

The Abolition of Gender: Postgender Technologies in Sayuri Ueda's *The Cage of Zeus*

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Abstract

This paper studies a contemporary example of postgender science fiction, *The Cage of Zeus* by Sayuri Ueda. Postgenderism, a cultural movement towards the deconstruction of the gender binary, is often assisted in science fiction by postgender technologies such as reprognetics or advanced bioengineering that alter the human body and its social perceptions beyond simple binary categorization. My paper will explore how, in the world of *The Cage of Zeus*, postgender technologies are used in an attempt to build an ideal postgender society in which binary gender no longer exists. However, the attempt ultimately fails, because those very postgender technologies undermine their own purpose by inadvertently promoting binary thinking. The paper is organized into three broad sections; the first section introduces postgenderism, the second section offers an overview of postgenderism in speculative fiction, and the third section engages deeply with the postgender technologies and world-building of *The Cage of Zeus* itself.

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Postgenderism is a cultural movement which argues that “gender is an arbitrary and unnecessary limitation on human potential” (Dvorsky and Hughes 1). As such, postgenderism is “a radical interpretation of the feminist critique of patriarchy and gender, and the genderqueer critique of the way that binary gender constrains individual potential and our capacity to communicate with and understand other people” (Dvorsky and Hughes 13). Postgender literature espouses this same philosophy, and postgender speculative fiction speculates as to the existence or emergence of worlds with non-binary gender models, that is, of worlds with no genders, multiple genders, or an amalgam of genders. Postgender science fiction, specifically, explores the technologies that assist in, contribute to, indirectly enable, or directly cause the abolition of the gender binary. My paper will conduct a close textual analysis of Sayuri Ueda's *The Cage of Zeus*, a contemporary science fiction novel that builds a postgender world through postgender technologies, which are depicted as being crucial to the postgender revolution. As Dvorsky and Hughes say in the abstract of their defining essay on postgenderism:

Postgenderism is an extrapolation of ways that technology is eroding the biological, psychological and social role of gender, and an argument for why



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the erosion of binary gender will be liberatory. ... Postgenderists ... foresee the elimination of involuntary biological and psychological gendering ... through the application of neurotechnology, biotechnology and reproductive technologies. (Dvorsky and Hughes 1)

However, just as vital as the technologies themselves are the cultural, socioeconomic, and ethical approaches to gender adopted by the users of postgender technologies. After all, technology itself is intersectional and exists in inextricable dialogue with culture, society, and economics, through what Arjun Appadurai calls a five-point “global cultural flow” whose points are: “(a) ethnoscapescapes; (b) mediascapescapes; (c) technoscapescapes; (d) finanscapescapes; and (e) ideoscapescapes” (Appadurai 296). Each of these landscapes intersect with all the other landscapes with Gordian knot-like complexity, but the most relevant intersection to my paper is that of the “technoscape” and the “ideoscape” of gender. What Appadurai describes as “the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (295) can certainly be applied to gender; binary gender is one such homogenization, and postgenderism is the movement towards a more heterogeneous (but not heteronormative) plethora of overlapping and coexisting gender identities, including non-binary gender identities. If technology can move “across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (Appadurai 297), then the boundary between the so-called male and female sexes and genders should be transgressive as well. This connects with Donna Haraway’s concept, in *Manifestly Haraway*, of the cyborg as a symbol of boundary-crossing and liberating technology.

Like Haraway’s posthumanism, postgenderism holds that under the gender binary, “[w]e have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender” (Haraway 67). Technology – particularly postgender technology that seeks to tangibly alter or erase the distinctions of biological and social sex and gender – keeps that “utopian dream” alive in postgender science fiction. Despite being utopian, the dream is still “monstrous” because, under the current hegemonic totalism of the gender binary, the non-binary is seen as monstrous, even though that seeming monstrosity is the only means of healing the injuries done unto societies and individuals by that very binary. It is a case of the addiction (binary gender) training its host (society) to behave as though the removal of the drug is a threat in itself. To the addict, recovery is as monstrous as it is impossibly utopian.

This battle instigates in the collective body of our culture(s) a fever, a confusion, fits of action and reaction, the thrashing of a being mid-transformation as the addictive substance fights for dominance with the body before the addiction breaks.

Much as with the biological recovery from addiction, there is a cognitive rewiring (Costa et al.) that must occur in our collective minds in order to re-route the mental connections we have made between the signs and symbols of gender as we have come to know it, and gender as it *could* be.

Modes of social behavior and patterns of collaborative world-building must be revisioned, renewed, and reenacted. Fiction offers us an opportunity to gradually rewire our brains with new concepts of gender, including new gender technologies, because technology is among the chief means by which we physically renew and reenact social and cultural patterns. The novel studied in this paper performs just such a technological revisioning; the postgender world-building of *The Cage of Zeus* is a step towards Haraway's "utopian dream" of a "monstrous world without gender." Even if it does not reach that utopia, the novel has at least begun to chart a path to it, and has become part of a growing literary movement towards postgenderism, a movement "away from binary thinking and toward hybrid beasts, open-ended quests, and new tales" (Lacey 63).

Postgenderism has been increasingly prevalent in science fiction, and in speculative fiction in general, for decades. I have chosen to narrow the scope of this paper to only *The Cage of Zeus*, because the novel deeply engages with postgender technologies in particular, and because earlier, classic explorations of postgender worlds – such as Ursula K. Le Guin's seminal *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) – have already received significant critical attention.

Focusing on contemporary postgender world-building through the lens of postgender technologies will enable me to make a more original contribution to the academy, and will address the need for fresh research into more recent postgender works, as well as into how postgenderism is developing as a subgenre of speculative fiction. I will now briefly look back at the history of the postgender subgenre of speculative fiction in order to establish a framework within which to locate *The Cage of Zeus*, and in order to describe the overarching literary tradition of which the novel is a part.

Aside from the aforementioned *The Left Hand of Darkness*, other twentieth century examples of postgender speculative fiction include *The Dark Light Years* by Brian Aldiss (1964), *The Gods Themselves* by Isaac Asimov (1972), *Xenogenesis* by Octavia E. Butler (1989), *Distress* by Greg Egan (1995), *Commitment Hour* by James Alan Gardner (1998), and the *Worldbreaker Saga* by Kameron Hurley (2014-2015). One series, the *Wraeththu Histories* by Storm Constantine (1987-2017), has bridged the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This explosion of postgender speculative fiction in the last few decades demonstrates a marked rise of interest in postgenderism in the past half a century, both as a fictional and as a potentially real social model

whose viability has been and *is* being continually tested by ever-new speculative texts. *The Cage of Zeus* (2011) is among the more recent science fiction contributions to postgender world-building.

Such postgender worlds offer queer alternatives to the ubiquitous, heteronormative worlds of mainstream science fiction that reinforce and perpetuate the “absolute despot duality” (Anzaldúa 41) of the gender binary. Postgender worlds have the capacity to release genderqueer and gender non-conforming people from the oppressive, othering narrative of being “unnatural,” “prohibited and forbidden” (Anzaldúa 25), and to provide them with an affirming narrative that naturalizes and normalizes their gender identities instead of erasing and pathologizing them.

In ideal postgender worlds, gender diversity is no longer “perverse” or “troublesome” (Anzaldúa 25), but natural. Heteronormative privilege is, if not altogether dismantled, then at least interrogated; unlike heteronormativity, which interrogates the genderqueer, in postgender worlds, the genderqueer interrogates the heteronormative. The language in which that interrogation is conducted is often technology, at least in postgender science fiction. In these science fiction worlds, heteronormativity is not simply the unalterable, involuntary assignation of one half of the male/female gender binary to a person based on their biological sex at birth, but the absence of a choice at all, even in gendered systems with multiple genders.

It is “normativity” in general, as a system of thought, social policing, and enforcement that is anathema to postgenderism. Heteronormativity is the most commonly understood example of such normativity, but as the above postgender novels explore, heteronormativity’s insidious practice of enforcing genders can persist, like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, even in more progressive-seeming systems. The ideal postgender world is not always achieved. In *The Cage of Zeus*, prejudice against genetically engineered intersex people exists alongside otherwise progressive attitudes towards non-binary identities, and alongside the technological ability to (seemingly) freely choose one’s gender expression and biological sex, with sexual organs and characteristics treated as optional technological accessories. Progressiveness, in nearly all of the postgender novels mentioned above, is associated with the societal acceptance of individual agency. Despite this progressiveness sometimes being incomplete or problematic within the texts themselves, the progressive journey *towards* an ultimate acceptance of all genders is very much in line with the postgender manifesto. As Dvorsky and Hughes state,

Postgenderists do not call for the end of all gender traits, or universal androgyny, but rather that those traits become a matter of choice. Bodies and personalities in our postgender future will no longer be constrained and circumscribed by gendered traits, but enriched by their use in the palette of diverse self-expression. (1)

The postgender novels listed above offer their characters many such palettes of “diverse self-expression,” with each palette featuring a different but no less vibrant combination of gender identities and gender expressions. In doing so, postgender worlds bring genderqueer, genderfluid, transgender, agender, intersex, and non-binary people in from the borderland of society to the mainland: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary ... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants ... the perverse, the queer, the troublesome ...” (Anzaldúa 25).

A “borderland,” in sociological terms, is created by geographical and sociopolitical borders which “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (Anzaldúa 25). In the context of this paper, the heteronormative border that exists in contemporary society between “straight” and “queer” or “cis” and “trans” is an artificial and unnatural division based on prejudice and privilege, where the straight experience is identified as the default/self, and the queer experience as the aberration/other. *The Cage of Zeus* presents a similar division between the Rounds and the Monaurals that I will soon explore. This attempt to divide that which should be whole – the universal human experience of love, desire, and self-expression – results in the forced, painful, and messy surgical removal of the LGBTQIA+ community from the “mainland” of mainstream society.

However, a “borderland” has the potential to be a fruitful, hybrid, and reparative “Third Space” (Bhabha 74-75) instead of merely a “fractured landscape” where “[i]nterstitial terrains” (Lakomäki et al. 251-260) between apparently different communities are perpetually combative and fractious. Instead, a borderland can be open to mutual acceptance and dialogue. It need not be a space of division but a space of merging, where “the lifeblood of two worlds merge[s] to form a third country – a border culture” (Anzaldúa 25). This border culture, instead of surviving solely on the outside and on the edge of a cliff, always on the brink of extinction and erasure, can itself become a return to the center and a reclamation of and amalgamation with the center. A border culture can, through a hybridized “reparative turn” (Wiegman 7), dismantle the oppositional binary framework which resulted in that culture’s own exile:

The notion of queer as ethnic and gender multiplicity delineates a politics of difference that subverts the segregating order. Anti-homophobic interventions ... should target a binary system of exclusion; heterosexual versus homosexual, masculine versus feminine, white versus all other races, demonstrating that such a binary distribution is asymmetrical. (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 84)

All postgender texts are, in this sense, “borderlands,” for they dismantle binary

systems. An intersectional reparative approach is capable of deconstructing the false divisions imposed on gender and sexuality by heteronormativity, by addressing not only heteronormativity in isolation but the entire, interlocking system of binary oppositions on which narratives of privilege and exclusion are based. This more inclusive perspective “emphasize[s] the importance of building bridges in order to neutralize exclusionary practices [and] posits an enveloping community that overcomes interethnic and international segregation” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 84). Bridge-building across borders creates an osmotic dialogue that eventually erases those borders, because there is enough of a blurring between previously held concepts of “self” and “other” that borders are no longer required. When borders are eliminated, the divisive rhetoric of “borderland” vs. “mainland” becomes irrelevant and obsolete.

Postgender science fiction uses technology to blur the existing borders between male and female, straight and gay, cis and trans, binary and non-binary, and does so through recontextualizing the notion of the borderland within new, complex fictional worlds which contain species, races, genders, religions, technologies, and cultures that are markedly different from our own and yet reenact many of the same injustices. In these speculative worlds, borders still exist, but the key distinguishing factor is *where* the borders are drawn; the shifting of these borders from between the borderlands/mainlands we expect (such as homosexual/heterosexual) to those we do not (such as AI/human) is what calls our attention to the problematic existence of such borders in our own world.

The technique of recontextualization makes strange that which was once familiar, and hence draws the reader's attention to it, ringing an alarm that reminds the reader of similar borders in modern society and the need for eliminating those borders. In essence, the postgender texts mentioned above provide social commentary on gender by couching that commentary within a broader critique of us/them binary ideologies, such as those of racism (superior/inferior), colonialism (civilized/barbaric), capitalism (rich/poor), technospeciesism (AI/human), tyranny (powerful/weak), and monarchy (ruler/subject). This critique is enacted through the use of fictional postgender technologies. As Haraway observes:

[C]ertain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. (Haraway 59-60)

These various facets of oppressive binary thought are deconstructed by the numerous postgender works listed earlier. All of the texts take intersectional approaches to postgender world-building, and do so through technologies that confront the socioeconomic, philosophical, ethical, and medical ramifications of binary social structures including and beyond gender.

Thus, my paper studies postgenderism in the larger, cohesive picture of technological world-building as engaged in by *The Cage of Zeus*. I will conduct an intersectional “reparative reading” (Wiegman 7) that will explore how complex, multilayered postgender world-building occurs within the primary text through its deployment of postgender technologies.

The two most recent novels from the past decade that use postgender technologies to construct postgender worlds are Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312* and Ann Leckie’s *Ancillary Justice*. Since those two novels are the immediate contemporaries of *The Cage of Zeus* (having been published within one to two years of Ueda’s novel), and are part of its literary and cultural context, I must briefly comment on their approaches to postgender technologies, so that I might compare them with Ueda’s approach in *The Cage of Zeus*.

Robinson’s novel, *2312*, features a humanist, Mondragon-inspired economy maintained and regulated by a set of qubes, or quantum computers of immense intelligence. The socioeconomic utopia portrayed by the novel has a direct impact on the proliferation of non-binary gender identities in this postgender world, where gender diversity is approached with the same rational humanism that the economy is.

Leckie’s Radch empire, however, does not take such a utopian approach to the technological abolition of gender. In *Ancillary Justice*, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is depicted as the primary postgender technology, given that the proliferation of AI has led to the deconstruction of the gender binary, and, indeed, the gradual dissolving of the concept of gender as a whole. An AI-run society sees no worth in gender models at all. However, this democratization and equalization of all gender identities is arguably also a *flattening* of those identities, particularly in Radch-occupied cultures that seek the freedom to identify differently. Technology as a tool of colonialism and cultural assimilation makes it an ambivalent device for the seeming liberation of (and from) gender.

Similarly, Ueda’s *The Cage of Zeus* presents a multi-gendered society that, although enriched by advanced gender technologies, nonetheless continues to engage in deep-set prejudicial behaviours, sexism, and sexual objectification, all of which are inadvertently powered by those same technologies. Ueda’s novel, as I will study it,

contrasts drastically with both the gender utopianism of *2312* – in which postgender technologies are democratized and gender diversity broadly accepted – and with the dystopianism of *Ancillary Justice*, in which postgender technologies are at least partly inhuman, with Artificial Intelligences inhabiting and controlling human bodies, or ancillaries, which are then used as soldiers and cannon fodder. Ironically, the dystopianism of *Ancillary Justice* is what leads to the deconstruction of gender identities and the emergence of a pseudo-utopian postgenderism, as the AI does not consider gender relevant, and the Radch empire consequently does not distinguish people by gender. Hence, the cause of this world's fundamental injustices is also the cause of its utopian attitude to gender. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba point out that

The utopian horizon of queer perspective must be articulated with an inclusive notion of identity and citizenship, canceling the oppositional [and] deconstructing heterosexual hegemony in a manner that focuses on and calls into question the exclusion and prejudices of the modern state ... and examining oppression grounded in the critical assessment of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. (84)

Like *Ancillary Justice*, *The Cage of Zeus* presents the “utopian horizon” of postgenderism while concurrently examining the multifaceted modes of dystopian oppression (be they cultural, colonial, technological, or sociopolitical) that exist in these new postgender worlds, where “identity and citizenship” are being continuously negotiated and in which there is always an Other who is *not* granted citizenship, be it based on gender or on other factors, although I will of course be focusing on gender in this paper. What differentiates *The Cage of Zeus* from its two immediate postgender contemporaries is that its entire narrative is diametrically opposed to the indifference to gender that *Ancillary Justice* represents, and the relatively uncomplicated acceptance of all sexes and genders that *2312* represents. In the world of *The Cage of Zeus*, the public is obsessed with gender and its various biological reflections, permutations, and ramifications, often to the detriment of the world's (and its government's) own stated, postgender agenda.

Hence, the technological abolition of gender is not a one-dimensional, utopian revolution, but a complex, dangerously entangled process which, like the excision of a tumor from the brain, may result in healthy tissue being removed alongside cancerous ones. The deployment of gender-abolishing technologies is depicted, in these examples of contemporary science fiction, as a promising but ultimately ambivalent tool that must be used carefully to avoid causing more of the very damage it was originally designed to prevent.

Now that the literary context of *The Cage of Zeus* as well as the literary tradition of postgenderism have been elucidated, I will delve into the construction of the

seemingly postgender world of *The Cage of Zeus* using postgender technologies, within the aforementioned intersectional framework of “technoscapes” reflecting and intersecting with the “ideoscapes” (Appadurai 296) of gender.

Before analyzing Sayuri Ueda’s novel in-depth, I must note that it was translated from the Japanese, and that throughout the text, Spivak pronouns are used:

In order to reflect the bigender state of the Rounds, this English-language translation of *The Cage of Zeus* employs Spivak pronouns – a set of gender-neutral pronouns devised by mathematician Michael Spivak – to refer to the Round characters. Spivak pronouns are formed by dropping the *th* from the plural pronouns “they,” “them,” “their,” etc. Although gender-specific pronouns exist in Japanese, they are used less frequently, making it easier in Japanese to avoid using pronouns that specify gender. (Ueda ch. n)

The above explanation is from the Translator’s Note at the beginning of the book; the translator is Takami Nieda. Key in Nieda’s note is the acknowledgement of linguistic bias inherent in the languages that we use, and the implication that the gender binary is more entrenched and less escapable in English than it is in Japanese. Taking this into account, we can then allow for the interesting – if problematically othering – deployment of the term “Rounds” for the genetically engineered intersex people who struggle against the prejudices of the “Monaurals,” the non-intersex majority who form the society of the novel.

The Cage of Zeus depicts a society that has, at least legislatively, made significant progress in the direction of postgenderism, and in which gender technologies such as gender confirmation surgeries and “reprogenetics” (Simonstein 1) are used to grant people the sexual or gender outcomes they desire, and to allow them to change their physical sexual characteristics repeatedly, not just once; these people are termed “Fluids.”

However, the novel’s fictional society as a whole has not entirely accepted complete gender diversity, and cisgender parents are depicted as preferring that their children also remain cisgender, or that, if they do opt for sex-altering surgery, they do so only once and not repeatedly, i.e., that they do not become “Fluids,” who are seen as capricious and harmful to morality and the public good.

Thus, there is still a pressure – given voice repeatedly through bigoted Monaural characters – to conform to the gender binary, even if *technically* the society portrayed in the novel is postgender. A major complicating factor is the concurrent existence of the genetically engineered, intersex “Rounds,” who are created on a space colony known as Jupiter-1 in order to experiment with a potentially utopian society in which differences in biological sex are absent from the very beginning. Rounds are created:

To resolve the issues raised by gender differences. Our society has not been able to overcome gender discrimination with our laws and ethics alone. We're incapable of eliminating the conflicts stemming from the differences in sexes. And that's only natural. Our physiology is different. So are our hormonal cycles. There's no way to understand the other completely. That's fine, I suppose. You might say that such issues are what make humanity so fascinating and profound. But now as we've left the tiny confines of the solar system and are attempting to embark on a journey into the dark expanse, we can't afford to quibble over such trifling matters. Which is why we should dispense with the problems that can be resolved by reinventing the body. A society where we are equals, where only individual differences exist. That was the ideal scientists proposed (Ueda ch. 3)

Despite living in what is at least nominally a non-binary, postgender society – citizens can change their sex and/or gender whenever they wish and can wed people of any sex/gender – the Monaurals nonetheless discriminate against the Rounds by calling them unnatural. This is, arguably, because the Rounds are products of the very technology that aims to liberate them from the sex binary and the gender binary; as manufactured beings, they are often described as unnerving or disconcerting. Ironically, the same postgender technology that creates the Rounds as potentially exalted beings also condemns them in the eyes of the rest of society, who are revolted by the engineering of intersex people, not out of empathy for them as subjects of medical experimentation, but by their status as apparent lab rats and by their alleged, stereotypicized promiscuity.

Rounds are often compared to animals within the text and are termed as inhuman or animalistic – a familiar, pejorative heteronormative narrative used for centuries to oppress the queer community. Indeed, given this stereotyping, the world of *The Cage of Zeus* is only partially progressive, and seeks to approach the postgender ideal from which it is still distant, not because of a lack of the appropriate technology but because of a lack of commensurate open-mindedness in the still largely binary-thinking culture:

He wanted Rui to go on being a girl, of course, but if she were to declare herself a fluid transsexual, Hasukawa didn't have the right to reject her even if he might protest. The Planetary Bioethics Association had done away with such restrictive sociopolitical paradigms and established laws to guarantee one's gender and sexual identities. The individual's choice to change one's gender however many times and to marry someone of any gender was now protected by law. There was only one choice forbidden on Earth and Mars, and that was the bioengineering of an intersex human having both male

and female reproductive organs and then actually registering that person as *intersex*. Of course not everyone chose to live as a fluid transgender, even while that right was guaranteed by law. Fluids were a minority, and an overwhelming majority still held prejudices and bigoted views on such a lifestyle. (Ueda ch. 1)

Thus, even though non-binary people exist among the Monaurals and have their rights legally protected, public opinion has not wholly swayed away from heteronormativity. This heteronormativity expresses itself most vigorously in the Monaurals' descriptions of Rounds as barely human or not human at all. One Monaural says that Rounds "don't deserve to call themselves human," and directly compares them to beasts by saying, "They're the same as sea hares and snails, with the ability to inseminate and be inseminated at the same time" (Ueda ch. 2). This dehumanization is brought about by a "paranoid reading" (Sedgwick 126) of the Rounds by the Monaurals, who are willing to believe the worst of the Rounds based solely on their status as manufactured intersex beings. Perhaps this is because Rounds are meant to replace Monaurals as the primary gender, and are consequently perceived as a threat to society as it exists – a society still clinging to the vestiges of the gender binary.

The Rounds are also sexualized and are depicted as being sexually promiscuous and constantly primed for sexual encounters, in a negative, bestial, inhuman light. Disturbingly and perhaps problematically, the novel itself temporarily employs this language of objectification in introducing a Round character, via an unnecessarily sensual, borderline masturbatory shower scene of the sort typically used to objectify women in contemporary film (Paszkievicz 48). This raises the question of whether Rounds are the oppressed sex in the world of Ueda's novel, and whether they are deliberately fetishized by the text to draw a parallel between the fetishization of women's bodies in contemporary society and that of Round bodies in Ueda's imagined society.

Tei continued to shower, caressing eir body with both hands. The roundness of eir breasts, though not glamorous by Monaural standards. The smooth and supple skin. The subtle curve of eir waist. The visibly bony figure. The firmness of eir joints. The tautness of eir muscles. Tei's fingers slid from the swell of eir breasts down past the torso to between eir legs where both genitalia were tucked away. Ey fondled the soft flesh. A moist slit and a copulatory organ protected by a thin sensitive skin. A Round possessed both sexual organs similar to those that female and male Monaurals had. Tei was no different [G]enetic sequencing making the Rounds perfect hermaphrodites (Ueda ch. 2)

The author's decision to describe Round anatomy through this sexually fraught, disconcertingly titillating language echoes the sexualization that Rounds are subjected to elsewhere in the narrative, by the occasional Monaural character who gives voice to their anti-Round prejudices. That the Rounds may have partly internalized their own sexualization is a distinct possibility, and explains the Round's, Tei's, bodily descriptions of eirself in the above passage. The only (if significant) difference is that from the Round's point of view, eir own sexualization of eirself portrays eir body as beautiful and desirable, as opposed to the monsterizing, alienizing sexual vernacular used by Monaurals to describe Rounds as disgusting.

This revulsion-driven fetishization is also a direct result of the perceived *artificiality* and non-originary nature of the Rounds. Just as the products of mimesis in Plato's theory of Forms are seen as inherently inferior imitations of a perfect, original Form (Plato 286), so is the Round seen as an inferior imitation of the Monaural template, and a corrupt and adulterated imitation at that. While Rounds were intended to be an improvement on Monaurals, much of society believes that their manufactured-ness makes them inferior. In being products of postgender technology, Rounds are seen as lesser creatures instead of as the improvements upon the heteronormative *status quo* that the government had intended them to be.

As *The Cage of Zeus* illustrates, it is important that the postgenderism achieved via gender technologies does not itself become an example of what Appadurai calls "production fetishism" (306), in which biological androgyny or non-binary biology is fetishized. While Appadurai's criticism of production fetishism is grounded in the socioeconomic reality of the fetishization by transnational manufacturing companies of "the idiom and the spectacle of local ... control" (Appadurai 306), postgender texts such as *The Cage of Zeus* must likewise avoid fetishizing "the idiom and the spectacle" of non-binary identity. Another parallel fetishism to be avoided is "the fetishism of the consumer" in the sense that:

[T]he consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent; and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. Global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a plethora of creative, and culturally well-chosen, ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser. (Appadurai 307)

Again, while Appadurai is speaking of standard commercial products and consumers and not of gender specifically, the thorny issues he explores are very relevant to intersectional postgender worldbuilding, be it in the world of fiction or the real world. Essentially, if gender is to be *produced* via gender technologies, and is therefore a product, then what prevents its commodification, regulation, and objectification? If the government is the standard “producer” of gender – as it is in *The Cage of Zeus*, wherein the government manufactures the intersex Rounds – then this model is not genuinely postgender in terms of postgenderism’s loftiest goals. Even the seemingly utopian, freed-from-the-constraints-of-binary-sex Rounds are mere products and do not have much, if any, agency in selecting their own biological sex and social gender, unlike the rest of the populace of *The Cage of Zeus*. In being *consumers* of gender rather than producers of gender, the Rounds are disempowered. Despite being technologically constructed as the non-binary human ideal, the Round is merely a “simulacrum” of agency “which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent,” and whose technology-based production is “a mask for the real seat of agency” (Appadurai 307). The Rounds are not free because they did not choose to be who they are, even if the government touts them as being superior while the public condemns them as being inferior.

However, the oppression of the very Rounds who the government intends to be the godlike progenitors of a new, non-binary, space-faring society *also* reflects on the lack of agency of the Monaurals. The Monaurals, despite being seemingly empowered by postgender technologies to change their bodies and their gender performance at will, are convinced by the *marketing* of gender agency to believe that the Monaural is “an actor, when in fact [they are] at best a chooser” (Appadurai 307). While they are a step above the Rounds in terms of agency, Monaurals are not free, either. Choosing biological sexual characteristics like items from a pre-existing menu, in search of a body that suits them, is a commercialized illusion of freedom that has resulted in a society where postgender technologies are a means of self-expression *through self-negation*, i.e., through pre-chosen technological processes that hijack an individual’s agency while still leading them to believe in the illusion of choice. In giving Monaurals their pick of biological sex, the postgender technologies of *The Cage of Zeus* sabotage their own postgenderism by grounding gender in biological sex, thereby reinforcing the very system of binary gender that these technologies were initially created to deconstruct. To tie gender inextricably to biological sex is transphobic and goes against postgenderism.

In becoming preoccupied with biological sexual characteristics as the only meaningful markers that determine their gender identities, and in pursuing the inadvertently anti-trans vision of gender identity as being inseparable from biological sex (even if it is a customized, individualized biological sex with endless permutations of various

sexual traits), the society of *The Cage of Zeus* remains anchored in the heteronormative concept of biological sex as the sole determinant of gender expression and identity. In attempting to free the bird from its cage, the postgender technologies of this world have *made the bird into its own cage*. Hence the novel's title.

All the characters of Ueda's postgender world have complicated relationships with postgender technologies. In this world, the technological movement towards the abolition of gender threatens to also become a movement towards the abolition of truly free, non-binary, trans-positive gender expression and agency. Perhaps this would be a difficulty that we would encounter in the real world as well were we to implement Dvorsky and Hughes' postgender manifesto using the previously discussed gender technologies that they mentioned in their 2008 paper.

In any case, the hypothetical exploration of postgenderism in this science fiction novel has established that the use of postgender technologies to abolish gender is not without its risks, and must be pursued only with the utmost caution. Still, these technologies hold promise, and are worth exploring further. The novel itself, after raising the many issues and difficulties postgenderism faces – including the very postgender technologies designed to create and sustain it – eventually concludes on an open-ended but tentatively optimistic note.

Perhaps Lanterna was too small to light humanity's way into space. But any amount of illumination was better than nothing. Much better. Would there ever come a day when Monaurals and Rounds together journeyed past the eye of Zeus and saw what lay ahead? The answer was nowhere yet to be found. (Ueda ch. 6)

The ending of the novel looks forward to a more harmonious future and, self-aware of its own limited progress towards true postgenderism, suggests that “any amount of illumination” is “better than nothing.” In this sense, postgender technologies are still promising, in that they do offer at least partial illumination of a far greater phenomenon – the utopian challenge of building a truly postgender world. The world of *The Cage of Zeus* describes a cage (binary gender) and a flawed means of escape from it (postgender technology), and leaves it to the reader and to society to improve on that means and make the ultimate escape.

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