the Achaian embodiment is that there is barely any physical proof of what they look like on the show. The scientist who enters the ship interacts with them while they take on his wife's form, and the other physical evidence of their existence are their ships and the parasitic organisms that insert themselves into people's brains. When referring to the Achaia, the people on the show use 'They' – not the singular but the plural, as they are referring to the entire species. The intentions of destruction and chaos gives the Achaia a more masculine tint, but overall there is no obvious gendering of coding applied to their species. This, of course, can be for two reasons: first being that in order to keep the mystery of the Achaia going (as well as the suspense), the writers chose to

withhold information about the Achaia. The second reason could be that the writers intend to portray them as non-normative by expelling the gendered norms we tend to apply to organisms, creating a picture of the unfamiliar through this mysterious alien species we never get to see. The Zakir, on the other hand, seems to be more femininely coded. We only meet one, but the AI present on the planet identifies her as a 'she'. We see her cower in submission and fear, making herself small, which relates back to feminine coding. For this alien we do get a physical representation: an insect-bat combination that looks natural, but not human. I say natural due to the fact that we see her surrounded by nature reminiscent of Earth, and her appearance relates back to our concept of nature. The relationship often drawn between women and nature further emphasizes her feminine reading.

(Zakir. "Hello." *Another Life*. 06:38)

The power dynamic presented between the Achaia and Zakir does, to an extent, confirm gender bias in that the feminine is shown as weaker/dominated. However, it is the Achaia that have taken on the role of Unknown Other in the most literal sense: we cannot relate nor understand the

Achaia due to the fact that they are unknown to us. Though the alien body has often been the target for representing marginalized communities (Thibodeau 157), the writers seem to have opted for a more conservative approach here. Pearson outlines the trope of alien-human imitation that often define the aliens as dangerous beings who try to imitate humanity in order to be able to take over the world. Though imitation is not applicable in this show, the nature of the Achaia is: their lack of empathy is what ultimately defines their unhuman/alien-ness. This then relays back to the communities these aliens are meant to represent. If the alien is in mainstream portrayed as evil, and in social SF they represent marginalized communities, audiences might make a connection between these two views. Of course, the Zakir are not portrayed evil, but they are also not portrayed as Self. We feel sympathy for their fate, and we can relate due to the shared threat, but they are still unknown to us in a way that won't allow us to connect with them; they remain an Unknown Other.

Nightflyers uses the same air of mystery as *Another Life* in its portrayal of alien life: the Volcryn is said to be an alien race with much advanced technology, and the scientists seem to believe they have the technology to help Earth recover. The Volcryn are not assumed to be malicious, but there has been no contact between humanity and the Volcryn despite humanity's attempts. As the show progresses, they develop the theory that the Volcryn are able to control space and time. The Volcryn are even less physically present than the Achaia, as most of the show we are trying to reach their ship. When we finally do, in the last episode, the Volcryn ship is described as a swarm and we get a vague visual of extending, extra-terrestrial lights through the psychic powers of one of the crew members.

(View of the Volcryn. “All That We Have Found.” *Nightflyers.* 18:15)

We see the Volcryn communicate with the ship twice: the first is when they send the scientists’ probe back filled with data, time, and human flesh, a message they attempt to decipher (though prove mostly unable to). The second is through a power they call the ‘Teke’, which is a psychic energy that can be shared between organisms. On Earth, some humans are born with these psychic powers. This makes them able to communicate with the Volcryn at close range, but also positions them as dangerous in human society – they are outcasts that are kept away from the world. This powerful human being able to communicate with the Volcryn shows a new evolution, but also serves to emphasize how overwhelmingly advanced the Volcryn are: after all, the psychic humans are still shown to be weak and helpless in comparison to the Volcryn. However, the Volcryn’s only actions seem to be ‘willingness to communicate with the scientists following them in space’, which is not an action gendered on either side of the binary. Ultimately, the only thing we know about the Volcryn is that they are more advanced, which makes them impossible to recognize

as coded either way. The Volcryn are not just delegated to the category of Other, they are firmly situated in Unknown territory: not to be understood, related to, or seen by an audience.

The second nonhuman we will discuss is the digital human. The digital human comes in different forms, but is most easily recognized as an AI: Artificial Intelligence. Often in the form of a supercomputer, the AI is a character that imitates human behaviour or has developed their own consciousness to interact with the world created. The idea of artificial intelligence is to have a computer that thinks and reacts on its own, but that does not always result in a 'human computer'. The AI can be represented as just as soulless as any other piece of machinery, just with the ability to act and react to commands on a more intelligent level. What we see more often in SF, however, is the conscious AI: a literal digital human. One that can not only make rational decisions, but feel emotions and desires.

William is the holographic image used by the AI of the ship to communicate with the crew. It is established in the first episode that he can change into whatever shape or appearance is necessary, but has adopted his current one due to it being in accordance with the captain's aesthetical preferences. Over time we see him grow more emotional and personal, and he is said to evolve from his original coding, essentially becoming human in every way except physically. Through this growth, he admits that he 'has grown to like William', claiming ownership over an identity constructed for someone else initially. William's embodiment is male, and he is generally more male-coded, but it is of course important to note that a hologram does not have the physicality we normally associate with sex or gender. He has taken on the form of William, but this was by choice: he wants to present this way even when distancing himself from his own coding. Throughout the show we do not see discomfort with his gender or identity, but in the last episode the show diverts from the male coding: William becomes a mother to a new AI. The use of the word 'mother' emphasizes this feminine act of birth, and provokes a sense of discomfort from the audience because of its transgression of cultural elements. To be precise, the culturally gendered act of creating new life being assigned to someone presented as male for ten episodes diverts gendered

expectations and undermines whatever masculine assumptions/biases we had attributed to William. It reemphasizes his non-binary status: he may go by a male appearance and pronouns, but he is ultimately a being without gender. His physical body is constructed by choice, and although it does reflect human (male) physicality, it does not restrict him to humanity's physical limitations. There is a second AI on Zakir, but there is not much to analyse since it is mostly used as a plot device for the crew/audience to find out information about the Achaia. The device exists somewhere between digital alien and robot due to its lack of embodiment but presence of consciousness, but there is no specific gendering involved in its conversations. Mostly, it translates conversation and gives information.

The 'information source AI' character is often equated with the friendly AI trope. These AI's are mostly characterized based on certain themes: temptress/lover, lover/saviour, or lover/leaver. More often than not, these AI's are coded as female, and provide intimate and emotional connection to their (often male) counterpart. In William's case, however, we see a reversion of this stereotype: though the lover/saviour theme remains, it is a male-coded AI that acts out and provides the female lead with an emotional counterbalance. The friendly AI's nature is to transgress boundaries: from the machine to the human, the inorganic to the organic, the non-human to the human. This transgression, though easily interpreted as heteronormative, also questions the normative boundaries of society (Thweatt-Bates 42). By creating a male-coded AI that takes on a historically feminine coded role, we see this transgression play out. While this is mostly done subtly throughout the show, it is the act of creating new life and being titled 'Mother' that finally clues the audience in on William's ungendered existence. Though William was built by humans, his evolution throughout the show allows him to grow beyond human cultural limitations, including gender norms. The AI both exemplifies cultural norms (created by humans, thus cultural bias is installed) and defies them (not limited to human cultural thinking due to not being human).

Posthuman Ponderings

We start the posthuman analysis with hybrids. Hybrid usually refers to alien-human offspring, but the general understanding of the posthuman hybrid is a being whose human DNA has become mixed with something non-human. For that reason, I apply the term to the humans whose brains were taken over by the Achaians: Sasha Harrison and Harper Glass. Sasha is the male crew member whose job is to broker peace between humans and aliens. When the crew leaves him alone on a planet, he is absorbed into the artefact (similar to the one on Earth) and leaves with an alien parasite influencing his actions and thoughts. The hybrid human is a figure of contradictions and evolution more than anything else. We see Sasha struggle against the alien but ultimately being unable to disobey its commands. He is shown to have gained new powers that are beyond human capacity through his alien fusion. Sasha is masculine coded, but also an arrogant character whose actions create dissonance between him and the rest of the crew. He is typified as a 'rich white boy' whose father got him the job and is generally seen as useless by the rest of the crew. In Sasha's case, masculine coding is used to emphasize his masculine fragility. There seems no inherent gendering upon his fusion with the alien parasite, as the parasite is only seen in X-rays and one calcified skull: an invertebrate creature attached to the brain of its host. Sasha is able to 'see' the parasite as it appears only to him as a (better) reflection of himself: more intelligent, more aggressive, more action prone.

(Sasha Harrison. “I Think We’re Alone Now.” *Another Life*. Perf. Jake Abel. 04:04)

Parasite-Sasha seems to take on the more toxic side of the masculine coding. We can wonder if this is an extension of Sasha, an extension of the parasite, or a reflection of the Achaia, but ultimately, we are not given enough information to draw any conclusions. Comparing Sasha to Harper, it would seem that their negative characteristics are blown up: Sasha’s insecurity turns to anger, whereas Harper’s ambition turns to manipulation. Though we are not shown her intentions or motivations, the show hints that she has become a plant for the Achaia to lure humanity into a complacency that will make it easy for the Achaia to infiltrate.

The usual conflicts we see with hybrid characters are the cultural conflicts they encounter in structuring their identity: how does their human part reconcile with the non-human part? This conflict can be transferred to Sasha’s progression as hybrid, though not in the traditional sense. We see him try to hold on to his original ‘Earthly’ values while the parasite attacks his mental state and forces its own agenda on him. This struggle of forced identity vs original self is something non-binary people would be able to relate to as it directly parallels their inner identity with the social identity they are assigned and forced to perform. However, it is not positioned in the show as a struggle of

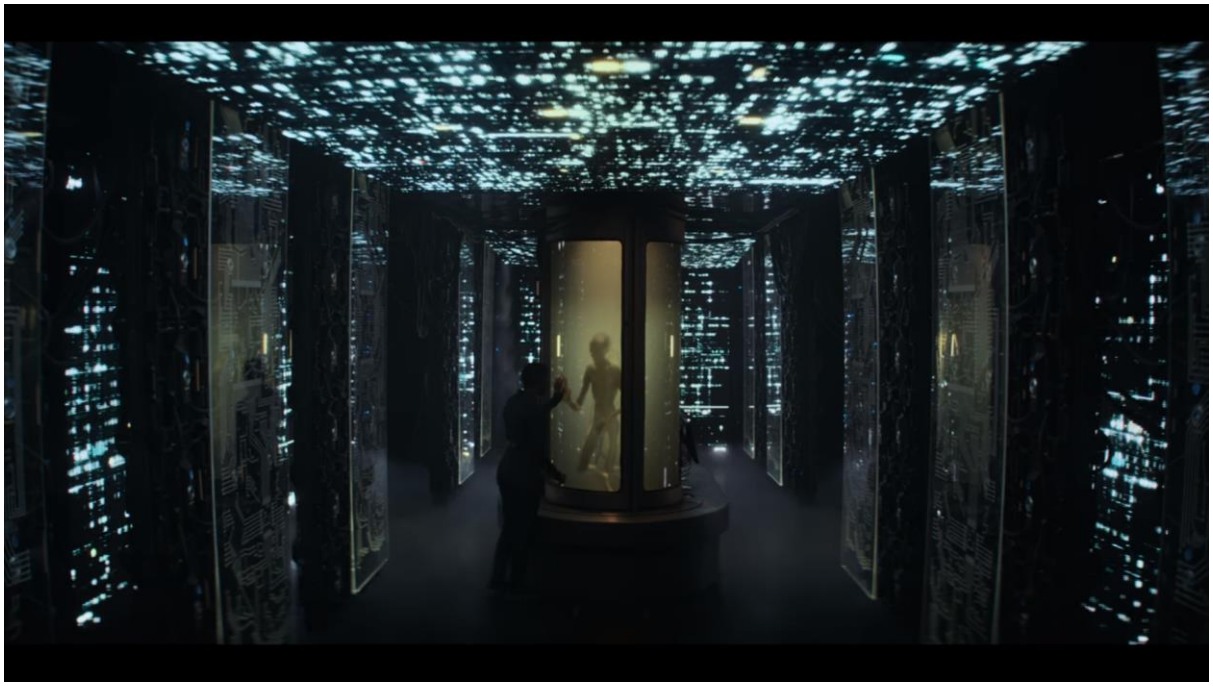
gender identity and social pressure, but rather of the literal invasion of someone's personal thoughts, thus structuring the issue around autonomy rather than social constructs.

Posthuman characters tend to be more difficult to label as their existence is dependent on mixing different organisms/technology/other. *Nightflyers* seems to be fond of crossing their SF icons into single characters. The two characters I will be discussing now are posthuman, but not easily identified as *one* icon, thus my choice of separating them from the others. The first character of interest here is Cynthia Eris: previous captain of the Nightflyer. Throughout the first episodes, we learn the ship is trying to kill the scientists: this is Cynthia's consciousness that she uploaded into the ship's mainframe before her passing. The show establishes her as being the same person she was while alive, except her body is now the ship. Later, she takes over Lommie's body and becomes fully organic again. This makes her a difficult figure to iconize as she is neither digital human nor cyborg nor human. Due to her existence and human life, I categorized her as posthuman. Cynthia's appearance is femininely coded: dresses, make up, impeccable styling. Her character is more masculine: she shows aggression, dominance, intelligence, ambition and insensitivity. When we see her in the digital world (where she can choose her appearance), we see her in two different forms: when she was a child, and when she was an adult. Both of these remain true to how she supposedly looked like, meaning the loss of her physical body did not change her sense of identity. When she takes over Lommie's body, we also do not see any significant changes other than inhibiting a new body. As a digital human she follows none of the conventions I outlined earlier, but due to her human past this would not be possible either.

Cyborgs are recognized by their (often later) marriage of organic and machinery. The cyborg is almost always used as a queer symbol due to its emancipatory features that defy cultural norms and convention, but Cynthia does not quite follow this narrative either. From a purely physical standpoint, Cynthia chooses her new bodies not because of her identity, but because of her will to survive: she has no issue stealing Lommie's body to return to the physical world, but shows no

interest in the actual body itself. Thematically she represents none of the struggles cyborgs are meant to represent either: she does not need to question her identity as she seems to simply exist as Cynthia, regardless of whatever body she resides in. Though physically she is posthuman, thematically she embodies none of the struggles or social issues these icons usually represent, instead her main character representing self-interest and anger. Not a pretty picture, but not one that reflects on non-binary people either as there seems to be a lack of social dimension to Cynthia's character.

The second character of interest is Roy Eris, Cynthia's 'son'. We learn in the finale that the he was created by his mother through artificial means using her own DNA, and his 'real' body is in a large test tube on the ship while a robot version of him walks the ships. He controls this robot body from his test tube. In the beginning of the show, we are not even shown this robot: he remained in his quarters and sent a hologram of himself (or, his robot self) to talk to the crew. These three different bodies mean Roy could belong to the categories of clone, hybrid, robot, and digital human. We know Roy mostly through his robot body, which is male and male coded. His overall character is masculine coded as well: a strong leader, dominant, active, brave, intelligent, and mysterious. The body we are presented throughout the season seems to reflect this masculinity, but then upon the discovery of Roy's 'real' body the audience starts to question this: he no longer lives up to the standards of masculinity set for himself throughout the show. His body is weak, barely more than a skeleton with skin, and he is dependent on the tube and technology of the room to keep him alive. The strength of his character disappears as we see his helplessness while in the tube: he cannot defy his mother, fight for Melantha, or even speak as he is imprisoned by the technology that is keeping him alive. His robot body was destroyed, and now the only body he can rely on is the one that undermines the masculine coding he performed before. It can be seen as a metaphor for the standards of masculinity men are held to: toxic masculinity dictates that men act and present themselves in certain ways or risk being seen as weak, even though their 'real' self might be nothing like the persona they are forced to adopt.



(Melantha Jhirl and Roy Eris. “All That We Have Found.” *Nightflyers.* Perf. Jodie Turner-Smith and David Ajala. 23:53)

When Cynthia reveals she ‘made’ Roy to keep her legacy alive, she establishes he is a cross-sexed clone of herself. Though similar with actual birth, the intentions he was created with take even more of his agency over body and character away. This can be compared to how non-binary people are ‘created’ socially to act in accordance with one binary, rather than break free from their metaphorical tube and live without restraint. This interpretation, however, is not supported by any visual or textual evidence in the show itself.

The thematic issues of digital humans are also not relevant to Roy as, although built by humans, he is an organic being. The hologram he uses is the futuristic equivalent of facetiming. As a hybrid, he also does not seem to embody the evolution and contradiction typical to them, since he remains a constant in most of the show. Our understanding of him changes, but his identity remains the same. The robot figure is usually a reflection of human norms without being human, much like the digital human. Again, this is not fully applicable to Roy as he *is* not a robot but uses a robot body to walk around the ship. However, embodiment is of importance in this research. The form of his

body is interesting since it does not reflect his 'real' body, but instead follows masculine expectations. This means that these masculine attributes were used intentionally, possibly based on biased views/norms its creator may have held. A term used for this when contextualizing robots in the discourse surrounding gender is 'engenderneering': the construction or interpretation of a gender-neutral object so that its gender becomes part of its essence (Schwartzman 75). Bergstrom suggests that while robots with strong personalities are often used to 'blur accepted distinctions between human and non-human' (35), sexual differences are often quite visibly coded in SF films: though this could be attributed to Roy's desire to keep his body a secret, it can also be used to guide the audience in how to read a character. General SF treatment of robots does little to represent non-binary people, and Roy seems to make no exception to this. Masculine and feminine robots seem more confined to the gender norms they were assigned than the people who created them. There is little interaction between femininity and masculinity within a robot's identity. Although one rule cannot be applied for ever SF work, the recurring pattern of the robot's masculine/feminine dichotomy is not so easily brushed aside.

Finally, clones are often used to question the concept of femininity as it involves the practice of creating life in transgressive ways (Brigley 22). Schwartzman argues that the clone is a figure that automatically defies heterosexual customs due to its asexual reproduction (85). This asexual reproduction carries an essence of purity in it (Brigley 18) that would deny the gendered bodily experience of 'female creation', as cloning would be creating life through artificial means that do not depend on the female reproductive system. Cynthia's lack of interest in the conventional is emphasized in her different embodiments and her defiance of these cultural norms. Driven only by her wish to stay alive, she refuses conventions we consider inherent to create life by combining different non-human elements with the human; for herself and for Roy. Though it ultimately changes little for Roy, Cynthia's refusal of limited cultural norms pushes for innovations of science previously unseen: whether these are good or bad remains to be seen, but they are not immediately demonized.

Post- and Nonhuman Reflections

Ultimately both shows present very little non-binary representation in their posthuman and nonhuman characters. Though they do make use of gender miscoding in their character constructions, the presence of this miscoding in connection to non-binary identity is missing. The academic literature and interpretations of these SF icons also does not seem to relate back to the characterizations in these shows. Although not using the non-binary identity to create dissonance to alienate characters is good for non-binary people, we see a binary gendering happen among these characters that remains firmly structured within coding. The gender miscoding present does not conflate or build a new category, but rather reemphasizes existing categories. Characters are given depth, yes: but none that specifically challenge the audience in their understanding of gender identity despite the posthuman, nonhuman, and human characters' diverse identities. The shows barely acknowledge the established non-binary identities of its main cast, and they are only further erased by the strict gendering of character and appearance for non- and posthuman figures. In addition, the non- and posthuman characters are given much more screen time/depth than the human non-binary characters, especially in *Another Life*. Both shows seem to sidestep issues they promote their stories with: social and political questions of gender and society, though implied to be unlike *our* normative society, are simply not addressed. The shows ultimately claims credit for progressiveness without having to fear alienating a conservative audience. It was established in chapter 1 that the SF works that often surface in mainstream media rely on normative ideas of gender, rather than question social aspects that might criticize or challenge the audience's associations. These two works follow in the footsteps of that mainstream SF TV trend: though the shows portray a society unlike our own, and hint at the rejection of our contemporary cultural norms, both shows confirm and use these cultural norms to present a plot that is interesting only in its action and mystery. The lack of criticism regarding social issues, specifically gender, is disappointing for shows so actively promoting their non-binary inclusion and futuristic/advanced societies.

Conclusion

My hope and expectation when starting this research was to analyse characters that not only *are* non-binary, but also provide an audience with understanding and normalization that would further naturalize the non-binary identity in contemporary society. Science fiction remains a genre uniquely perfect for exploring unknown and non-normative identities, and thus can be used as a platform to provoke and challenge audiences in their ideas, and to give space to marginalized groups of people. Unfortunately, the two shows I analyse in this research failed to live up to that expectation. Despite the inclusion of non-binary characters, the shows not only failed to acknowledge their gender identity, but also refused to engage with the audience on the topic of gender. Icons of science fiction that are often used to embody social struggles, especially with gender, were left shallow in that regard. The most in-depth character that seemed to embody non-binary identity (to an extent) was the AI William, who was made more familiar to us than the *actual* non-binary character on the same show. He diverted gender norms, but ultimately did not challenge the audience's gender norms in any way, nor did his presence create space for gender discourse beyond his cultural transgression of creating new life. Both shows focus more on an exciting plot and the mystery of the Unknown than criticizing contemporary social values. Although it is possible to interpret the nonhuman and posthuman characters in a way that their experiences/identities *can* be compared to non-binary people, ultimately this interpretation does not seem supported or emphasized by the visual/textual narrative of the shows. Being able to interpret something as representation does not equal something being representation.

SF literature seems to engage more with the social issue of gender (among others), whereas we see a distinct lack of this with televisual SF. Although this makes for interesting literature, the focus of this research was on TV due to the huge influence it has on contemporary society. Audiences consume televisual messages on a daily basis, and it is (one of) the most accessory medium for sharing intelligence, knowledge, and ideas. The failure of these shows to use their platform to challenge conventional thought, and even rely on gender norms that they

simultaneously establish as outdated, confirms these norms and thus undermines the identity of non-binary people. There is a whole community of trans-, genderqueer, and non-binary people in the world that exists of wonderful, vibrant, and exciting characters that not only deserve representation but would make a work of fiction more interesting. The lack of representation does them, and the rest of the world, a disservice, as the richness of diversity cannot be understood when writers rely on unchallenged assumptions in their construction of fictional universes.

This research was set up to analyse the roles and representation of non-binary people in SF televisual works to start understanding the relationship and practical characterization on SF TV, but by no means is this research finished nor perfect. To develop this subject and add to the field of queer and SF studies, further research is needed. Possible options for further research are research that looks at shows from other genres compared to SF, characters that are non-binary/androgynous/trans-coded, SF's relationship to the genderqueer in literature, or the social representations of human, nonhuman, and posthuman characters. It is my hope that as more shows develop and include diverse characters, it becomes possible to elaborate on this research and create frameworks and coding systems scholars can use to analyse non-normative gender identities.

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