NOT WITHOUT MY BODY : FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION AND EMBODIED FUTURES

Sarah Jane James

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Abstract

This study explores the interaction between feminist science fiction and feminist theory, focusing on the body and embodiment. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate that feminist science fiction novels of the 1990s offer an excellent platform for exploring the critical theories of the body put forward by Judith Butler in particular, and other feminist/queer theorists in general. The thesis opens with a brief history of science fiction's depiction of the body and feminist science fiction's subversions and rewritings of this, as well as an overview of Judith Butler's theories relating to the body and embodiment. It then considers a wide range of feminist science fiction novels from the 1990s, focusing on four key areas: bodies materialised outside patriarchal systems in women-only or women-ruled worlds, alien bodies, cyborg bodies and bodies in cyberspace. An in-depth analysis of the selected texts reveals that they have important contributions to make to the consideration of bodies as they develop and expand the issues raised by theorists such as Butler, Elisabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

Declarations

(i) I, Sarah Jane James, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 79,846 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date: 27 July 2004 Signature of candidate:

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in September 2000 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2001; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2000 and 2004.

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Introduction

> [...] no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one's notion of the possible and the real. (Butler, 1990/1999: xxiii)
>
> [...] there is nothing like constructing a world, or recognising a constructed world, for teaching you to see your own world as a construct. (Jones, 1999: 6)

The above quotations offer an insight into the productive interaction that can and does take place between feminist theory and feminist science fiction. This thesis aims to explore this interaction in the area of the 'matter' of bodies, concentrating on feminist science fiction published in the 1990s and on key feminist theories of the body and embodiment developed during the same decade. Specifically, it will argue that feminist science fiction offers an excellent platform for exploring the critical theories of the body and embodiment developed by feminist/queer theorist Judith Butler in particular, and other feminist theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Donna Haraway in general.

As Gwyneth Jones's comment on constructed worlds suggests, science fiction offers an excellent means of radically shifting our 'notion of the possible and the real' and is therefore a particularly suitable site for the exploration of issues relevant to critical theory. After all, as Carl Freedman points out in the introduction to his recent study, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000), '[b]oth critical theory and science fiction are ultimately oriented towards the future' (2000: xiii). Freedman further convincingly argues that 'critical theory and science fiction [are each] a version of the other' (2000: xv) and that 'science fiction texts resonate strongly with concerns proper to critical theory' (2000: 94). Although Freedman also claims that '[t]hough the relationship between critical theory and science fiction is certainly well established, it is in my view insufficiently recognized and very inadequately understood' (2000: xix), this is not necessarily true in respect of the relationship between feminist theory and (feminist) science fiction. In *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988), for example, Sarah Lefanu considers the interaction between feminist theory, which 'questions a given order in political terms' and science fiction, which 'questions it in imaginative terms' (1988: 100), looking at how feminist science fiction has responded to the issues concerning feminism during the 1970s and 1980s. Other critical texts such as *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (Roberts, 1993) and *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Donawerth, 1997) have considered the relationship between feminist science theory and feminist science fiction. As Jenny Wolmark notes in *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (1993):

> [f]eminist science fiction has brought the politics of feminism into a genre with a solid tradition of ignoring or excluding women writers, and in so doing it has politicised our understandings of the fantasies of science fiction. To do so, it has drawn on feminist analysis of the construction of gendered subjectivity in order to suggest possibilities for more plural and heterogeneous social relations, and to offer a powerful critique of the way in which existing social relations and power structures continue to marginalise women. (1993: 1-2)

Wolmark then goes on to analyse how feminist science fiction has responded to issues raised by feminism and postmodernism in the 1980s and early 1990s. More recently, Robin Roberts' *Sexual Generations: Star Trek: The Next Generation and Gender* (1999) draws on the work of French feminist theorists Hélène Cixious, Catherine Clément, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to explore issues relating to 'the feminine' and sexual and racial politics in the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The 1990s have also seen the appearance of special issues of the journals *Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Studies* dealing with the relationships between feminism, feminist theory and science fiction (1995) and between queer theory and science fiction (1999), respectively.

This thesis accordingly aims to contribute to this existing body of work on the intersections between feminist theory and feminist science fiction. As noted above, it will restrict its focus to the field of the body and embodiment. 'The body' has indeed become an increasingly popular topic in science fiction and feminist science fiction criticism over the past decade, particularly in relation to the science fiction sub-genre of cyberpunk, and it now appears rare to find an edited collection that does not include a section devoted to some form of the body or embodiment.[1] This study, however, aims to provide the first overview of the most important forms of embodiment described in feminist science fiction texts of the 1990s and the implications these bodies have in terms of the theories of the body and embodiment developed during the same decade. The 1990s have after all seen the rise of what has been termed 'corporeal feminism', involving a focus on the 'matter' of the body. In *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (1999), Chris Weedon traces the development of feminist attitudes towards the body, noting that liberal feminism has been criticised for its 'failure to challenge that normative dualism which defines the essence of humanity solely in terms of rationality' and its resulting tendency to ignore 'the social significance of bodies for both patriarchy and racism' (1999: 16). In *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Elisabeth Grosz expands this view to include other types of feminism, commenting that:

---

[1] See for example, Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon's 2002 collection *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, which includes a section entitled 'Imploded Subjects and Reinscripted Bodies', Jenny Wolmark's 1999 *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, with a section entitled 'Technology, Embodiment and Cyberspace', or Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows' *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk* (1995). N. Katherine Hayles and Anne Balsamo, to name but two examples, have devoted books to the topic of the cyberbody, namely *How We Became Posthuman: The Virtual Body in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999) and *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (1996). Alien and alternately sexed bodies have also received some of the attention; see for example Joan Haran (2001a) 'Destabilising Sex/Gender/Sexuality in Melissa Scott's *Shadow Man*' and Sherryl Vint (2001) 'Double Identity: Interpellation in Gwyneth Jones's Aleutian Trilogy'.

> [f]eminists, like philosophers, have tended to ignore the body or to place it in the position of being somehow subordinate to and dependant for all that is interesting about it on animating intentions, some sort of psychical or social significance. Feminist theory, with its commonly close relation to psychoanalytic theory and to various forms of phenomenology, has tended, with some notable exceptions, to remain uninterested in or unconvinced about the relevance of re-focusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivity. (1994: viii)

Weedon, however, sees the body as central to many branches of feminism, arguing that:

> the female body has been central to a range of feminist approaches to difference. In radical feminist analysis it is the primary site both of women's difference from men, and of the exercise of patriarchal power over reproduction, motherhood, sexuality and women's labour power. For radical psychoanalytic theorists like Luce Irigaray, it is the basis for accessing women's different and repressed imaginary. In socialist feminism, meanings of the body are seen as historically and socially produced in the interests of particular class, gender and racialized interests. However, it is in postmodern forms of feminism that the most developed attempts have been made to theorize the body in non-essentialist and historically specific ways. (1999: 100-101)

It is Anne Balsamo who perhaps best sums up the sometimes ambiguous position of the body in feminist theory, noting in *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (1996) that:

> [i]t seems, at times, that the more "the body" is subjected to theoretical scrutiny, the more resistant it becomes. Just as the disappearance of the body is announced in theory, the material body returns to thwart all attempts to repress it. It remains, for all of the various feminisms, a vital

> site for the working out of the intersections among feminist politics, theory, and practice in postmodernity. (1996: 40)

One of the most influential theorists of the body in the 1990s is without question Judith Butler, whose theories of performativity and the way in which the body is materialised by its repetition of sex and gender norms have sparked a great deal of debate. The key to Butler's approach is her insistence on re-thinking the materiality of the body and rejecting the distinction made by many other theorists between the material, or physical, body and a social, or discursive, body. As Anne Fausto-Sterling explains, many feminist theorists 'view the body not as essence, but as a bare scaffolding on which discourse and performance build a completely acculturated being', and 'argue very persuasively and often imaginatively about the processes by which culture molds and effectively creates the body' (2000: 6). For Butler, however, even the 'bare scaffolding' is always already constructed, since, as Fausto-Sterling notes: 'the idea of the material comes to us already tainted, containing within it pre-existing ideas about sexual difference' (2000: 23). There is, therefore, no bare, untainted bodily 'scaffolding' on which social and cultural norms can act. Instead the body itself is materialised through what Butler refers to as the 'ritualized repetition of norms' (1993: x). Butler therefore proposes a revision of previous notions of 'construction', arguing that:

> [t]hinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself. And if certain constructions appear constitutive, that is, have this character of being that "without which" we could not think at all, we might suggest that bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas. (1993: xi)

Ultimately, the ongoing construction of the body within these regulatory schemas means that, for Butler, 'matter' is regarded not 'as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization*' (1993: 9).[2]

It is this concept of 'radical constructivism' which, along with its implications for sex and gender, and for relations between mind and body, will be explored in this study through the medium of feminist science fiction. Although Butler's theories have met with a fair amount of criticism,[3] they have also proved very useful to feminist science fiction critics who have drawn on them to discuss issues of performance and identity in the context of cyborg bodies and alien bodies.[4] What this study aims to offer, however, is a sustained engagement with Butler's theories, looking in depth at how ideas similar to those which form the basis of Butler's theories of the body have been developed in the context of feminist science fiction novels written during the same period as Butler was developing her key works *Gender Trouble* (1990, with a new introduction in 1999), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) and *Antigone's Claim* (2000).[5] As suggested above, this thesis will also draw on the work of other feminist theorists involved in analysing and debating the meaning and significance of the body, including Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristava, Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz.

The first chapter of this thesis will accordingly offer an introduction to Butler's theories of the body as well as a brief history of science fiction's portrayal of the body and feminist science fiction's revisions and interpretations of these portrayals. This introductory chapter will highlight the key aspects of Butler's work to be discussed and will explain why feminist science fiction is such a profitable locus for this discussion by suggesting that it has always asked - and attempted to answer - questions very similar to those posed by Butler. Butler calls for a 'self-consciously denaturalised position' (1990/1999: 140) and bodies that call the existing framework of sex and gender into question: this thesis will argue that feminist science fiction is able to provide such positions and bodies.

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[2] Butler's theories in relation to the body will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1.

[3] See for example Klein (1996) and Ward Jouve (1998).

[4] See for example Foster (1997), (1999) and (2002), Wolmark (1999), Hollinger (2000) and Haran (2001a).

[5] Although Butler has also written a large number of articles, as well as other books, this thesis will concentrate on the theories developed in these four works as the most pertinent for the field of study. It will, however, occasionally draw on other works to expand or develop ideas expressed in one of these four works.

The remaining two chapters of the first part of this thesis will look at five feminist science fiction texts from the 1990s dealing with two tropes that have always been at the very heart of the genre, namely women-only or women-ruled worlds, and the encounter with aliens. The first of these chapters discusses Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992), Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* (1992) and Leona Gom's *The Y Chromosome* (1990), all of which depict women as either the sole inhabitants or the rulers of the worlds described therein. Although Butler has dismissed lesbian separatism, as depicted in these novels, as a viable strategy for re-configuring the heterosexual matrix, I will argue, drawing on the work of French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, that the separate space for women described in these texts at the very least makes it possible to uncover how women's bodies are materialised, and indeed, how they could be materialised differently in a world not dominated by the heterosexual matrix. The following chapter turns to novels where the heterosexual framework is challenged in different ways by two very different alien societies: Eleanor Arnason's *Ring of Swords* (1993) and Carolyn Ives Gilman's *Halfway Human* (1998). Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, I examine how boundaries between bodies that matter and those that do not are mediated by the identification and (attempted) expulsion of abject bodies. Ultimately, I suggest that the encounter with the alien allows us to view our own perceptions of the sexed and gendered body and categories such as male and female from a different perspective, calling our understanding of what is 'normal' and 'natural' into question.

The second half of the thesis opens with an introduction to the science fiction sub-genre of cyberpunk, which deals with humanity's encounter with the machine. Chapter 4 argues that this sub-genre of science fiction, and in particular its appropriation by feminist science fiction writers, offers the ideal locus not only for continuing the exploration of Butler's theories about how bodies are materialised as sexed and gendered, started in the first half of the thesis, but also for exploring her views on the relationship between mind and body. Chapters 5 and 6 then consider the two key types of 'cyberbodies': cyborgs and bodies in cyberspace. Chapter 5 argues that examining the materialisation of the cyborg body allows us to uncover, in detail, the ways in which our performances make us sexed and gendered beings. Drawing on Donna Haraway's seminal 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1991), I examine how the cyborg, as a boundary crosser, enables us to identify how such boundaries (between male and female, between machine and human, and between mind and body) are established and maintained. The three novels considered in this chapter - Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), Laura Mixon's *Proxies* (1998) and Justina Robson's *Silver Screen* (1999) - all suggest that technology, whether in the form of cyborg implants within the body or layered onto it in the form of an external cyborg shell, may allow its users to realise differently sexed and gendered bodies. *Silver Screen* and *Proxies* also offer an extended meditation on the relationship between mind and body, since the technology depicted in these novels apparently allows this link to be severed, questioning Butler's assertion that body and psyche are necessarily materialised together.

This question of the interdependence - or absence thereof - between mind and body is then further developed in Chapter 6, which looks at the materialisation of the body in cyberspace. Drawing on the work of Elisabeth Grosz, I argue that the three novels discussed - Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) and Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998) and *Dervish is Digital* (2000) - depict highly complex relationships between offline body, mind and online body. These relationships in turn have consequences for the ways in which both offline and online bodies are materialised.

The thesis concludes by briefly reviewing the dialogue that has developed between the novels and theories over the course of the discussion, noting that there is always a price to be paid for the materialisation of differently sexed and gendered, or border-crossing, bodies. The fact that this price is almost always exacted in the form of physical pain is then considered in the light of Butler's enigmatic comments on 'gender pain'.

The feminist science fiction texts discussed in the above chapters have been chosen not only because they depict a wide range of possible future bodies, but also because they offer productive engagements with Butler's theories. The texts also cover a broad spectrum of publication dates, with the final novel, Cadigan's *Dervish is Digital*, drawing the discussion over the threshold and into the twenty-first century. The texts also range from the well-known and much-discussed *Body of Glass,* through to lesser-known texts such as Vonaburg's *In the Mother's Land* and Mixon's *Proxies*, on which only one or two articles have been published, to texts such as Robson's *Silver Screen* and Gom's *The Y Chromosome,* which appear, to my knowledge, to have escaped critical attention to date. With these texts, I hope to provide an overview of the kinds of bodies present in 1990s feminist science fiction, which, as I will argue in the following chapters, offer a range of responses to Butler's question: 'Which bodies come to matter - and why?' (1993: xii).

Chapter 1

Judith Butler, Feminist Science Fiction and the Body

> [How do we] rethink the terms that establish and sustain bodies that matter? (Butler, 1993: 240)
>
> By showing us worlds unlike our own, science fiction can help us to see our own world anew. (Sargent, 1995a: 20)

This chapter is intended as an overview of those aspects of Judith Butler's work which relate to the production and perception of the body and which suggest the most productive dialogue with the feminist science fiction texts to be discussed in later chapters. What I aim to suggest is that while Butler's theories offer a means by which to approach the topic of bodies in feminist science fiction texts, the feminist science fiction texts themselves offer some answers to Butler's questions about the body. The aspects of Butler's work highlighted here will be discussed in greater detail as they are applied to the selected texts.

Butler's work on the body is both thought-provoking and useful in a study of this kind because it asks the right questions - even if it is not always able to provide the answers. Both Butler's theories and feminist science fiction texts are concerned with thought experiments along the line of questions such as: What if things were different? What if we saw bodies differently? Why and how do specific bodies come to matter? What if the sex/gender system was based on something other than the heterosexual matrix? Both strive to some extent for what has been termed 'conceptual breakthrough', which is about 'acquiring knowledge of the world in such a way that one's view of the world changes radically' (James, 1994: 91). By Butler's own account, *Gender Trouble*

(1990/1999) was written 'to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions' (Butler, 1990/1999: viii), to 'rethink the possible as such' (1990/1999: xx), and to show that many theories - including feminist ones - are based on assumptions of heterosexuality. Like feminist science fiction, Butler's objective is therefore to try and think the unthinkable, as well as to bring to light what is hidden in our assumptions about sex and gender.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler goes on to argue that challenging the heterosexual framework in which bodies are 'naturalized' requires us to take up a 'self-consciously denaturalized position' as this is the only position from which we can 'see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted' (1990/1999: 140). Linking this to bodies, she points out that:

> [t]he presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside", gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorisation as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently. (1990/1999: 140)

Science fiction in general - and not just feminist science fiction - would appear to be the perfect genre to provide these strange and incoherent bodies, since, as Peter Nicholls claims, it:

> can create its own worlds, has access to new juxtapositions [...] It is able to incorporate intellectually *shocking* material, partly because it is so pre-eminently the literature of change [...It] is the literature of the outsider, in the extreme sense. [...] It is science fiction which makes the conscious effort, sometimes quite successful, to stand outside [the society which

> produces it]. It is in science fiction that we are now asking the deepest questions of meaning and causation. (quoted in Broderick, 1995: 47)

Or as Gwyneth Jones somewhat more succinctly puts it, '[...] there is nothing like constructing a world, or recognising a constructed world, for teaching you to see your own world as a construct' (1999: 6).

Science fiction also, by its very nature, has access to a far wider range of bodies than other types of fiction. After all, it routinely depicts not only human bodies, but also various kinds of monstrous bodies, alien bodies and machine bodies. An examination of the ways in which these bodies are gendered, however, is highly suggestive: time after time, bodies gendered as female fall outside the human and into the category of the monstrous, alien or machine body.[1] It has also been argued that even where monsters, aliens and machines are depicted as being male or androgynous, they function as encodings of the female body, and as ways for male writers to work through their anxieties in respect of man's 'other' (Roberts 1993, 1999).[2] The values ascribed to/inscribed on the female body in much of science fiction can perhaps most clearly be seen in the science fiction 'pulp' magazines from the 1940s and 1950s, often described as science fiction's 'golden age'. One of the key features of the pulp magazines was their garish, larger-than-life, brightly-coloured covers, often featuring a giant female 'alien'

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[1] As might be expected, the question of where the boundaries lie between human and non-human is not at all clear-cut in science fiction. Sometimes simply being a woman seems to be enough to disqualify one from the human race: see Robin Roberts (1993) and Jane Donawerth (1997) for discussions of the woman as alien in science fiction. Alice Sheldon, writing as James Tiptree Jr, describes future scenarios where women have been classified as sub-human ('The Screwfly Solution' (1977)), but also ones where women have become the entire human race ('Houston, Houston, do you read?' (1976)). As the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (directed by Philip Kaufman, 1978) shows, looking human is not enough, either: in line with Butler's theories (see below) a person has to be able to *perform* as a human as well. Even that may not be sufficient as the discussion of Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* in chapter five of this thesis will show.

[2] In *Sexual Generations:* Star Trek: The Next Generation *and Gender* (1999), for example, Roberts claims that '[b]ecause of its separation from, and subordination to, mankind, an android can effectively function as a stand-in for women' (91).

(usually looking remarkably like a human woman from the 1940s or 1950s) towering over a tiny male human. Promising as this may sound, almost every story results in the male triumphing over the female. These stories highlight the way in which male anxieties about the 'monstrous' nature of femininity are projected onto the surface of the female body, with the result that the female body has to be excluded from society unless it can be rehabilitated under the control of a man. That this rehabilitation is usually the result of the female character 'performing' femininity by submitting to the control of the male character, underlines Butler's contention in *Gender Trouble* that 'presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as the "human"' (1990/1999: xxii).

Unsurprisingly, male bodies fare somewhat better in early science fiction, playing a central role in what Joanna Russ calls novels dealing with 'the Battle of the Sexes'. Russ discusses a number of texts written by male science fiction writers, where woman have rebelled and are in power, only to be defeated and brought back into the 'natural' order of things by the end of the text, simply because 'possession [of the male genitalia] guarantees victory [...] This victory is therefore a victory of nature, and so the battle may be won without intelligence, character, humanity, humility, foresight, courage, planning, sense, technology or even responsibility' (1995: 43). These are victories which truly appear to be written on/in the (male) body. In these types of stories, too, women can only be rehabilitated into the realm of the human by submitting to men, usually by having sex with them. Accordingly, the female body remains outside the realm of the human until it 'becomes' that of a 'real woman'. As Justine Larbalestier explains, this 'process of "becoming woman" takes place when the woman is incorporated into the heterosexual economy' (2002: 58).[3]

In the above examples, we can clearly see science fiction (unconsciously) mirroring aspects of one of Judith Butler's key theories, namely that gender is performative, not expressive. According to Butler, 'what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (1990/1999: xv). The body surface therefore becomes the site for the inscription and performance of the gendered identity, since 'acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body' (1990/1999: 173). The women in the above stories have to learn to perform *as women*, that is, as women are expected to do; only then can they be allowed into the realm of the human. As Butler explains, and the science fiction stories discussed above confirm, bodies that do not perform their gender properly will always fall outside the human (1990/1999: 142). The stories also support Butler's claim that 'one is a woman [....] to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame' (1990/1999: xi).

The above description of Butler's theory of performativity as outlined in *Gender Trouble*, and the brief overview of early science fiction texts both seem to imply, however, that there is a body that can be inscribed, that can perform, and that exists *before* the (heterosexual) law is inscribed upon it. Towards the end of *Gender Trouble*, however, Butler raises the question:

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[3] In her discussion of battle-of-the-sexes science fiction texts, Larbalestier carefully distinguishes between 'real men' and 'real women', and 'not-real men' and 'not-real women' in these stories. Even in these early texts, she argues, 'an identifiably male or female body does not [...] automatically grant the person the status of man or woman' (2002: 48); this status is instead dependent on the ways in which the characters *behave*, and the extent to which they function within the heterosexual economy. See below for a discussion of this in terms of Butler's theory of performativity.

> Is "the body" or "the sexed body" the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is "the body" itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex? (1990/1999: 164).

Although, as Butler admits in her 1999 introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble,* the latter 'does not answer the question of whether the materiality of the body is fully constructed' (1990/1999: xv), in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), she argues for 'the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*' (1993: 9). This is not intended to mean that there is no material body that can feel pain or that the body is purely a discursive form, but 'rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body' (1993: 10). We cannot access the 'pure' body, for:

> what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an "imaginary formation", which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as others but marked by a social system), through the network of relationships in which they are perceived (Wittig quoted in Butler 1993: 145).

In the same way as Butler argues that there is no original sex or gender[4] to be performed, and that we are all therefore performing 'copies of copies', so to speak, there is no original body which is free of interpretation. There are two key points to be drawn from Butler's argument: firstly, that the body is materialised or constructed over time by its own performance or recitation of sex and gender norms, and secondly, that the way we perceive the body is determined by the action of these same norms. As Butler points out, 'even "seeing" the body may not answer the question [of sex]: for *what are the categories through which one sees?*' (1990/1999: xxii).

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[4] In both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Butler wrestles with the problematic relationship between sex and gender, questioning the idea, adopted by some feminist constructivist theorists, that gender is a construct imposed on the sexed body, that is, that sex is natural and gender constructed. In *Gender Trouble*, for instance, she asks: 'Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests?' (1990/1999: 10). Her conclusion is that sex must be 'as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (1990/1999: 10-11). In *Bodies that*

Although we may have material bodies, then, *how* we live our own bodies or perceive other bodies is heavily constructed. The key to this construction, according to Butler, lies in our insertion into the sex/gender system. This begins at birth with what she calls a 'founding interpellation', for example with the doctor's cry of 'It's a girl' (1993: 7). At no stage is this interpellation an optional one: being identified as a sex, and performing our gender following on from this identification, is necessary for our construction as subjects. Without the performance, there can be no subject: there is no doer behind the deed, the doer is constructed in and through the deed (Butler, 1990/1999: 181). And in our society (as in that of much traditional science fiction), this performance must include performing the appropriate sex and gender. As we have seen from the above discussion, failure to 'be' a particular sex, with the accompanying gender, means exclusion from the status of subject, a falling outside of the boundaries of the human. Butler also convincingly demonstrates, however, that our performances must be constantly reiterated over the course of our lives in order to produce the effect of a stable gender identity. In turn, this opens up the

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Matter, Butler deals in detail with the ways in which the body is produced, or in her terms, materialized, through the operation of sex *and* gender norms. In doing so, she once again refuses any absolute distinction between the terms: there can be no sexed body on which gender norms operate, only an ongoing process during which the body performs and is therefore constituted by the sex/gender norms that it must perform to remain a 'body that matters', in both senses of the word.

possibility for resistance, for deviations from the standard reiteration, for performances which include other possibilities, providing a wider range of permissible sex/gender identities.

Butler goes on to suggest that resistance is possible as a result of our failure ever to completely or successfully fulfil our sex/gender roles. There are always gaps in the performance, failures to repeat or recite the norms of sex and gender faithfully, and such gaps give rise to the possibility of agency. In her later works, *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Antigone's Claim*, Butler is extremely concerned to retain the possibility of agency even for subjects who appear to be wholly constructed by their performance of regulatory sex and gender norms. She suggests that these gaps, these failures mean that subjects are in fact never finally or conclusively constructed:

> [t]he subject might yet be thought as deriving its agency from precisely the power it opposes, as awkward and embarrassing as such a formulation might be, especially for those who believe that complicity and ambivalence could be rooted out once and for all. If the subject is *neither* fully determined by power *nor* fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both), the subject exceeds the logic of noncontradiction, is an excrescence of logic, as it were.' (1997a: 17)

The body is, therefore, no longer seen merely as an inscribed surface, but as a battleground: a site which is constantly in the process of being materialised through performance, where meanings can be contested, where boundaries are marked, where what is at stake is the question not just of how we are sexed and/or gendered, but of whether or not we qualify as human. Although, as we have seen, the kinds of science fiction stories considered above do more to support the heterosexual economy Butler wishes to subvert than to challenge it, they do, as will be discussed below, contain the seeds for the later development of feminist science fiction. Indeed, it could be argued that science fiction has inevitably produced feminist science fiction as its necessary 'constitutive outside' (Butler, 1993: 188). According to Butler, whatever falls inside the boundaries (of the human, of a genre) always necessarily produces an outside, an excluded realm without which the inside could not exist, and against which the inside defines itself. Science fiction has, on occasion, attempted to exclude or condemn feminist science fiction by accusing it of betraying the ideals of the genre, straying from the use of 'hard' science to deal with 'softer' social issues. Displaced to the margins of a genre which is itself already marginal, feminist science fiction, in turn, attempts to inhabit the tropes of science fiction and repeat them in ways which exceed or displace the original intentions. It inhabits these tropes excessively, expanding and exploiting them, creating the 'dissonant play of attributes' that Butler calls for at the start of *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999: 32). At the same time, feminist science fiction - because it remains *part* of science fiction - constitutes what Adam Roberts has called an 'eruption of alterity into the structures of production of SF itself' (2000: 83), an eruption of the outside into the inside, where the outside is always already implicated in the inside. Feminist science fiction has the capacity to *perform* science fiction differently, to expand the way in which we see both human and alien bodies, and indeed *what* we see as human and alien bodies, opening up possibilities for resignification by deploying terms differently. In this way, feminist science fiction attempts to rewrite which bodies matter by moving the boundaries 'to expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world' (Butler, 1993: 22).

As suggested above, the seeds of this feminist rewriting can be found even in the apparently misogynistic pulp magazines of the 1940s. In a move which may be seen as an attempt to 'inhabit' bodies differently, feminist science fiction critic Robin Roberts suggests that the female figures portrayed on the covers of the pulp magazines were read in a different way by the female readers of the time, since seeing and reading about strong, dominant women (at least for the first couple of pages of each story) had a positive effect which was not entirely undermined by the endings. She quotes one woman writer as saying "'I read the stories for the beginnings - men may have been reading for the endings [...] I think [other] women writers and I want to rewrite the endings'" (1993: 45). More recent studies such as Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002) and Justine Larbalestier's *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction* (2002) have also traced science fiction's involvement with feminist issues over and above the limited number of female writers working in the genre prior to the 1960s. Larbalestier, for example, has suggested that:

> [t]he increase in feminist engagements with science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s was made possible not only by the increase in consciousness of feminism generally and in the science fiction world in particular but also by science fiction's prior engagement with feminism. (2002: xii)

As Larbalestier shows, this engagement took place at a number of levels, including letter-based discussions between female and male fans about the role of women in science fiction stories.[5] There were also a number of early texts written by men which engaged with questions of feminism, such as John Wyndham's 'Consider her Ways' (1956) and Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (1960).

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[5] Larbalestier goes on to point out that some writers - and readers - of early science fiction would have preferred to exclude the female body from science fiction altogether. After all, the (often scantily-clad) female body was seen to represent sex, and many readers felt that as such it had no place in science fiction, which was supposed to deal with intellectual issues (Larbalestier, 2002: 138). Other readers and writers were happy to have women along, provided that they kept to their traditional roles.

Although there have always been a few female - and the occasional male - writers 'rewriting the endings' throughout the history of science fiction, it was in the late 1960s and the 1970s that feminist science fiction really began to emerge as a sub-genre in its own right.[6] It was during this period, for example, that Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Suzy McKee Charnas and Marge Piercy wrote the classic novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Female Man* (1975), *Motherlines* (1978) and *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978), respectively. During these decades, 'there was a growing sense that science fiction was a form in which the issues raised by feminism could be explored, in which writers could look beyond their own culture and create imaginative new possibilities' (Sargent, 1995a: 16). These four texts alone provide a wide variety of subversive bodies, from *The Left Hand of Darkness*'s androgynous bodies, through to the powerful, capable and 'realistic' free female bodies of *The Female Man* and *Motherlines*, and the radical severance of the link between the female body and reproduction in *Woman on the Edge of Time*.[7]

Subversive bodies have continued to abound in feminist science fiction ever since, as its writers have continued to explore 'what we might become if and when the present restrictions on our lives vanish' and to show us 'new problems that might arise' (Sargent, 1995a: 16). As Robin Roberts and Jane Donawerth, among others, have shown, feminist science fiction authors have, for example, taken up and subverted the figure of 'woman as alien', previously excluded from the realm of 'bodies that matter' by male writers, in order to 'reclaim misogynistic cultural stereotypes, give them a local habitation and a name, and remodel them so that they can live within them' (Donawerth, 1997: 93).[8] They have created worlds where gender is absent to explore how our lives and bodies are constructed through gender, worlds where women rule over men or men are absent altogether, and worlds where absolute equality between the sexes is simply taken for granted. Such texts make 'possible [...] the inscription of women as subjects free from the constraints of mundane fiction; and [also offer] the possibility of interrogating that very inscription, questioning the basis of gendered subjectivity' (Lefanu, 1988: 9).

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[6] This has been well documented elsewhere. See for example Lefanu (1988), Roberts (1993), and Sargent (1995a).

[7] As Charnas herself puts it:

> Better yet, instead of having to twist "reality" in order to create "realistic" free female characters in today's unfree society, the SF writer can create the societies that would produce these characters, not as exceptions of limited meaning and impact, but as the healthy, solid norm. (quoted in Lefanu, 1988: 158)

Feminist science fiction has of course changed and developed over the past four decades, as has feminist theory. If, as Lefanu argues, feminist science fiction has been 'informed by the feminist, socialist and radical politics that developed during the 1960s and 1970s' (1988: 3), the feminist science fiction of the 1990s also specifically confronts many of the problems addressed by Butler in her work during the same decade. Since the 1960s and 1970s, feminist science fiction texts in general have been increasingly characterised by a more complex treatment of feminist topics, displaying an awareness of 'a certain complicity with the patriarchal structures and attitudes that they wish to criticise,' focusing 'more on scrutinising the range of dilemmas and contradictions facing the female subject, rather than eliminating them' (Wolmark, 1993: 88). Such texts therefore attempt to create what Butler calls 'a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself' (1990: 119). Crucially, this subversion involves more than the simple role-reversal along the lines of 'women are good' and 'men are bad' found in earlier feminist science fiction texts such as Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978). Gearhart's text, which creates a feminist separatist utopia outside the confines of the cities controlled by men, celebrates both women's own essential 'nature' and their connection with the natural world, developing an environment where women practise 'soft science' such as telepathy (among each other, and with animals and trees) and can wield a high level of control over their bodies, enabling them to fly, among other things. As many critics have noted, there is a great deal that is valuable in this kind of text, which explores what Irigaray and Cixous, among others, celebrate as women's multiple and diverse capacity for pleasure, where, as Joanna Russ points out, '[f]emale sexuality is seen as native and initiatory, not (as in our traditionally sexist view) reactive, passive or potential' (1995: 142). Science fiction author and critic Gwyneth Jones argues that '[p]erhaps the posturing of feminist biological-determinacy fiction is a stage we have to go through. The Female Principle has to be promoted, the dark and the dirty has to be celebrated' (1999: 30). Texts such as these have much in common with Kristeva's second generation of feminism, which:

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[8] See also *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (1993) by Robin Roberts.

> reject[s] the powers that be and make[s] the second sex into a *countersociety*, a sort of alter ego for society that harbors hopes for pleasure. This female society can be opposed to the sacrificial and frustrating sociosymbolic contract: a countersociety imagined to be harmonious, permissive, free and blissful. (in Oliver, 1997: 361)

Ultimately, of course, Kristeva believes that we need to move past this stage to her 'third generation', in which, as Toril Moi succinctly puts it, '[w]omen reject the dichotomy between men and women as metaphysical' (1985: 12). Kristeva herself refers to the 'fight to the finish' between the sexes moving *inside* women and men, so that 'the violence occurs with the utmost mobility within individual and sexual identity, and not through a rejection of the other' (in Oliver, 1997: 366). As will be seen in the following chapter, worlds inhabited by women alone, or ruled by women, do still exist in 1990s feminist science fiction. Unlike their earlier counterparts, however, they do not claim to reveal women's 'essential' identity but show how life could be lived - and, crucially, how bodies could be materialised - under a different kind of social structure, one where it is women's bodies that (come to) matter. In doing so, they offer the 'denaturalised position' that Butler calls for, and expose both the restrictions operating on sex/gender roles and the ways in which sex and gender are constructed in and on the body.

It is, however, in the final two novels of Suzy McKee Charnas's *Holdfast Chronicles* that we can find perhaps one of the clearest examples of what Butler describes as:

> this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (1993: 241)

The *Holdfast Chronicles* began in the 1970s, with Charnas's classic novels *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978). *Walk to the End of the World* is a post-apocalyptic dystopia, where women - called 'fems' - living in the male-dominated world of the Holdfast are vilified, kept as slaves and treated as animals, breeding machines and, ultimately, as a source of food. *Motherlines* follows the story of Alldera, a fem who escapes from the Holdfast to join the utopian society of the Riding Women (women who have never been subject to men, and who reproduce by a cloning process) and to find the community of Free Fems living in the wilderness. These novels, as has been documented, respond to both the concerns of the feminist movement, and to previous science fiction texts.[9] Charnas originally intended to write three novels, with the third depicting the Free Fems' triumphant return to the Holdfast to liberate their fellow women. Initially unable to write the conclusion to the trilogy,[10] Charnas eventually produced the final two novels in the series in the 1990s: *The Furies* in 1994 and *The Conqueror's Child* in 1999. In *The Furies*, Charnas moves away from the separatist utopia *Motherlines* to show that although her Free Fems had previously managed to (physically) escape the savage male-dominated world of the Holdfast, they are nonetheless irrevocably marked by its power relations. When the Free Fems return with superior technology (horses) to a Holdfast laid waste by civil war, they are able easily to defeat the men they previously feared and hated. In doing so, however, the women descend into the same kind of barbarism (referring to the men as 'dirts' and 'sticks', torturing and murdering them, keeping them in terrible prison conditions and using them for breeding purposes) as the men were guilty of in *Walk to the End of the World.* Gwyneth Jones argues that this is inevitable:

> If the Free Fems ever could have been more sane and human than their masters, it is too late. They have returned to the Holdfast only to demonstrate that they are incurably infected with its poisons. Women under patriarchy become as corrupt and callous as men, and will prove it as soon as ever they get the chance. (1999: 188-9)

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[9] See for example Lefanu (1988), Bartkowski (1989), Wolmark (1993) and Burwell (1997) for detailed discussions of *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines* as feminist - and in the case of *Motherlines* - utopian texts. Brian Attebery (2002) also locates *Walk to the End of the World* as part of feminist science fiction's dialogue with previous works, tracing the parallels between what he calls 'male-bonding texts' of the 1950s and the development of feminist dystopian novels like those of Charnas.

[10] Jenny Wolmark (1993) quotes Charnas as saying:

> Considering the way things are likely to go in the next decade or so, specifically with regard to the hard-won and now imperilled gains of women and non-whites in America, I don't think anybody who was not insane could actually write that book [*Holdfast Harrowing*]. Someday, maybe, I hope. (1993: 84)

Ironically, the behaviour of the Free Fems in *The Furies* shows, as Jones points out, that '"women" behave exactly like other human beings. [...] If there *are* such things as intrinsically female qualities, they do not emerge in the action of this novel' (1999: 189). In many ways, *The Furies* argues that the women of the Holdfast have been so completely constructed by the violence and viciousness of the circumstances of their former lives that they are apparently unable to move beyond it. In this way, Charnas exposes the limitations of a vision of life outside patriarchy: the Free Fems can never live the same lives as the Riding Women of *Motherlines* because they *cannot* move outside the constraints of the society that formed them. They can only try to free themselves from the constraints of that society by going back inside it, a task they attempt, but to a large extent fail at, in *The Furies.* In the final novel of the series, however, Charnas shows a number of the women - and men - gradually coming to terms with the new attitudes and new performances that will be required if men and women are ever to have a future together. Many of the women have by this time had children - some of whom are sons - and want the next generation to have a better life than they have had. As Beyarra, one of the female slaves freed by the returning Free Fems, puts it:

> This life is so much better, but it's not yet good enough. It's not what I joined you for - a state of permanent enmity between us and the men, between us and our own sons. I have a daughter. She deserves peace, not war; brothers, not slaves. (1999: 45)

By the end of the novel, there is a great deal of debate among the women as to how 'to raise the boy-kits to be more than pets or draught animals', as one woman puts it (1999: 398). We also learn that the Riding Women have left the Grasslands to preserve their way of life far from the Holdfast and its two-sexed society. This seems only fitting: the Riding Women and their separatist society have, after all, fulfilled their purpose: having provided a vital space for Alldera and the other Free Fems to live - and think - outside the confines of the Holdfast, what happens next is, and must be, up to the Holdfasters themselves. The novel leaves no doubt that forging a new and more equitable society will be a long and arduous process, as the following exchange between Alldera and her daughter Sorrel shows:

> "If you care about the little boys growing up to be people and not just the vengeful ghosts of their fathers, you should stay here and help raise them in better ways."
> "How would *I* know better ways?" Sorrel objected. "There aren't any boys where I come from!"
> "Nobody knows," Alldera said, "that's what I'm telling you. It's going to take everybody to come up with some answers, and to convince us all to try. And then spot what's not working and figure out how to fix it." (1999: 406)

This is truly what Butler calls a 'difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure' (1993: 241).

In addition to the types of bodies discussed above, feminist science fiction is of course also able to offer a wide range of alien bodies, materialised under the constraints of societies constructed along entirely different sex/gender lines. The aliens of Gwyneth Jones's Aleutian trilogy,[11] for example, resist categorisation into male and female (although this does not stop the humans in the novel from trying to label them nonetheless). Feminist science fiction can also offer human bodies that have become alien, as is the case in Melissa Scott's novel *Shadow Man* (1995), where humans have undergone mutations as a result of taking the drugs required for them to travel at faster-than-light speeds. The planet Scott describes is, therefore, inhabited by humans displaying five sexes and nine genders.[12] The novels to be considered in Chapter 3 of this thesis offer alien societies constructed outside the heterosexual matrix, with all the implications for sex and gender performance that this implies. However, they provide not only another opportunity to take up Butler's denaturalized position, but also, crucially, a depiction of borderline bodies, caught between human and alien, between male and female, and ultimately, between what is accepted as an 'intelligible' body, in Butler's terms, and what is not (Butler, 1993: xi).[13] Borderline bodies - whether human/alien or human/machine - are so important not only because they show us where the boundaries are, but also how we may cross and relocate them. They disrupt attempts at sex/gender categorisation, leading to the 'moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees' (Butler, 1990/1999: xxiii). This is a crucial moment, since, as Butler argues:

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[11] Consisting of *White Queen* (1991), *North Wind* (1994) and *Phoenix Café* (1997). See Sherryl Vint's article 'Double Identity: Interpellation in Gwyneth Jones's Aleutian Trilogy' (2001) for a useful discussion of the construction of the alien body in Jones's novels.

> [w]hen such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real", what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. (1990/1999: xxiii)

Such borderline bodies are also able to provide disruptive sex/gender *performances*, where the gendered performance does not follow from the presumed sex.[14]

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[12] See Joan Haran's article 'Destabilising Sex/Gender/Sexuality in Melissa Scott's *Shadow Man*' (2001a) for an in-depth discussion of the consequences of this sex/gender system for the materialisation of the body.

[13] An intelligible body is one that is accepted into the dominant sex/gender system.

[14] It is important to note at this point that performativity, as Butler acknowledges, does have its limits: in *Bodies that Matter*, for example, she asks whether parodying the dominant gender norms is enough to displace them, and points out that the strategies for redeployment are limited (1993: 125). Butler also warns that 'there are workings of gender that don't "show" in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake' (1997a: 144). These points will be discussed in greater detail both in individual chapters and in the conclusion to this thesis.

The final border that both Butler and feminist science fiction explore - and which will be discussed in greater detail in the second half of this thesis - is that between body and mind, or, in Butler's terms, between bodily performance, or the gendered acts each of us must perform each day to remain a subject, and what could be called psychic performativity. Throughout her work, Butler draws on psychoanalytic theories from Freud, Lacan and the feminist theorists Kristeva and Irigaray, and brings them together with the work of Foucault. On the one hand, then, are the theories concerning the development of the body from the 'inside out', where the psyche's projection of bodily experiences becomes the perceived bodily morphology. On the other, is Foucault's perception of the outside of the body as inscribed with the laws of society. But if 'what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (Butler, 1990/1999: xv), does this mean that 'everything that is understood as "internal" about the psyche is therefore evacuated, and that internality is a false metaphor?' (Butler, 1990/1999: xv). Is there, therefore, nothing *but* the body? Butler's own reply is somewhat inconclusive:

> [a]lthough I would deny that all of the internal world of the psyche is but an effect of a stylized set of acts, I continue to think that it is a significant theoretical mistake to take the "internality" of the psychic world for granted. (1990/1999: xv)

In *Volatile Bodies*, Elisabeth Grosz faces the same problem, looking at both 'the ways in which the psychical interior has made the body its form of exteriority, as it were from the inside out' and 'the ways in which the social inscriptions of the surface of the body generate a psychical interiority - the movement from the outside in' (1994: 115). She suggests the moëbius strip as a suitable metaphor -

since it is impossible to tell on a moëbius strip where the outside becomes the inside, and the inside, the outside. Butler's model of the body as 'materialised' over time as a result of the acts and gestures we perform could, then, be read as a continual and unstable negotiation between the inside and outside, where bodily and psychic norms become indistinguishable and performativity is multidimensional.

Ultimately, Butler offers no straightforward or simple answers, suggesting instead that each of us has a complex path of compulsory (psychic and bodily) recitations to negotiate: recitations which we need to perform to remain subjects but which also offer the possibility - however slim - of change. In a similar way, the feminist science fiction texts of the 1990s that this thesis considers are involved in complex renegotiations of the male and female body. They offer the 'denaturalized positions' that are required to expose sex and gender as constructs, exploring the implications of ideas such as Butler's in a wholly different context. In doing so, they also uncover potential problems and limitations. Such texts explore worlds dominated by a homosexual instead of a heterosexual matrix and consider the implications of what it means to be a 'man' or 'woman' under such a social structure. They describe the effects of being 'differently embodied' in worlds where the sex/gender system is based not on a binary, but on three or more sexes and a multiplicity of genders. And as will be discussed in the second half of this thesis, they also explore the relations between mind and body, positing futures where minds can inhabit different bodies by changing bodies at will (or even leave the physical body behind altogether to take up residence in cyberspace), thereby becoming involved in the debate on whether the mind determines the image of the body, or the body the image of the mind.

A number of these science fictional explorations of the questions raised by Judith Butler will be considered in the following chapters. Work on the body by theorists ranging from Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to Donna Haraway and Elisabeth Grosz will be drawn on to supplement Butler's approach and offer further insight into the matter of bodies. The overriding questions will be: what future possibilities do feminist science fiction authors envisage for our bodies and what are the implications of these futures in terms of one of Butler's key concerns, namely how and why certain bodies - and not others - come to matter. Or as Butler puts it in one of her most recent works, *Antigone's Claim*:

> [the] position outside life as we know it is not necessarily a position outside life as it must be. It provides a perspective on the symbolic constraints under which livability is established, and the question becomes: Does it also provide a critical perspective by which the very terms of livability might be rewritten, or indeed, written for the first time? (2000: 55).

Chapter 2
Where Women's Bodies (Come to) Matter

> For, without the exploitation of women, what would become of the social order? What modifications would it undergo if women left behind their condition as commodities [...] and took part in elaborating and carrying out exchanges? Not by reproducing, by copying, the "phallocratic" models that have the force of law today, but by socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language and desire. (Irigaray, 1985: 191)

> [...] this position outside life as we know it is not necessarily a position outside life as it must be. (Butler, 2000: 55)

The first 'position outside life as we know it' to be considered in this thesis is that of worlds inhabited by women only, or worlds ruled by women where men are in the minority. While the former necessarily depict lesbian separatist societies, the latter, as will be seen, can offer some hope of new definitions of - and new relationships between - the sexes. It should be noted, however, that Judith Butler does not regard lesbian separatism as a viable strategy for redefining which bodies come to matter. In *Gender Trouble*, for example, Butler discusses Monique Wittig's claim that lesbians not only fall outside the heterosexual economy, but also leave the status of 'woman' behind, since, in Wittig's view, a 'woman' can only exist in relation to a 'man' within a heterosexual society. Butler argues that such an approach is fatally flawed, since

> [l]esbianism that defines itself in radical exclusion from heterosexuality deprives itself of the capacity to resignify the very heterosexual constructs by which it is partially and inevitably constituted. As a result, that lesbian strategy would consolidate compulsory heterosexuality in its oppressive forms. (1990/1999: 163)

In such a view, science fiction dealing with lesbian separatist worlds merely offers an escape from our present social structures without suggesting any possibility for disrupting them. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, science fiction critics have levelled this accusation against feminist separatist fiction. Nevertheless, this chapter will argue that such texts do offer a useful forum for considering alternatives and a 'position outside life as we know it' which cannot be ignored if we are to investigate how bodies - and female bodies in particular - come to matter. It is valuable to imagine how women's bodies could be materialised in a different social system even if this runs the risk - feared by Butler - of creating a different kind of body still governed by patriarchal law:

> [t]he female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation. (1990/1999: 119)

French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray is rather more optimistic about the possibility of freeing the female body from the 'shackles of the paternal law'. For Irigaray, women are always at least partly outside the phallocratic economy, since this is an economy of the same (of men and their image of women). Even when mimicking the 'feminine role', women also 'remain elsewhere' (Irigaray 1985: 76), that is, they are not fully trapped within or defined by the phallocratic economy. Women are therefore in a position to disrupt and change this economy through practices such as mimesis because they are both implicated in, and yet exceed the limits of phallogocentrism (Irigaray 1985: 163). This is not far from Butler's own position at the end of *Bodies that Matter*, where she refers to 'being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to establish alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition' (1993: 241). Butler and Irigaray differ, however, in their views on separatism as a strategy for redefining which bodies come to matter. Irigaray regards it as crucial that women identify their own sexual specificity, namely who and what they are outside the dictates of the phallocratic economy. Only once women have acceded to full subjectivity can they take part in what Irigaray refers to as 'the practice of sexual difference', namely a society based on interchange between two distinct sexes. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray identifies separatism as a strategic political tactic enabling women to 'begin to escape from the spaces, roles and gestures that they have been assigned and taught by the society of men [...] to discover a form of "social existence" other than the one that has always been imposed upon them' (1985: 164). Women also need a separate space in which to discover their own sexuality, since, as Irigaray notes, '[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters' (1985: 23). It has therefore become necessary for women:

> to keep themselves apart from men long enough to learn to defend their desire [...] to forge for themselves a social status that compels recognition [...] these are certainly indispensable stages in the escape from their proletarization on the exchange market. (1985: 33)

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray develops this idea further, envisaging:

> [a] world for women. Something that at the same time has never existed and which is already present, although repressed, latent, potential. Eternal mediators for the incarnation of the body and the world of man, women seem never to have produced the singularity of their own body and world. (1993: 109)

Irigaray emphasizes on a number of occasions, however, that creating such a world is not about reversing the roles of men and women, since:

> if their aim were simply to reverse the order of things, even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallocratism. It would leave room neither for women's sexuality, nor for women's imaginary, nor for women's language to take (their) place. (1985: 33)

Crucially, Irigaray sees 'a world for women' as a stepping stone, a way of exploring what women's desires could be outside a patriarchal system. As she argues, it is, after all, not about 'toppling [the phallocratic] order so as to replace it [...] but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an "outside" that is exempt, in part, from phallocratic law' (1985: 68). A world for women, then, is not an end in itself, since the ultimate goal must be to initiate a productive exchange between the two different sexes, once women have established their specificity.

Irigaray's theories, then, would appear to offer a very productive dialogue with the strand of feminist science fiction dealing with women-only or women-ruled worlds. This type of feminist science fiction has always given its writers the opportunity to explore a world 'for women themselves', and to conceptualize female sexuality and female bodies in altogether different terms. Such fiction therefore makes it possible to address the question of what would happen if *women's* bodies were the ones that mattered - either because the world was populated by women only, or because men had ceased to matter. Would women's bodies (come to) matter, or materialise, in the same way as they do now? Or, in Judith Butler's terms, what kind of bodily performances would constitute the identity of 'woman' in such a world?

The question of what would happen if women were the dominant sex, or if men did not exist at all, has occupied feminist science fiction writers for over a hundred years, in novels ranging from Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora* (1890) and

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) to the 1970s utopias of Joanna Russ, Suzy McKee Charnas and Sally Miller Gearhart.[1] As Sarah Lefanu argues, utopia offers us 'an imaginary place, a nowhere land, a realm like the unconscious, where dreams may flourish and desires be realised' (1988: 53). A woman-only utopia specifically offers women a space to discover who and what they may be once they cease to reflect men's desires, or cease to be little more than what Irigaray refers to as 'the otherness of sameness' (1985: 152). As Lefanu puts it:

> [t]he point is that "woman" in conventional contemporary science fiction is an absence, at best a pale imitation of "man", if not actually the feared castrating m/other. So to imagine a woman as having a self that can be liberated from the strictures of male dominance, of narrative form as well as of the real world, as these feminist utopias do, is in itself a liberating experience. (Lefanu, 1988: 54)

As noted in the previous chapter, however, many of the utopias written in the 1970s and early 1980s have been criticised for their essentialism, particularly in linking women and nature, and men and violence. Joanna Russ has identified the following list of common features of women-only worlds: the absence of crime, a relative lack of government, the diffusion of the parental role to the whole of society, a lack of dualistic thinking, the importance of mothering, communal, even 'quasi-tribal' societies, strong connections to the natural world and changed philosophical and religious attitudes (1995: 135 ff). In Russ's view, men are excluded from utopia because 'men are dangerous. They also hog the good things of this world' (1995: 140). Indeed, as Diane Griffin Crowder points out, in many of the novels 'men are *by nature* incapable of inhabiting utopia', being depicted as 'inherently violent, hierarchical, incapable of humane, or even human, relationships with women, children, the earth or other men' (1993: 242).

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[1] *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanne Russ, *Motherlines* (1978) by Suzy McKee Charnas and *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1979) by Sally Miller Gearhart.

While these novels may have provided the space for women to develop their own identities, many foreclose the possibility of any productive relationship between the two sexes. Women can only be(come) women if there are no men.[2]

The utopian impulse of the 1970s and early 1980s, which mirrored developments in the women's liberation movement, has given way, for the most part, to rather more dystopian science fiction novels in the late 1980s and 1990s, again reflecting changing attitudes within feminism. Rural settings have by and large been rejected in favour of post-apocalyptic cities, where equal gender rights are no guarantee of future bliss. The desire to explore women-only, or women-ruled, worlds is not entirely absent in 1990s science fiction, however, and while later chapters in this thesis will look at examples of more dystopian feminist science fiction, the present chapter will focus on three novels from the early 1990s which have retained some part of the utopian impulse: Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992), Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* (1992) and Leona Gom's *The Y Chromosome* (1990). As I will show, all three novels investigate what women could be outside a phallocratic economy. They explore in depth the relations among women - what Irigaray refers to as 'women-among-themselves' - and the ways in which the (usually female) body is inscribed and materialised. Griffith's novel explores the (rather utopian) consequences of life on a planet where only women can survive, and where - in the tradition of Russ, Gearhart and Tiptree - the return of men would spell the end of the women's way of life. Vonarburg, in contrast, depicts a future European society which, although run by women (who constitute 97% of the population), is slowly struggling towards a more equitable relation between the sexes, although not necessarily towards the 'practice of sexual difference' favoured by Irigaray (1985: 159). As will be seen, Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* also depicts a society which is far less utopian than that of Griffith's *Ammonite.* Both texts also offer alternative kinship structures in worlds where the role of the mother is diffused across a number of people (and not just those related by blood), rendering the role of the father superfluous. Finally, Leona Gom's *The Y Chromosome* also describes a world apparently populated entirely by women, because men are believed to have died out as a result of a deadly mutation of the Y chromosome. However, we soon learn that a few men still exist in hiding in rural communities, where their behaviour and movements are strictly regulated. Unlike *Ammonite* or *In the Mother's Land,* however, Gom's future earth is one where technology has been retained and developed after the demise of (the majority of) men, with interesting consequences for the relationships of women among themselves and the materialisation of the body in the novel. Crucially, all three novels provide a vital space for women to 'speak (as) women', to use Irigaray's phrase (1985: 119), and to 'think in symbolic structures outside the heterosexual socialization patterns' (Dehler, 2000: 37). The texts therefore offer various models of Irigaray's 'world for women themselves' and suggest the different ways of socializing 'the relation to nature, matter, the body, language and desire' that she calls for (1985: 191). As will be seen, they also highlight a number of problems inherent in moving from a world for women themselves, envisaged by Irigaray as a stepping stone only, to a world based on productive relations between two different sexes.

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[2] This is, of course, in diametric opposition to the Battle-of-the-Sexes texts discussed in the previous chapter, where women can only become (real) women by submitting to/having sexual relations with men. Irigaray's point, however, would be that these are not women, merely images of women as projected by men. A similar point is made by Joanna Russ in her 1971 essay entitled 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction' when she argues that '[t]here are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women' (quoted in Lefanu 1988: 13).

Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* is a novel about establishing identity, learning to break down bodily and other barriers and redefining both kinship relations and the relationship to the body. It introduces us to a planet - known as Jeep - recently re-opened for colonisation, where the original human population is entirely female. This, we learn, is the result of a virus which is invariably fatal to men, as well as to a fifth of all women. The virus is also, however, the key to the women's reproduction and their future, as one of the characters acknowledges: '"Without the virus, the people of this world don't have children. No children and we die"' (1992: 346).[3] It also endows survivors with increased self-healing ability, enhanced senses, and the capacity to access race memories. This is clearly a planet where only women's bodies matter, since men's bodies are unable to survive the virus.

The novel's protagonist, Marghe Taishan, arrives on Jeep to test a new vaccine against the virus which will allow the planet's new owner, the Durallium Company (known as 'Company' for short), to resume exploitation of the planet's natural resources. It is clear from the beginning of the text that Marghe is well attuned to her body:

> Adrenaline, faster than conscious thought, flooded through Marghe and she had to discipline her breathing, decreasing her pulse and respiration rate, slowing blood flow and reducing the sudden over-oxygenation of her long muscles. (1992: 2)

Controlling her own body has always been a key concern for Marghe, as from an early age she has been fascinated with learning to 'increase blood flow to various parts of her body at will' (1992: 59). After a disastrous posting to another Company planet, known as 'Beaver', where she was beaten unconscious by miners, she restores her confidence by undertaking biofeedback training, during which she relearns 'that her body [is] an intricate mechanism made of interconnecting parts, a homeostatic system: change this, and this alters, which changes this' (1992: 60). It is, then, unsurprising that Marghe spends her first few days on Jeep attuning her senses to the new planet, learning to distinguish its smells, sights, sounds, and enjoying the feel of the grass beneath her bare feet. Gaining knowledge through the body - in addition to acquiring knowledge through the mind - is clearly important to Marghe, something that will only be reinforced as the novel progresses.

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[3] The virus makes it possible for the women on the planet to control their own reproductive capabilities. By entering into a trance, either on their own or linked with a partner, they can stimulate their own - or their partner's - ova to divide and thereby initiate pregnancy. This has rendered men superfluous; indeed it is unclear whether the women of Jeep would be able to conceive by means of intercourse with men.

Shortly after arriving on the planet, Marghe leaves on a quest to find information about the origin of Jeep's native inhabitants and the secret of their reproductive capabilities. The journey that follows is one of self-discovery, as Marghe gradually loses what she regards as the most important aspects of her identity. Captured by the warlike tribes of the frozen north of the planet, she is initially stripped of her communication device and the vital supplies of her vaccine. Her reaction when these are returned to her clearly shows the tenuousness of her identity:

> She was Marguerite Angelica Taishan, the SEC rep; she was not lost and alone, helpless as any savage on a horse.
> Aiofe had the power to take away from her that so-slender thread of identity any time she wished. (1992: 67)

From the position of subject, an anthropologist examining the native inhabitants of the planet, she has become an object: 'she was no longer studying in the field, she *was* the field; because now this woman controlled her life' (1992: 89). As her circumstances worsen, she turns to what she sees as the power of her mind to pull her through:

> She sat down in the snow, careless of the freezing cold, and pulled out her wristcom. She would externalize her thoughts. She was a rational woman. All she needed to do was list her options, then make the most sensible decision. (1992: 124)

Her wristcom soon fails her as well, however: 'Marghe sat in the snow thousands of millions of miles from home, alone. Now there was nothing left. She did not weep: this far north, her tears would turn to ice and cut her cheeks' (1992: 125). For Marghe, the loss of the wristcom, the last of her technology, means the loss of the last part of her identity as an anthropologist, as a scientific observer. The wristcom also appears to be linked to Marghe's ability to be 'a rational woman' and to 'make the most sensible decision'; without it, she is unable to bring her mind to bear on the problem of how to escape. Marghe's final escape from the tribe is anything but rational and sensible: when her captors are distracted by a raid carried out by another tribe, Marghe seizes the chance to flee into the frozen wasteland with no resources but a horse and her own body. Significantly, she refuses to 'allow herself to think' as she gallops away (1992: 131).[4]

It is Marghe's control of her own body, via her knowledge of biofeedback procedures, that enables her to survive her arduous journey across the snow with no food or technological aids; she closes down the 'non-essential' parts of her body and travels for days in a light trance. She is eventually rescued and nursed back to health by women from a peaceful, rural community, but her experience has been inscribed upon her body as an indelible reminder: she loses two fingers and part of one ear to frostbite.

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[4] This section of the novel also raises questions as to where identity is to be located, in the mind or the body, and the role of technology in mediating this. At the time of her escape, Marghe has rejected all aspects of her identity except her body; she nearly dies because of this. As will be seen from the discussions below, what she learns from her experiences on Jeep is how to integrate all aspects of her identity in the most effective manner.

This breaking down of Marghe's identity during the first part of the novel is indicative of what Irigaray regards as the need for 'negatives':

> And if I have so often insisted on negatives [...] it has been to remind you, to remind us, that we only touch each other naked. And that, to find ourselves once again in that state, we have a lot to take off. So many representations, so many appearances separate us from one another. (1985: 217-8)

As she recovers from her ordeal, Marghe comes to realise - in line with Irigaray's above claim - that her identity as an anthropologist has functioned as her shield against others:

> "Sometimes... sometimes I feel that all I've got is my job. I study people, that's who I am: studier of people. [...] It's as though all I am is my job. All I am is an empty shell. [...] But I don't have that job anymore. No shell. But if I don't have that, then what do I have?" (1992: 180)

Having had her 'representations', her 'appearances' stripped away from her, Marghe must rebuild her identity according to a new pattern. To do so, she embarks on a vision quest, discovering that identity is not just a matter of learning to understand and trust her own body, but also understanding that her body is intimately linked to those around her and to the planet itself:

> They were connected: the world, her body, her face. Perhaps she should not be asking who she was but, rather, of what she was a part. The world was telling her: her blood, the tides in her cells, and the fluctuations in her nerves already beat to its rhythm [...] Her body rang with this world. She had a place here; she could take it up, if she chose. (1992: 184)

Marghe begins to rebuild her identity by choosing to forge new kinship relations: she asks to be adopted into the 'family' that rescued her. For Marghe, this is an opening up, a setting aside of the barriers she has raised between herself and others, and an articulation of her need to belong. Her next test is the virus itself: with only limited supplies of the vaccine remaining, and no chance of obtaining more, Marghe must prepare to let the virus into her body, thus changing it irrevocably:

> The virus was going to invade her, cell by cell, sliding cold fingers into her cells and curling around her genes. She would never get rid of it, never. She could stop taking the FN-17 voluntarily, let Jeep in with open arms. It was coming anyway. (1992: 185)

To Marghe, the virus represents the blurring of the boundaries between self and other, the intrusion of alien DNA into her body, changing her identity and perhaps even rendering her no longer truly human. As critic Anne-Marie Thomas argues, the virus

> set[s] a new order in motion, whether for good or ill, and it is one that complicates notions of self and other. Through infection and subsequent transformation, humanity becomes other to itself, in ways that require us to redefine this new subject in "nonhuman" terms. (2000: 157)

It is this fear of becoming 'other' that brings Marghe to death's door when she falls ill with the virus:

> But Marghe did not want to return to her body. It was no longer entirely hers. The virus lived in it now, in every pore, every cell, every blood vessel and organ. It slid, cold and in control, through her brain. If she recovered, she would never be sure what dreams and memories were her own, and which were alien. She belonged to Jeep. She wanted to shout, *Don't you see? It'll never let go. I'll never be clean again…?*
> "In me," she gasped. "Unclean." (1992: 217)

It is a member of her new family, Thenike, who pulls her back from the brink by emphasizing the importance of connection: '"Unclean? No. Your body is changing, just as it does every time you get sick and another little piece of something else comes to live inside you. [...] Is this unclean? No. It's life. All life connects'" (1992: 217).

As Anne-Marie Thomas points out, '[i]n 1992, of course, a disease that is described as "a bit like a retrovirus" will have a certain resonance with readers', giving the Jeep virus 'affinities to the most visible of all viruses: HIV' (2000: 152). In her article 'Viral Metaphors in SF by Women', Thomas also traces how a virus's 'invader status can be rewritten in ways that do not imply the typical rape of the body, but rather an empowerment of the human (woman) host' (2000: 145). Griffith, she argues, introduces a 'straight plague' in terms of which 'the Jeep virus rewrites HIV, boosting the immunity of the host and transforming the diseased into an empowered class' (2000: 153). Indeed, once Marghe has survived the virus, she finds that both her senses and her feeling of connection to Jeep have been enhanced. She is also able to take advantage of the ultimate reproductive freedom available to the women of Jeep: she can choose when to have a child, and whether to quicken her own ova or have them quickened by Thenike, now her lover. The new level of bodily control conferred by the virus also means that Marghe, having decided to become pregnant, also has the choice of terminating the pregnancy: 'The ovum [...] was just cells. She could abort them, it, as easily as she had induced cell division' (1992: 249).[5] Ultimately, she chooses to continue the pregnancy, seeing it as another means of 'belonging', to her chosen partner, to her community and to the planet itself.

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[5] A woman's right to choose has therefore become something entirely under her own control, no longer requiring any form of outside intervention.

The reproductive process requires Marghe to cross another physical boundary: having already let in the virus, allowing alien DNA into her body, Marghe must now learn to dissolve the boundaries between her own body and that of Thenike:

> And Marghe gave up everything, gave her breath to Thenike, took Thenike's into her lungs. Then their arms were wrapped around one another, eyes open, staring deep, and Marghe let herself slide down that long steep slope, that slippery slope, sinking in, right in, right down until she *was* Thenike, was Thenike's pulse, Thenike's breath, until she could skip back and forth: her breath, Thenike's breath, back and forth. [...] And Marghe was standing before the cathedral that was Thenike's body and all its systems, as Thenike stood before hers. She stepped inside. (1992: 231-2)

This confusion of boundaries is very similar to what Irigaray appears to be suggesting in the somewhat cryptic remark with which she concludes her essay 'When our Lips Speak Together': 'You? I? That's still saying too much. Dividing too sharply between us: all' (1985: 218). The identity of one's self, then, as Marghe learns and Thenike already knows, is not something to be rigidly defined and defended against an other; body boundaries are not to be protected and maintained at all costs. Nevertheless, this ability to cross physical boundaries does not mean that Marghe has no sense of self, on the contrary, after recovering from the virus, she experiences her body for the first time as a 'magnificent, healthy whole' (1992: 224). She also learns to take up her place within her new network of kinship relations: to Thenike, to the other members of her family, and to the planet itself. Her final act of self-discovery is to undergo the traditional rite of passage on Jeep, involving a 'ritual trance, called deepsearch, which [...] allows the adolescent to somehow access the memories of her ancestors' (1992: 117).[6] It is during this trance that the person undergoing the rite chooses what she regards as her 'true' name, a name that best describes who she is and which will replace the name given to her at birth. When she emerges from her trance, Marghe chooses a new name to replace the name of the Father: Marghe Amun, the 'complete one'. This signifies that, as Joanna Russ argues, 'women are erotic integers and not fractions waiting for completion' (1995: 142).

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[6] The women of Jeep appear to be born with the virus as part of their DNA; Marghe is told that only a few premature babies get the virus after being born and that most, but not all, recover. All

The sense of connection felt by Marghe is also experienced by the majority of the native human inhabitants of Jeep. Griffith describes a society where women are determined not simply by whose daughter they are, or whose wife, or mother, but by all their kinship relations. Marghe's rescuer, for example, introduces herself as 'I am Leifin. Daughter of Jess and Bejuoen and Rolyn. Soestre to Kristen' (1992: 143). Children have 'choose mothers' as well as 'blood mothers' and 'tent mothers'; tent sisters as well as soestre (children born at the same time to different mothers who have caused each other's ova to divide). Children do not have to remain with their blood mothers, or their blood mother's family (who may or may not be biologically related); they can elect to live with a choose mother, in another family. In this way, Griffith offers a vision similar to Irigaray's, which Margaret Whitford describes as 'new forms of social organisation which embody in a public form the metonymical subject-to-subject relations among women' (Whitford, 1991a: 184). Mother-daughter relations are neither privileged nor left to languish unsymbolized. Furthermore, all the women have identities *as women*, as important contributors to the family or tribe, over and above any role they may have as mother, thus 'reconceptualising the woman which any mother is, and reclaiming for her a history and context that have been covered over and destroyed by her burial in maternity' (Grosz, 1989: 119), which is, as Grosz acknowledges, a crucial element of Irigaray's project.

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women undergo the deepsearch process at puberty; this ability to enter into a deep trance is essential for the process of reproduction.

The virus also enables the women of Jeep to remember the lives and actions of their ancestors, as Thenike explains: "'You can see so much of the world through others' memories, places you've never been, faces you've never seen and never will'" (1992: 187). Marghe realises that this ability gives the women of Jeep a sense of connection to the women who have gone before them, and a sense of their place in the world, a sense of connection that Irigaray regards as vital to women's identity:

> It is also necessary, if we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women. There is a genealogy of women within our family: on our mother's side we have mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, and daughters. [...] Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. (1991: 44)

Towards the end of the novel, Marghe takes up her new profession, that of viajera - journeywoman, arbitrator, singer, historian - and learns to speak from her new, fully embodied, position. This means understanding how to use all the timbres of her voice and her hands on the drums to tell a story in such a way that her audience lives it with her. Indeed, in Irigaray's terms, she learns to 'speak as woman', which, as Elizabeth Grosz explains:

> means to undo the reign of the 'proper' - the proper name, property, propriety, self-proximity. It means to evoke rather than designate, to overflow and exceed all boundaries and oppositions [...] To speak with meanings that resonate, that are tactile and corporeal as well as conceptual, that reverberate in their plurality and polyvocity. (Grosz, 1989: 132)

Marghe is, however, not the only character in the novel who learns to renegotiate the boundaries between herself and (the) other(s). The novel switches between the points of view of Marghe and Hannah Danner, the commander of the military officers - called Mirrors - originally sent to the planet by Company, and now reduced to fewer than half their original number as a result of the virus. The Mirrors have chosen to remain at their original base on the planet - called Port Central - making occasional forays out to lay communication lines.[7] It is clear that they regard the inhabitants of the planet as 'other', often referring to them as 'the natives' or as 'savages'. As the novel progresses, however, there is a change of attitude: Danner, for example, finds herself thinking of '*Some smiling woman bringing Marghe soup*' (1992: 81) and realises that

> [i]t was the first time she had really, deep down, thought of the indigenous population of Jeep as women. Not aliens, or natives, or beings to be taken into consideration from a humanitarian point of view, but women like her, like Marghe [...] *Like us.* Women who lit fires against the cold and made soup for their loved ones. (1992: 81)

As it gradually becomes clear that the Mirrors will be left to fend for themselves on the planet by Company, the barriers come down even further, until, at the end of the novel, one of the characters (and an employee of Company) can say:

> Company never gives up. *They'll* keep at it, on and on, until they find a vaccine, or a cure, and then *they'll* be back. [...] And when they do, they'll be holding *our* destruction, the destruction of all the communities of this world, in their syringes or their sprays. Without the virus, the people of this world don't have children. No children and *we* die. (1992: 346, my emphasis).

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[7] These are communication lines to enable them to communicate more effectively with Company spaceships in orbit above the planet, no matter where on the planet the Mirrors are based. Later, Danner realises that they should have been concentrating on 'laying communication lines' to improve their communications with the 'natives' instead. Ironically, it is a failure in communication that ultimately strands them on the planet - Marghe chooses to stop taking the vaccine so that she can prepare herself for the virus; the message she sends to tell Danner this is distorted, leading her to believe that the vaccine has failed and that Company will therefore simply abandon the women on the planet. This is, in effect, what happens, although, as discussed below, Danner suspects that Company's withdrawal is only temporary.

It could be argued that the novel therefore ends by evoking the female self - as varied as this is on the planet - against a male other, excluded from the planet by the virus, but always threatening to return. The question of whether this vision of the female self is essentialist is a contested one: Griffith herself has said that *Ammonite* is 'a book about people, every variety of people - smart and stupid, kind and venal, indifferent and vicious, etc. - who all happen to be women' (quoted in van der Kruisweg, 1994: 4). Anne-Marie Thomas, however, argues that in the novel '[w]oman [...] is equated with nature, and the virus is the agent that links them. After Marghe contracts the virus, she feels at one with herself and the world' (2000: 154). She identifies the feminine discourse of the native inhabitants as well as the 'fact that utopia is achieved through the agency of a virus which itself seems to embody a "feminine" essence' (2000: 157) as 'encouraging a depiction of gender that actually reinforces gender binaries' (2000: 158). There is also the question of whether the focus on bodily identities and bodily performances simply reenacts the reduction of women to the body typical of phallocratic society.

Granting the women of Jeep a certain 'feminine essence' would perhaps be in line with Irigaray's aim of identifying women's sexual specificity – suggesting what women could be outside the phallocratic economy, what kind of female imaginary they could develop, and so forth. But the peaceful harmony and sense of connection to others and to the planet engendered by the virus in Marghe is only one part of the story, albeit the most utopian part. As Marghe's kidnapping by the tribes early in the novel suggests, the women Griffith depicts occupy the full range of human roles: some of the women are cold-blooded killers, others steal and even one of Marghe's adopted family, Leifin, far from living in harmony with nature, is 'obsessed by perfection and possessions. It was an obsession that prevented her from seeing any difference between carving something beautiful and killing another thinking, feeling being for its fur' (1992: 278). Nor do any of the Mirrors, despite having survived the virus, have the sense of connection that Marghe does.[8] They are furthermore not in any rush to give up their technology or weapons, even though it is clear that circumstances will force them to embrace more primitive technologies in order to survive in the long run. Even Marghe's own journey of self-discovery is not just about body knowledge and body awareness, but about integrating this with mind-based knowledge. Her new role as viajera requires her to make careful and well thought-out judgements - for example in a case of stealing which she is asked to judge - and to reach people's minds, as well as their hearts, with her story-telling. Marghe's journey is therefore one of integration: although previously aware of her body's functioning, as has been shown above, her aim has always been to control her body, to master it. What the virus teaches her is how to integrate her body and mind, to embrace and accept her own body, to learn to work *with* it and thereby gain a better understanding of what it is to be embodied. This is, I would argue, not a reduction of the self to the body but an acknowledgement of the implications, and the possibilities, of embodiment. Those, like the Mirrors and Leifin, who refuse to see or choose to reject these implications and possibilities will never experience the deeply inter-connected and multi-dimensional lives of those who embrace them - as do Marghe, her lover Thenike and many of Jeep's native inhabitants.

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[8] Marghe attributes her ability to deepsearch and to feel a physical connection to Jeep to the fact that she is already well-attuned to her body and is well-practised in various meditation techniques. The other non-native women on Jeep are all Mirrors - all trained military personnel. As Danner muses at one point, when she and her Mirrors fail to return a friendly wave because 'after hundreds of hours of parade-ground training, [they] did not think to respond': 'What else had been trained out of them? How many other things, human things, would they have to relearn?' (1992: 292). Marghe herself compares the Mirrors to children, who will have to learn how to listen to their bodies and to their new world (1992: 270).

It could therefore be argued that the range of behaviours and roles available to, and adopted by, the women on Jeep complicates any idea of a 'feminine essence' conferred by the virus. The women in Griffith's novel, after all, embrace the full range of human possibilities. This is not necessarily at odds with Irigaray's view of women. Although Irigaray has herself been accused of identifying a 'feminine essence', Elizabeth Grosz argues that "[c]ontrary to the objection that she is describing an essential, natural or innate femininity, unearthing it from under its patriarchal burial, Irigaray's project can be interpreted as a contestation of patriarchal representations *at the level of cultural representation itself*' (1989: 116). Irigaray is therefore offering alternative images of the female body that 'reveal the implicit assumptions, and the sexual positions, constituted and affirmed in dominant representations, and [...] ease their hold over the terrain, so that different representations may be possible' (Grosz 1989: 116).

In *Ammonite,* Griffith, like Irigaray, is imagining how women's bodies might be materialised outside the patriarchal system, and her characters also challenge dominant representations of what it means to be female. For Griffith, however, women are not just half the world, they can be the whole world and it is on this point that Griffith parts company with Irigaray. For Irigaray, separatism is only a stepping stone, a means to an end for women to discover their own sexual specificity, whatever this may be. Ultimately, she argues, we must take up our task, which is to 'go on living and creating worlds' which, however, 'can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of the two halves of the world: the masculine and the feminine' (1993: 127). Griffith, in contrast, implies - given the threat posed by the return of the patriarchal Company - that the women's way of life on Jeep *cannot* become part of the 'practice of sexual difference', since, after all, if the men of Company return, 'we die' (1992: 346).

While Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* also offers a space in which to explore the relations of what Irigaray refers to as 'women-among-themselves', and the implications of these for the materialisation of the body, it is rather more dystopian than *Ammonite.* Although the society of Maerlande ('the Mother's Land') that Vonaburg depicts is ruled by women, the problems inherited from previous societies (run by both men and women) to a large extent constrain and determine the ways in which female and male bodies are sexed and gendered in the novel.[9] Before looking at the current Maerlande society, then, it is necessary briefly to consider the events that have led to the formation of this society.

When the novel opens, Maerlande has been in existence for approximately 500 years. We learn that three distinct periods preceded it, starting with the 'Decline', the period furthest in the past and a time of increasing environmental pollution and devastation of the earth not very far removed from our own present-day world. The Decline period, we are told, was followed by the 'Harem' period, with the latter being superseded in its turn by the 'Hives' period, immediately prior to the formation of Maerlande. During both the Decline and the Harem periods men were dominant; as the name 'Harem' suggests, this dominance intensified during the latter period, with the majority of women being kept as slaves. Eventually, however, the women rebelled, turning the tables on the men and starting the Hives period, so-called because each community was headed by a 'Queene', served by her female 'workas'. As one of the characters notes, '[t]he Hives turned this situation [men ruling over women] upside down, like a lot of other things' (1992: 290). The Hives period is particularly interesting in view of Irigaray's numerous comments on the folly of women simply turning the tables on men. In

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[9] Women vastly outnumber men in this society as only three out of every hundred babies born in Maerlande are male.

This Sex Which is Not One, for example, she argues that '[i]t clearly cannot be a matter of substituting feminine power for masculine power. For this reversal would still be caught up in the economy of the same...' (1985: 129-130). And indeed, the women leading the Hives merely use the same, often barbaric, practices, on the men under their control as were practised against them in the previous era. As Irigaray points out, such a reversal of the order of things 'leave[s] room neither for women's sexuality, nor for women's imaginary, nor for women's language to take (their) place' (1985: 33). We learn that Maerlande was, in turn, formed in an attempt to leave many of the practices of both Harem and Hives behind. As will be discussed in detail below, it is a society struggling to move from 'an economy of the same' to the practice of what Irigaray calls an 'economy of sexual difference', in which both women and men have their places.

In the Maerlande described at the beginning of the novel, it is clear that women's bodies matter a great deal more than men's. This is highlighted most explicitly in the mythology in place in the novel, which not only describes Maerlande's origins and customs, but also appropriates and subverts some of the myths of origin that circulate in our own society. This act of appropriation and subversion is, as Margaret Whitford explains, also a crucial aspect of Irigaray's work:

> Irigaray's reinterpretations of classical mythology [...] come from her belief that in mythology we can see a struggle taking place between the maternal and paternal genealogies, eventually ending in the installation of patriarchy. To "undo" the gesture which puts patriarchy in place it is necessary to reveal the gesture in detail. But that in itself is not enough. It is clear from her method and from her interest in mythology that Irigaray does not regard the negative moment as sufficient. One has to prevent the patriarchal version from simply falling back into place again, by providing alternative versions, alternative readings, alternative mythologies and alternative imaginary configurations, however provisional. (1991a: 103)

In *In the Mother's Land*, Vonarburg uses the change in power relations to uncover the links among myths, meaning and power, and to show how both male and female bodies are materialised as a result. For a start, Maerlande has a female deity: Elli, and in a reversal of the Garden of Eden myth, children are told that '[i]n the beginning, Elli had created a big garden where an apple tree grew. There were as many boys as girls in the beginning. But the boys ate the apples before they were ripe, seeds and all, and Elli was very angry' (1992: 29).[10] Elli's punishment, the children learn, was to create fewer boys than girls. From a very young age, then, both boys and girls learn which bodies matter in Maerlande. Boys' bodies are viewed as mistakes, inferior and as objects to be rescued:

> After all, you couldn't play rough games with boys. The way the gardianas all sprang into action the first few times this happened made it abundantly clear: it was even worse than fighting with girls. Boys were only included in two games: Dungeon and Queenegarde. The gardianas who showed the little mostas how to play had never explained why; it had been that way since they themselves were childreen, so why would they question what was simply a fact of life? The gage to be delivered from the Dungeon, the trophy to be won by answering the Queen's riddles - it just had to be a boy, and that was that. (1992: 28)

Nor is there any room for penis envy in Maerlande: '[g]irls had no pipes, and women probably didn't, either. The suggestion that girls might develop one when they grew older was brushed aside: who'd want such a ridiculous thing?' (1992: 30). Indeed, there is even a form of reverse 'castration' anxiety: when threatened with punishment, the young girls in the 'garderie' (nursery) anxiously ask whether 'they [could] turn into boys if they weren't good?' (1992: 29).

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[10] In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray identifies the existence of 'a female divine' (1993: 68) as one of the tasks that must be successfully completed before women can accede to subjectivity. However, she once again emphasizes that it is not a question of a female deity replacing the male one, but of the two co-existing, which is clearly not the case in Maerlande.

In Maerlande, then, it is women's bodies that function as the standard; men's are the deviation. In some cases, men have become almost invisible: the young Lisbeï, for instance, initially tends to see men as women, simply because she expects to see women, and describes one hapless man as follows: 'She must be rather old, because she hadn't much hair on her head. Still, the face seemed quite young - a very ugly face, thought Lisbeï' (1992: 67). In this way, Vonarburg makes explicit the 'categories through which [Lisbeï] sees', to use Butler's phrase (1990/1999: xxii). Even the language used is no longer that of the 'Father': the standard forms are the feminine ones: 'childe' and 'childreen' instead of child and children, her instead of his, 'explora' instead of explorer. Only rarely are the male terms used; in general the female terms designate both females and males, since the former far outweigh the latter.[11] If, in our present society, '[m]en have dominated over women, by and large, because they have a stranglehold on *meaning*' (Edley and Weatherell, 1996: 107), Vonarburg's novel clearly offers us a world where women are in charge of the production of both myth and meaning. Using the space opened up by a world where women rule, Vonarburg is therefore able to provide the 'alternative readings' and 'alternative mythologies' Irigaray seeks, disrupting the framework of the reader's own perceptions of (the value of) male and female bodies, whilst clearly indicating that the border between bodies that matter and those that do not is 'a variable boundary set and reset by political investments' (Butler, 1993: 20).

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[11] Nor does Maerlande have any 'Name-of-the-Father', which Lacan sees as crucial for the materialisation of the sexed and gendered body. As Judith Butler explains, 'For Lacan, names, which emblematize and institute this paternal law, *sustain* the integrity of the body. What constitutes the integral body is not a natural boundary or organic telos, but the law of kinship that works through the name' (1993: 72). In Maerlande, women - and men - take the name of their community as their second name (Lisbei is known as 'Lisbei of Betheley', for example), signifying a completely different kinship structure and possibly, therefore, bodies materialised differently.

Even if women's bodies matter more than men's in Maerlande, however, genetic mutations and a lack of technology (believed to have been destroyed and/or lost during the Decline) mean that almost all bodies are necessarily subject to a practice known as the 'Service'. The Service is a system designed to ensure the continuation of Maerlande society in a world with a severely skewed male/female ratio, where the pollution of the earth in past eras has brought about a drastic decline in the birth rate, together with an increase in the number of abnormal births. All fertile women - known as 'Red women' or 'Reds' - are therefore required to bear children until they reach a certain age, while non-fertile women are declared 'Blue'. All fertile men - also called 'Reds' or 'Red men' - are required to go wherever they are sent to provide sperm for the artificial insemination of Red women. Reds who have completed their Service automatically become Blues, while men and women who are infertile are declared Blue from puberty. Maerlande is clearly no role-reversal utopia: even if women are in control, the requirements of the Service, coupled with the lack of technology, result in many women dying in childbirth, or even committing suicide after being forced (by the less progressive communities) to bear abnormal child after abnormal child. Nevertheless, their situation is better than men's; once they are declared Blue, women can pursue any career they wish. Men, who are seen by many - if not most - women as nothing more than 'cattle' whose only function is to provide sperm, are denied access to a number of careers and have a considerably lower status as Blue men than Blue women.

The division of Maerlande's inhabitants into 'Blues' and 'Reds' means in turn that all bodies are also marked by the red or blue clothing they are required to wear to signify their physical status (fertile or infertile). This is of course highly reminiscent of the colour-coded clothing forced on women in *The Handmaid's*

Tale (1986), written a few years earlier by Vonaburg's compatriot Margaret Atwood. As in Atwood's novel, this clothing ensures that people are identified as much, if not more, by the roles they are required to play - roles based on their physical status - as by their names. For the novel's protagonist, Lisbeï, recording the Red/Blue status of those she meets is as important as recording their names and origins, and she accordingly refers to 'Ysande of Gers, a homely, good-humoured Red of twenty-five' or 'Livine, a recent Wardenberg Blue' (1992: 205). In Vonaburg's novel, however, this system is of course compulsory for *both* men and women, and stems from a decision made by the women when they founded Maerlande.

Despite the presence of men, and the emphasis on child-bearing, Maerlande is, for its female population at least, a society of compulsory homosexuality.[12] For the vast majority of its inhabitants it is therefore simply the natural order of things that women should love and have sex with other women. Although the children learn that the song of Elli refers to '*The night / and the day, The earth / and the sky, The woman / and the man*' (1992: 31), Lisbeï immediately perceives the last line as '[a] lopsided symmetry. The real symmetry, the one Lisbeï had thought of right away when she imagined the mirror effect was *Lisbeï / and Tula* [Lisbeï's half-sister] - the continual circling of emotions that rebounded between them, the resonance, the shared light' (1992: 31). To a large extent, then, Maerlande remains locked in the economy of the same that is the legacy of the Hives period: in a reproduction/reversal of the phallocratic economy, the role of both subject and Other is occupied by women. Nevertheless, as suggested above, it is also a society which, over the course of the novel, moves towards a new, productive relationship of exchange between the sexes. In Vonaburg's novel, of course, it is the *men* who need to accede to subject status in order to make such an exchange possible.

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[12] It is unclear to what extent homosexuality exists among the men in the novel. The men themselves describe the typical experience of a Blue male as follows: 'Alone even when he, too, becomes a Blue, alone with the shame of his wretched body conditioned since childehood, a body that can't forget and continues to desire ... to desire the Mother - but he is a Blue man now and can't possibly talk to a Blue woman, can't possibly tell her...' (1992: 341).

In the Mother's Land explores the position of men in Maerlande primarily through Lisbeï's relationships with Dougall and Toller, a Red and a Blue male, respectively. It is Dougall who opens Lisbeï's eyes to the ways in which men are first reduced to their physical function of sperm providers and then cast aside once they become infertile:

> "Cattle," Dougall repeated. "Males, wards, they're cattle." [...]
> "I've never considered myself cattle," said Ysande slowly. "Since I'm able to give Maerlande children, I give them; it's the least I can do in return for what I get. [...]"
> [...] "It could be worse," someone else remarked. "The fertile period could last longer. At least we can begin living after fifteen years."
> "*You* can begin living!" said Dougall. [...]
> "What stops me from living?" said Dougall. "What stops us from living? The Service, of course! Being a Red and not being chosen. Becoming a Blue with nowhere to go. Being good for just one thing, and good for nothing afterward!" (1992: 219-220)

As Dougall points out, some men cannot return to their home communities once their service is over; relatively few occupations are open to Blue men, and the possibility of acting as father to their children - or even knowing who their children are - is excluded in all but a few cases. The message is clear: while women are valued for their minds as well as their bodies, men are only useful for their reproductive capabilities. To this end Red men must follow a strict regime of diet and exercise designed to optimise sperm production and their ability to service one of the Mothers, should they be called to do so. Very few communities are interested in the development of men's minds by allowing them to be educated.

Nor are men allowed to display any physical prowess outside the Service - they are banned from competing in the games that form part of the celebrations accompanying the annual meeting of the Mothers. Men's inferior status is linked not only to their numbers, but also to what many in Maerlande see as their essential nature. Men are violent, Lisbeï is told, and can therefore never again have access to weapons. This in turn is used as the reason for excluding men from certain fields, such as the metal-working industry and the Patrol that guards Maerlande's borders. This essentialist approach is however undermined by events in the novel itself, which makes it clear, for example, that women have violent tendencies too. Lisbeï herself at one point almost murders a friend in a rage and the Patrol includes female criminals doing a form of community service. Those women who cannot be rehabilitated are exiled to the 'badlands', where they are likely to die of radiation poisoning. We also learn that the women of the Harem and Hives periods were ruthless warriors. The suggestion is that Maerlande is peaceful because of its social structures, not because women are innate pacifists, whatever the women of Maerlande themselves may choose to believe.

As the novel progresses, Lisbeï comes to realise that the prevailing view of men is flawed: that men are human, like herself, that they too have feelings, and desires. From Toller, a Blue male, Lisbeï discovers that men can be good fathers if given the chance and it is from Toller too that Lisbeï discovers that relationships between men and women still exist outside the ritual union of the Mother and the Mother's Male.[13] Before she meets Toller, any idea of a sexual relationship - or even a loving platonic relationship - between men and women is so foreign to Lisbeï that she does not recognise Dougall's declaration of love for her when it is made, leading to Dougall's suicide. As the novel progresses, however, Lisbeï becomes the representative of a group of Blue men seeking access to the games, and to other Maerlande institutions, such as the right to speak at the Mothers' Assemblies. She therefore becomes an advocate of the right for men's bodies to matter as well, not just to be used in the Service and otherwise discarded. The signs at the end of the novel are positive: by the time Lisbeï dies, men and boys have been admitted to the games and even to the holy of holies, the Assemblies.

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[13] The Mothers of the communities are the only women required to copulate with males, rather than become pregnant by artificial insemination.

The whole question of relations among women and between men and women in the novel is furthermore complicated by another genetic mutation present in some of Maerlande's inhabitants (both male and female), which - like the virus in *Ammonite* - fundamentally changes the ways in which bodies interact and which, moreover, radically undermines any assumption of difference between men and women.

There is little information in the text about how many of the people of Maerlande have this mutation; we learn, however, that many women, particularly those from less progressive communities, regard it as an abomination and that those who have the mutation are unlikely to broadcast the fact. The mutation allows those affected by it to recover from injury more quickly and to experience the presence of others who have the same abilities as a special connection, a 'light' or 'resonance'. This in turn makes it possible, among other things, for those with the mutation to read each others' moods and to achieve a greater sense of physical and mental closeness. The mutation therefore clearly has implications for both body and ego boundaries, as Lisbeï's description of the interchange between herself and her half-sister Tula, both of whom have the mutation, indicates:

> How can she explain it? Being with someone, feeling their presence inside or outside your own body like a sensation of heat, light, or smell. But with Tula it's right, she feels this is where she belongs and that the other belongs and knows it, too. (1992: 5)

Lisbeï's interchange with Tula has a great deal in common with Marghe's experience of the absence of physical boundaries between herself and Thenike in *Ammonite* (see page 45 above), during the trance state enabled by the virus. This in turn suggests that the dissolution of boundaries between self and other is a particularly powerful utopian ideal, one, indeed, that has been envisaged by Irigaray as well:

> We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I've never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations, we make two. Really, two? Doesn't that make you laugh? An odd sort of two: And yet not one. Especially not one. Let's leave *one* to them: their oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism: like the sun's. And the strange way they divide up their couples, with the other as the image of the one. (1985: 207)

Because of the mutation, Lisbeï, Tula and others like them therefore have to learn to renegotiate both body and ego boundaries, with varying degrees of success. Even for those without the mutation, the three key rituals of Maerlande society encourage a highly-trained sense of the body and its capabilities, and the redefinition of body, if not ego, boundaries. As Lisbeï realises, the first ritual, an exercise regime called 'the taïtche', teaches its practitioners to 'know the boundaries of your own body and to situate it exactly in its own space. You brushed the boundaries of someone else's space very briefly and immediately returned to your own' (1992: 113). The remaining rituals, the Parade and the Dance, in contrast, teach each participant 'to reach out towards [her] partner's space, to touch it, mold to it' (1992: 113). All three rituals therefore instil an awareness of a certain fluidity of physical boundaries. Lisbeï's participation in all three rituals is complicated, and in some cases, hampered by the mutation as she finds it impossible to separate the fluidity of body boundaries from a corresponding fluidity of ego boundaries. She later learns that Tula, far from sharing her sense of 'belonging', has learned to erect a 'mirror wall' to prevent herself from being overwhelmed by Lisbeï's feelings. As Tula therefore struggles to establish her own body - and ego - boundaries free of Lisbeï, Lisbeï must learn that 'we are each in our own bodies, and even when the bodies are similar, the souls are not' (1992: 470).

Despite these struggles, given the exchange of emotions made possible by the mutation, and the constant redefinition of body boundaries encouraged by the taïtche and the parade, characters such as Lisbeï exemplify the body as flow described by Irigaray in 'When our Lips Speak Together':

> You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? It is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple quantities. Yet it cannot be decomposed. These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end. These rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. [...]
> Speak, all the same. Between us, "hardness" isn't necessary. We know the contours of our bodies well enough to love fluidity. (1985: 215)

In Vonarburg's novel, however, this fluidity becomes almost destructive in nature, threatening to overwhelm rather than moulding to the other. Vonaburg also parts company with Irigaray – and, for that matter, with Griffith - on the subject of male bodies. While the flowing bodies of Irigaray's description are female bodies, and the virus Griffith depicts in *Ammonite* is invariably fatal to men, *In the Mother's Land* has male characters with the same mutation, and therefore the same, or similar, abilities, as Lisbeï and Tula. Any assumption of fundamental sexual difference in the novel is further undermined by the presence of Kelys, an older Blue woman who becomes Lisbeï's friend, but who is also, as we learn at the very end of the novel, a shape-changer who can take on a male or female body at will.

Kelys is, it turns out, the product of a special genetics project commenced during the Decline period and continued in secret ever since. The details of the project itself would be known only to a reader familiar with Vonarburg's preceding novel, *The Silent City* (1981). This earlier novel deals with humans who have been bioengineered to be able to change sex - and indeed species - at will, as well as to heal their own wounds and attain immortality. *The Silent City* ends with its protagonist, Elisa, having established a project to create more bioengineered humans in an attempt to redress the imbalance between the male and female birth rates. Her idea is that eventually a number of 'men' will be able to leave the project base (hidden in heavily contaminated 'badlands' where it is unlikely to be discovered) to mingle with other humans and spread these new genes. It is clear that this genetic manipulation is behind the 'mutation' experienced by Lisbeï and others in *In the Mother's Land*. Kelys, like the other members of the project, is fully able to change sex at will, and in fact proves to be not only Lisbeï's friend but also her father, having changed sex to take on the role of the Male to impregnate Lisbeï's mother. Like the other bioengineered humans, Kelys also appears to be immortal; from time to time during her life she has faked her own death, only to take on another appearance and re-join life in Maerlande, to continue the contribution of her own remarkable genes to the gene pool. Some years before Lisbeï's death, Kelys 'dies' and returns as Cheïre, who becomes one of Lisbeï's male students. As Cheïre, s/he is also able to watch over Lisbeï's own daughter, Yemen, whose ability to control her own body, and its interaction with those around her, is even more advanced than Lisbeï's. The suggestion at the end of the novel is that the numbers of those women - and men - with the mutation will continue to grow, as will their ability to control its effects. Ultimately, therefore, the implication is that the Maerlanders could even be able to change sex, as Kelys does, once they fully understand, and can control, the capacities conferred by the mutation. Characters such as Lisbeï and Toller are already able to control their reproductive capabilities: Lisbeï's body, for example, automatically defers the onset of menstruation (leading her to be declared a Blue when she reaches the age of 16) until she learns to unlock her own reproductive ability, thus signalling that she is ready to bear children.[14] As Kelys comments at the end of the novel, the Maerlanders have 'changed, they're changing now, and they'll continue to change' (1992: 487).

Like Griffith's *Ammonite*, Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* certainly offers what Irigaray refers to as a separate space:

> [f]or women [...] to keep themselves apart from men long enough to learn to defend their desire [...] to forge for themselves a social status that compels recognition [...] (1985: 33)

Unlike *Ammonite*, however, *In the Mother's Land* also envisages a world where men and women can learn to live together, although the novel suggests that the basis for their interchange would be a recognition of sameness, and not difference. This in turn implies a model of sexual difference perhaps closer to

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[14] Lisbeï manages to 'untie' what she perceives as a 'knot' within her own body during a taïtche trance. The process of controlling one's reproductive capacity has much in common with the depiction of trancing for the purpose of becoming pregnant described in *Ammonite*, although artificial insemination or intercourse would still be required in Vonarburg's novel for the woman to actually become pregnant.

Kristeva's than Irigaray's.[15] The key to the revaluation of women's bodies in both novels is linked to a change in bodily abilities - brought on by the virus or mutation. Both *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land* depict worlds with little, or no, advanced technology; both suggest that enhanced bodily control and awareness can offer many of the benefits of technology for women, such as reproductive control and the ability to heal oneself and others. Indeed, at the end of *In the Mother's Land* Lisbeï locates the possibility for change *inside* the body, in its enhanced capabilities brought about by the mutation, instead of outside the body via technology:

> Travel is fine, institutions are excellent, and so, no doubt, is the technology [...] that seeks to master time and space. There's another side, however, something more hidden that may initiate far deeper changes in each one of us, woman or man, and in the thread upon which our spirits dance with our bodies. And who knows with what body the children of our children will dance? (1992: 480)

This statement, however, points to a certain irony in *In the Mother's Land* which is absent in *Ammonite*: readers familiar with Vonarburg's earlier novel *The Silent City* would know that the 'something hidden' is the genetic mutation engineered using the most advanced technology of the hidden cities inhabited by the scientific elite, before such cities were shut down. Technology therefore proves, after all, to be irrevocably entwined with embodiment in the society Vonarburg depicts.

Ultimately, it could be argued that both Griffith and Vonarburg are using the science fiction genre literally to change the physical bodies of their characters in ways which bring them into line with the kinds of metaphorical bodies invoked by Irigaray.[16] Not all women-only worlds described in feminist science fiction have the same approach to the body, however, as Leona Gom's *The Y Chromosome* shows. The society depicted in Gom's novel also has the highest level of technology of the three novels considered here. If *Ammonite* shows the bodily capabilities engendered by the virus as *replacing* certain benefits of technology (in the area of healing, for example), and *In the Mother's Land* shows technology working *through* the body (via the genetically engineered mutation), *The Y Chromosome* shows technology working *on* and controlling the body in a way similar to, although more advanced than, our own present-day society.

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[15] See Kristeva's comments on what she terms the 'third generation' of feminism, in which the difference between male and female is recognised as 'metaphysical' and each individual is seen as containing aspects of *both* sexes, rendering sexual difference an internal struggle. (in Oliver, 1997: 366)

Gom's novel is set on a future earth where radiation damage to the Y chromosome has meant that men have been extinct for almost three hundred years, leaving women in possession of both the world's infrastructure and its technology. Unlike both the previous novels discussed, the inhabitants of Gom's novel therefore benefit from a technologically advanced society. Bowden, for example, one of the novel's protagonists, works in a large, well-equipped hospital where there are genetics records available for each patient (1990: 19). Much of the area where the novel is set is built up; since the men died out, the women, we are told, have added to the existing buildings to create large complexes, accommodating hospitals, universities and housing units. Far from displaying an affinity with nature, these city women, as one character notes, prefer to avoid going outside as much as possible (1990: 144). This does not mean, however, that all aspects of the classical feminist separatist utopia are absent: many women do live outside the cities, in rural areas or on farms, and even in the cities there are communal cooking and dining areas. All women also have to do a certain amount of community service each week, crime is virtually non-existent, recycling is high on the agenda, and those who are reasonably well off pay a 'world-welfare tithe' of 25% of their earnings to help those parts of the world where people still suffer from starvation.

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[16] That is, bodies perceived in terms of their morphology (namely their 'psychical and social meanings' (Grosz 1989: xv)) rather than their anatomy.

The implications of the society Gom depicts for the materialisation of the female body are manifold. It is clear that the level of technology that the women have at their disposal allows them a high degree of bodily control. Menstrual 'extractors' , for example, are used to avoid what one character refers to as the 'inconvenience' of menstruation (1990: 108). There are tablets available to clear spots away overnight (1990: 139), suggesting that an attractive appearance is important to at least some of the women. Reproduction is also technologically mediated: a couple who decide that they want a child must visit a doctor so that the complex process of 'ova-fusion' can be started. There is, then, little sense of the understanding of, and involvement with, the body and its sensations apparent in both *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land*, indeed in Gom's novel neither Bowden nor her partner Delacour can understand the impulse to reclaim and honour the female body expressed in a twentieth century poem they read about women celebrating their first menstruation (1990: 108).

Nevertheless, women's bodies remain the norm in the society Gom depicts, whilst men's bodies are perceived as monstrous. Bowden, for example, has a strong reaction to the idea of 'a male':

> A male: she felt an old and unexpected shudder run through her. *The male will get you, the male will get you.* She could still hear the giggly cries of her playmates when she began her kilometre-long walk home alone from kindergarten, through the woods made suddenly sinister by their echoing voices. And behind every tree, around every bend in the path there he would be, the male, the monster, and even if she evaded him he

> would follow her home and climb into her dreams and she would awaken screaming, unable to tell her mothers the nightmare, so terrifying was it, so beyond description. (1990: 36)

As the novel progresses, we learn that a few men do still exist in rural communities, although their behaviour and movements are strictly regulated and their existence is a closely guarded secret. Bowden's first encounter with a 'real' male does little to dispel her idea of men as monstrous, however:

> There was something physically wrong with the blonde person. Her breasts were covered with a woolly coat of hair, like an animal's, and something thick and white seemed to be protruding or oozing from her vagina. Bowden stared at it, horrified. (1990: 123)

Other characters in the novel have a different reaction to the idea of male bodies (as seen, for example, in old books or video footage). Delacour, for example, finds the male body alternately fascinating and risible. In a move similar to Vonaburg's rewriting of social mythology in Maerlande, Gom has one of Delacour's students present what has come to be known as a 'revisionist-structuralist position', which rewrites the history of both male and female bodies:

> "If the male phallus had really been pride-stimulus, it would not have been so determinedly hidden. Photographs. Film. Art. We [that is, women] are commonly depicted naked. Not males. The phallus: obviously an attribute of shame." (1990: 25)

Female bodies, then, are paradoxically constructed as both threatened by male bodies (Bowden's terror; invoking the 'male' to keep children in line) and a threat to male bodies, since men supposedly felt both inferior to, and envious of, the female body (1990: 26). Like *In the Mother's Land*, Gom's novel accordingly suggests that the ways in which bodies are materialised can be deconstructed and reconstructed in an alternate form. Gom's novel also suggests, like

Vonarburg's, that men and women may be more alike than they are different - indeed, that most of the differences between them were socially constructed, even if the majority of the inhabitants of the society she depicts do not necessarily see it this way.[17] The question of whether men could ever take up a proper and equal place in this society is never resolved in the novel, however. Certainly, the majority of the women seem happy that men no longer exist (or so they believe). As in *Ammonite,* there is a sense that a world for women themselves can be an end in itself.

What, then, do these three novels have to tell us about the ways in which bodies are materialised from this 'position outside life as we know it'? Are the bodies in these texts even sexed or gendered at all? In *Bodies that Matter,* Judith Butler argues that we are interpellated into a feminine gender identity from birth, from the very moment the doctor says 'it's a girl' (1993: 8). Such a statement would, however, simply be devoid of meaning in an all-female society as depicted in Griffith's *Ammonite* or Gom's *The Y Chromosome*. Gom's characters, for instance, as described not as 'women' or 'females', but simply as people (1990: 25). As Monique Wittig argues, without men, there can be no 'women':

> For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligations as well as economic obligation [...] (1992: 20)

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[17] At several points, Delacour argues that men were taught to kill, to be violent, and that if women had been taught the same, they would have acted in the same way. Bowden also comes to realise that she is capable of violent impulses as well - even if she doesn't act on them. Other characters, however, argue that the capacity for violence is something innate in men, something that can only be controlled, never eradicated. The men portrayed in the novel are, however, anything but violent and one of them, Daniel, realises that even if men were to be accepted back into mainstream society, things could never - and should never - be the way they once were (1990: 263).

According to Wittig, the only concept which exists beyond the categories of man and woman is 'lesbian' (1992: 20). Indeed, the lesbian societies of all three novels invalidate the very category of 'woman' not only by excluding or marginalising men, but also by calling the dominant heterosexual framework into question. All three novels also offer alternative kinship structures, with the role of mother being diffused across two or more women. This in turn obviates the need for a father figure for children to accede to the symbolic. Where Irigaray asks: '[...] what meaning could the Oedipus complex have in a symbolic system other than patriarchy?' (1985: 73), all three texts simply answer: none.

Women's bodies have become stronger, more easily healed and longer-living in these novels: virus, mutation and technology respectively act as a form of empowerment for the women in the texts. Where Gom's novel differs from those of Vonarburg and Griffith, however, is in the relations between women and their bodies. Both *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land* emphasize a renegotiation of identity that is, and must be, body-based. Both novels lay bare the process of bodily inscription from within (the virus/the mutation) and without (the cold on Jeep/the clothing in Maerlande). Marghe's body, in particular, functions as Butler's sought-after 'concrete scene of cultural struggle' (1987: 237) *par excellence*. Gom's text, in contrast, implies that this renegotiation is unnecessary in the society she depicts because technology allows women a fair degree of control over their bodies. Instead of embracing the full potential of embodiment as (many of) Griffith and Vonarburg's characters do, then, the women in Gom's novel prefer simply to minimise the inconveniences of the physical body wherever possible.

This does not mean, however, that female bodies in *The Y Chromosome* are not valued, or valuable. Indeed, one of the strengths of the novel is that, like *In the Mother's Land,* it rewrites the history and myths surrounding and constructing bodies, namely the stories and perceptions that give bodies form, position and value within a specific social structure. By reversing the ways in which bodies are often presented in our own society, and therefore making female bodies the ones that matter, both *The Y Chromosome* and *In the Mother's Land* not only contribute to the maternal genealogy that Irigaray is seeking, but also show some of the ways in which certain bodies - and not others - come to matter. *In the Mother's Land* also shows this materialisation of bodies through stories and perceptions as undergoing a process of change across the course of the novel, as men's bodies are slowly re-valued. In doing so, the novels cross and relocate the boundaries between bodies that matter, and those that do not.

Although, as we have seen above, *The Y Chromosome* rejects Irigaray's concept of the 'body as flow', both *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land* embrace it, along with a number of other Irigarayan concepts, including speaking (as) woman, and deconstructing and redefining bodily barriers. Knowledge and understanding of the body become a vital component of identity in both novels. However, the two texts differ in their depiction of who can experience such a 'body as flow': *Ammonite* implicitly argues (in agreement with Irigaray) that men can never experience this, since the virus that confers or enhances the understanding of, and control over, the body in the novel is deadly to men. In *In the Mother's Land*, by contrast, both men and women can experience the special relationship with their own and others' bodies brought about by the mutation. Nevertheless, *both* novels refuse - in different ways - what Irigaray sees as the next step on from the discovery of women's specificity (which is linked to their embodiment), namely a productive interchange between the two different sexes. *Ammonite*, although refusing an essentialist definition of women by showing them occupying the full range of human roles, nevertheless implies - in the tradition of utopias like Russ's Whileaway - that this can *only* be the case on the absence of men. *In the Mother's Land*, in contrast, attempts to argue that any exchange must take place on the basis of a recognition of sameness, not difference. Indeed, any supposed differences between the sexes are undermined on two levels in the novel. Firstly, as has been discussed above, the text clearly argues that women have the same capacity for violence as men, and that men have the same nurturing capabilities as women. Secondly, the presence of a sex-changing character (Kelys) and the implication that the mutation, once those who have it learn to control it properly, may confer the ability to change sex, complicates matters further. Each *individual* therefore has to learn how to negotiate his or her own ego and body boundaries - and with the enhanced sex-changing abilities which may become available to Maerlanders in future - the boundaries between sex and gender as well. The novel accordingly suggests a view of male and female contrary to Irigaray's concept of the radical otherness of each sex vis-à-vis the other sex. This in turn means that even though the starting points for both Irigaray's theory and Vonarburg's novel are very similar – two unequal sexes, although in *In the Mother's Land* it is the men who need to accede to subjectivity and equal status – the outcomes suggested are rather different. Where Irigaray envisages a productive interchange between two distinct sexes, *In the Mother's Land* suggests a model closer to Kristeva's third generation of feminism, where the difference between male and female has become something to be negotiated inside each and every individual. Indeed, the sex-changing potential offered by the mutation could be seen as rendering this process literal, ultimately enabling each person to change his or her sex at will. What both *Ammonite* and *In the*

Mother's Land suggest, then, is that the process of identifying female specificity through strategic separation may not in the end lead to the kind of society Irigaray envisages.

There is one final question to be asked in this chapter, namely: to what extent can the bodies in these novels be regarded as subversive bodies? Are they, as Butler fears, 'freed from the shackles of the paternal law' only to prove 'to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation' (1990/1999: 119)? Although the female bodies in these texts are outside the system of compulsory heterosexuality - and therefore, in Butler's view, unable to subvert it - they do offer alternatives to our current constructions as women. Both *In the Mother's Land* and *The Y Chromosome* in particular also expose and subvert the materialisation of female and male bodies as sexed and gendered by showing how the history of bodies can be rewritten, and the effects this can have on the ways in which bodies are lived (and what qualifies as a 'livable' body). Both novels also explore how perceptions of the body - the 'categories through which we see' - also contribute to its materialisation within a given social system. In these ways, they offer their own answers to Butler's question of which bodies come to matter - and why. Their limitations lie - as with *Ammonite* - in the fact that such reconstructions are only envisaged as being possible in the absence of (the majority of) men, and their subversive potential must therefore be restricted accordingly. Only one of the texts, namely *In the Mother's Land*, suggests a future where the two sexes could live together on equal terms, and even this is only offered as a distant possibility. The following chapter, then, will turn to the construction of sexed and gendered bodies in novels dealing with alien societies where men do exist, but what it means to be male and female has nevertheless been radically rewritten.

Chapter 3
Things Could Really Be Different: Alien Bodies

> Only from a self-consciously denaturalized position can we see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted. The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural convention. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside", gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently. (Butler, 1990/1999: 140)

> As long as we haven't met any actual no kidding extraterrestrials [...] the aliens we imagine are always other humans in disguise. No more, no less. (Jones, 1999: 108)

Aliens are perhaps the single most recognisable science fiction trope, notwithstanding what science fiction author and critic Gwyneth Jones refers to as the 'purist school' of science fiction thought, which holds that 'aliens are not science fiction because they are not within reach of our extrapolation. [...] They do not represent a calculable possible development from a known situation' (1999: 192). As Jones goes on to point out, 'Whatever you may think of the logic of this argument, both science fiction and fantasy writers continue to describe the unpredictable encounter [with the alien] with more or less of extrapolative rigour' (1999: 192). And with good reason: the figure of the alien offers a seemingly perfect opportunity for us to move 'outside' our taken-for-granted world, and accordingly to try and think beyond our current conception of what it means to be human to alternate ways of being. But is the alien - as we come to know him/her/it in science fiction - truly 'outside' our experience? As Jones argues:

> [...] we have to admit, in every case the aliens are not themselves. They are exploited Third Worlders, Evil Empires, unexplored aspects of the human psyche, devils, angels, elves, characters in a historical romance about foreign travel; perhaps they are "the other". We cannot write about real aliens until we've met them. Instead we use their name, and talk about something else. (1999: 192)

In traditional science fiction that 'something else' has all too often been the fear of difference, which in turn can be either racial, in the form of 'BEMs - bug-eyed monsters', or gender-based, in the form of 'BAMs - beautiful alien monster women' (Donawerth, 1997: 42). In an article entitled 'The New Aliens of Science Fiction' (1996), Nicola Griffith tracks the close relationship between the form of our aliens and the state of our society, pointing out that:

> [a]t any given moment, if we want to know which particular group of people is disturbing the rest of society, all we have to do is take a look at the kind of alien with which the genre is currently preoccupied. (1996: 1)

Griffith goes on to observe that the original pulp science fiction aliens,

> slimy bug-eyed monsters from the nether regions of the solar system [...] were always recognisably and rather adolescently male: they were war leaders, they had no kids around to spoil the fun, and (if the cover illustrations of the pulps are to be believed) they often abducted good looking and scantily clad human women for nefarious purposes. (1996: 1)

Other similarities have appeared at different times: in the sixties for example, when, Griffith argues, 'we felt a bit more kindly disposed towards aliens', science fiction moved away from 'a clear dividing line between *Us* and *Them*, the monstrous enemy. For the first time, we were being asked to imagine ourselves as and to identify with The Other' (1996: 1).

Whether there has ever truly been a 'clear' dividing line between '*Us* and *Them*' is highly debatable, however. Aliens not only represent what we fear as a society, but also what we fear most in ourselves, the deep dark recesses of our psyches. This complex and changing relationship between humans and aliens in science fiction therefore reflects not only changing political climates, as Griffith argues, but also our ongoing attempts to deal with what Kristeva refers to as the 'foreigner within':

> Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. (1992: 1)

Drawing on Freud, Kristeva argues that the foreigner represents what the self sees as monstrous within itself and therefore tries to exclude from itself:

> Furthermore, Freud noted that the archaic, narcissistic self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien *double*, uncanny and demoniacal. In this instance the strange appears as a defense put up by a distraught self: it protects itself by substituting for the image of a benevolent double that used to be enough to shelter it the image of a malevolent double into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain. (1992: 183-4)

As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, this is a process also apparent in much traditional science fiction where many male science fiction writers project their own fears and anxieties (in particular about sexuality and the body) onto the (often monstrous) body of the female alien. As has been noted, many feminist science fiction writers have attempted to subvert this traditional model by 'appropriating the convention of alien woman to their own ends' (Donawerth, 1997: 42), often using alien female characters to comment on and highlight the lack of equality in our current society, or to expose the cultural stereotypes applicable to women. Writing about alien societies also allows feminist science fiction writers to offer alternatives, as Gwyneth Jones explains in relation to her Aleutian trilogy:

> above all, I wanted my aliens to represent an alternative. I wanted them to say to my readers: *It ain't necessarily so.* History is not inevitable and neither is sexual gender as we know it part of being human. (1999: 110)

More specifically, for the purposes of this chapter, writing about alien bodies - male, female or other - offers a way of visualising bodies that have been materialised in different ways, under different circumstances and in different environments. This can both expose the ways in which sexed bodies are materialised, and destabilize our ideas of what a 'normal' and 'natural' body is. The concept of the alien can therefore be the key to achieving what Judith Butler refers to as a 'self-consciously denaturalized position' (1990/1999: 140). Reading and writing about aliens allows us to step outside our own society - insofar as this is possible - and consider alternative modes of being, and indeed alternate subjectivities, which are nonetheless relevant to our own modes of being and subjectivity, since the alien always comes from and is part of us.

The novels to be considered in this chapter offer depictions of alien bodies as they have been constructed by societies which, although in many ways very different to our own, offer interesting commentary on how bodies are constructed on the basis of a dual-gender system in our own society. Eleanor Arnason's *Ring of Swords* (1993) describes a two-sexed alien society with gender roles as rigidly fixed as those of our society, but with one striking difference: the aliens live in a system of compulsory *homosexuality*, and not compulsory heterosexuality. In

Gender Trouble, Judith Butler analyses what she calls 'the heterosexual matrix' that simultaneously governs and produces our present sex/gender system (1990/1999: 45 ff.); *Ring of Swords* suggests that a homosexual matrix would be equally difficult to displace and equally resistant to transgressive behaviour. Nevertheless, as will be shown in the discussion of the novel, the contact between humans and aliens does prompt some members of this alien society to question the apparent 'naturalness' of their rigid sex/gender system - which is more than can be said for the humans. The second novel to be discussed, *Halfway Human* (1998) by Carolyn Ives Gilman, offers an alien world with three distinct sexes: male, female and neuter. Men and women have been freed from the bonds of sex and gender by the creation of the third sex - neuters - to do all the dirty work of their society. As will be seen, however, in Gilman's alien world freedom from the sex/gender matrix comes at a terrible price.

In addition to offering alternative ways of constructing sexed/gendered bodies *within* the respective alien social systems, both novels also offer bodies - human and alien - that exist at/on the borders of their societies. As will be discussed in detail below, positioning these characters on the boundary allows the authors to explore Judith Butler's question of which bodies come to matter (and how). As one of the characters in Gilman's *Halfway Human* comments:

> "Where a culture is most *itself* is not in the areas where it is complacent, but where it's under attack, either from outside or in. The boundaries where it has to defend itself, and so define itself." (1998: 189-90)

The state of being on the boundary, not one thing or another, neither inside a culture nor truly outside it, lies at the heart of what Kristeva calls the abject:

> Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. [...] what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour... (1982: 4)

For Kristeva, the abject functions at two levels: firstly, in subject formation, where the abject is what the subject 'permanently thrust[s] aside in order to live' (1982: 3), but from which the subject can never truly separate; which is, ultimately, one of the founding conditions of his or her subjectivity. As Judith Butler explains, the abject forms 'the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which - and by virtue of which - the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life' (1993: 3). Secondly, the process of abjection also functions at the level of a society, particularly in relation to what Kristeva describes as 'defilement': '[d]efilement is what is jettisoned from the "*symbolic system*". It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals' (1982: 65). It is this symbolic system which simultaneously creates and rigorously defends itself against its outside. The characters to be considered here are, as suggested above, neither wholly inside nor outside their societies, but are trapped on the boundary. As such, they highlight the ways in which the constraints that function to determine a society 'not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies [that is, those that are accepted by the society], but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies' (Butler, 1993: xi). As will be seen, they can, however, also function as 'an enabling disruption, the occasion for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all' (Butler, 1993: 23).

It is this 'radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all' (Butler, 1993: 23) that is, to a large extent, the subject of Eleanor Arnason's novel *Ring of Swords*. Arnason not only draws on the concept of the 'alien' to destabilise the idea of 'natural' or 'normal' sexual identity and sexual roles, but also uses the shifting perceptions of the central characters to destabilise the notion of who or what is 'alien' and what constitutes an 'acceptable' body throughout the text. *Ring of Swords* explores the tensions and problems that arise when two space-faring races - the humans and the *hwarhath* - must decide whether to declare war on one another or learn to share the galaxy. The two societies are, contrary to the expectations of both sides, 'very similar with some striking differences' (1993: 250).[1] The text hinges not just on what the humans make of the aliens, but, crucially, on whether the aliens will accept that the humans are 'real people' - given what the aliens see as their immoral sexual behaviour - and not just clever animals.

The novel destabilises the idea of 'natural' or 'normal' sexuality and sexual roles predominantly through its depiction of the alien *hwarhath.* Although humanoid in appearance, the *hwarhath* have thick fur covering their entire bodies and eyes of a single, solid colour, with no whites and horizontal pupils (1993: 34). Like humans, the *hwarhath* have a two-sexed society, but one which is structured in a completely different way. Men and women live almost entirely separate lives - the men live on the 'perimeter', on spaceships and military installations, with their apparent sole purpose in life being to find enemies and wage war against them.

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[1] Anna Perez, a human scientist and one of the novel's protagonists, explains that both sides had expected to find 'aliens who were different from us, really different. We didn't expect to find aliens who are very similar with some striking differences' (1993: 250). When the novel opens, Anna herself is studying what she considers to be another intelligent alien race, in this case a large jellyfish-like species which Anna is convinced is capable of intelligent communication by means of flashing lights and whistles. Perhaps ironically, no-one else in the novel considers them to be true intelligent aliens - possibly because they are simply *too* different.

The women remain on the *hwarhath* planet, known as the 'hearth', and concern themselves with the running of the planet and the governance of their race in matters other than war. All children are raised in the hearth; male children leave when they reach adulthood while female children remain behind. At first glance this seems rather an essentialist society: the men wage war while the women stay at home, and the men's ultimate goal is to protect the women and children at all costs. One of the strengths of Arnason's novel, however, is that appearances are almost always deceptive, and relations between the male and female *hwarhath* are more complex than such gender stereotyping would suggest. As critic Brian Attebery explains, the *hwarhath* men are not just 'caricatures of masculine-coded traits: militaristic, restless, arrogant', but are also 'subtle, adaptable, loyal to their clans, respectful of the women clan leaders back on the home world, and capable of forming deep and lasting sexual attachments to one another' (2002: 122). Moreover, the *hwarhath* women are not only larger than the men, but also wield a great deal of influence over them, which sharply undercuts the idea that the men have the ultimate power to decide on matters of war. No *hwarhath* general would risk the anger of the matriarchs of his clan by taking decisions - even in matters of war - that would be in conflict with their interests. In addition, it is the women who decide who is permitted to be a 'person' in *hwarhath* society. As one of the female *hwarhath* explains:

> [...] it is not a question for men. They have never decided who is a person and who isn't. That task has always belonged to women. We are the ones who examine newborn children and decide whether or not they are going to become real people. We are the ones who examine those who have fallen sick and decide whether a true spirit remains. (1993: 314)

Hwarhath who are in a coma, for instance, can legally be killed as they are no longer 'people' (1993: 282). The same applies to *hwarhath* with mental or physical disabilities, who cannot take up a proper place in society, and criminals who lack a moral sense: all these are put to death in the same way, as one character puts it, as 'an animal [is put] out of its misery' (1993: 282). This means that it is the women, and not the men, who decide which bodies are allowed to matter in *hwarhath* society, and which bodies are, literally, 'unlivable'. It also gives us an insight into how the abject is demarcated in *hwarhath* society. As Kristeva explains:

> The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territory of animal. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism [...] (1982: 12-13)

Although far from a primitive society, the *hwarhath* draw very clear lines between real persons and animals. As will be discussed below, this is crucial for their assessment of human society.

The structure of the *hwarhath* society means that all sexual relationships are necessarily homosexual ones; the survival of the species is ensured by artificial insemination. Heterosexuality has become absolutely taboo: to be a man in hwarhath society is to desire other men; to be a women is to desire other women. If we substitute '*hwarhath*' for 'human', these beliefs provide a very clear-cut set of answers to Judith Butler's questions about:

> what will and will not constitute an intelligible life, and how do presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as "the human" and the "livable"? In other words, how do normative gender presumptions work to delimit the very field of description we have for the human? (1990/1999: xxii)

'Normative gender' is indeed even more rigidly defined for the *hwarhath* than it is for humans, and *hwarhath* society accordingly appears to offer much less opportunity for deviating sex/gender performances than our own. As Brian Attebery argues:

> [w]hile each gender role offers more variety than human codes typically offer,[2] the limits are more absolute. And heterosexuality is not even a marginalized option. We meet a few such deviants among the *hwarhath*, but they do not play the exception-that-proves-the-rule, as homosexuals do in many earthly societies. No gender safety valve exists among the *hwarhath*. There is no place for the woman warrior or the male homebody. (2002: 123)

If *hwarhath* society has such rigid sex/gender roles, however, what becomes of Judith Butler's claim that:

> [t]he practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, *but not for that reason fully determining*. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment *which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate*. (1993: 231, my italics)

There are in fact indications in the novel that sex/gender roles may not be as 'fully determining' as they initially appear. As Attebery points out, there are sexual deviants among the *hwarhath*,[3] although they can never act on their deviation because of the separation of men from women. Another indication is the 'sick fascination' exerted by *hwarhath* plays about heterosexual love, even if these always show that deviance cannot be tolerated, as one of the human characters explains:

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[2] Although *hwarhath* women do not go to war, they can do anything else from farming, to running factories, to creating art and writing plays. The *hwarhath* men can also take part in a variety of cultural activities (also including creating art and writing plays) in addition to their roles as warriors.

[3] Or at least men who desire women; we never hear of any women desiring men in *Ring of Swords*, although this possibility does arise in a short story about the *hwarhath* published separately by Arnason and entitled 'The Lovers' (1998).

> "Children are never allowed to see them; and at times, when the mood of the Weaving is conservative, they have been banned entirely. They are always violent and often verge on serious ugliness. They always end in craziness and blood.
> Often, at the end, after the bodies have picked themselves up and walked offstage, the main character will return and speak an epilogue. (The *hwarhath* love morals.) This is what happens when the violence of the perimeter is brought into the center. Everything is destroyed. The family cannot survive." (1993: 65)

The most important indication that sex and gender roles are not as fixed as they may seem, however, is the growing realisation among some *hwarhath* that their own society is not in fact the only 'normal', 'natural' and indeed possible way for men and women to co-exist. For Tsai Ama Ul, a female *hwarhath* scholar, the meeting between the two species raises questions about how and why each society has come to be as it is, as well as the realisation that 'there is more than one way to be' (1993: 168). Her arguments about how *hwarhath* society developed are presented in an appendix to the novel, which also makes it clear that her views are not shared by most of her colleagues, much less the rest of the *hwarhath*.[4] The key point of her argument is that the *hwarhath* must, at some point, have made a rational decision to separate men and women and to restrict heterosexual intercourse to procreation only. This decision was prompted, Tsai Ama Ul argues, because of the threat of overpopulation brought on by continuous heterosexual activity. The *hwarhath* women were able to enforce this separation until it became the 'natural' state of affairs because they are - and always have been - larger than the men. As time went by, and technology permitted alternatives to be developed, the *hwarhath* moved towards artificial insemination and heterosexual activity ceased altogether. *Hwarhath* society is therefore - according to the theories of Tsai Ama Ul - not a 'natural' way to be; it has simply found one possible solution to a problem also faced by human society.

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[4] It seems likely that this will change given the outcome of the *hwarhath*'s deliberations about whether humans are people; see below for further discussion.

Tsai Ama Ul is not the only character to highlight the constructed nature of *hwarhath* society. Nicholas Sanders, a human who has lived with the *hwarhath* for the past twenty years, offers an 'outsider's perspective' which describes the *hwarhath* men - and by implication, the women - as highly constructed beings:

> "The people believe that men are innately violent and innately - what word do I want? Hierarchical. They are obsessed with front and back, obsessed with winning and losing. Left to their own devices, they will try to dominate every situation. They will do physical harm. I have to say, I think this is a crock; but there is no question that *hwarhath* males are socialized to be intensely competitive and to think that violence is no big deal. (1993: 283)

As contact with the humans throws the constructedness of *hwarhath* society into relief - for some of its members, at least - so the *hwarhath* also question the supposedly 'natural' arrangements of human society, not least their living arrangements:

> "Surely you understand how dangerous it is to have men in the house, except briefly for a visit. How can you let people trained in violence near your children? How can you let people capable of murder and rape live in your houses day after day and year after year?" (1993: 169)

The human biologist Anna Perez also admits that until humans met the *hwarhath*:

> "We always thought that heterosexuality was natural. It's what all the other animals on our planet did.[5] We thought it was natural for men and women to live together and raise children together. That also was done by many kinds of animals.
> "When we met you, we had a reaction that was similar to yours. I've talked to a number of experts in the past year. Most of them say your society makes no sense at all. It shouldn't exist." (1993: 25)

It is clear from this extract that even though at least one hundred years have passed between our present time and that of the society Anna describes, attitudes to sexuality do not appear to have changed a great deal; heterosexuality is still the norm, homosexuality is still regarded by some as suspicious.[6] Nor do the vast majority of humans appear ready to change their ways of thinking because of their contact with *hwarhath* society. Although *hwarhath* society is apparently more rigid in its social structures, there is a clear sense by the end of the novel that change is afoot. As Nicholas puts it, their encounter with humans means that the *hwarhath* 'have to find new ways to think about morality and war' (1993: 345), and particularly about sexual morality. The humans, in contrast, do not seem to have learned the lessons of their encounter with difference, although it is possible that this could change if information about the *hwarhath* were to enter general circulation, instead of being restricted to military and diplomatic personnel.

The second key aspect of the novel is the way in which it shifts our perceptions of who or what is 'alien' and what constitutes an 'acceptable' body throughout the text. This takes place primarily through one of the central characters: the aforementioned Nicholas Sanders. Captured by the *hwarhath* some twenty years previously, extensively tortured by them, and yet now clearly a member of the *hwarhath* delegation to the human-*hwarhath* negotiations, Nicholas is regarded as a traitor by the humans, and as a liar (and potential traitor) by the *hwarhath*.[7] Both liar and traitor are categories that Kristeva describes as abject: 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour...' (1982: 4). And in keeping with Kristeva's assertion that the abject is what is on the border, neither one thing nor another, never truly part of something, but impossible to exclude, Nicholas is trapped between the humans and the *hwarhath*. As such, he is neither a body that matters, nor one that does not matter at all, as the following discussion will show.

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[5] This argument is diametrically opposite to that used by the *hwarhath* in identifying 'real' people. For the *hwarhath*, it is 'natural' that people have evolved past the animal stage, and that they are therefore able to distinguish themselves from animals in terms of their moral and sexual behaviour, among other things. See below for further discussion of the implications of this for human-*hwarhath* relations.

[6] One of the scientists Anna speaks to believes that the translators must be lying about having discovered a society like that of the *hwarhath*; he bases this belief, in part, on the knowledge that Nicholas, as one of the translators, is homosexual and therefore, in his view, untrustworthy.

Nicholas's complex borderline status - vis-à-vis both the humans and the *hwarhath* - is signalled in a number of ways in the novel. His body is marked as abject not only because it is a human body - and therefore lacking the fur that characterises the *hwarhath,* among other things - but also by the clothes he wears. While the *hwarhath* are all dressed in close-fitting uniforms the same colour as their fur, Nicholas wears plain, tan clothing, which, Anna realises, 'looked vaguely wrong, as if it had been made by someone who didn't really understand human fashion' (1993: 35). Later in the novel, Anna begins to suspect that the *hwarhath* Arts Corps, which provides the clothing, is not in fact incapable of accurately reproducing human clothing: Nicholas's clothes are *intended* to be 'vaguely wrong' as an overt reminder of his borderline status.

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[7] Nicholas became quasi-legendary among the *hwarhath* for his ability to lie under torture; the first part of *Ring of Swords* is entitled 'Nicholas the Liar'.

Although Nicholas is in some respects part of *hwarhath* society, particularly as the supposedly trusted lover of a leading *hwarhath* general called Ettin Gwarha, it is also clear that he is not trusted by any of the aliens, and is accordingly marginalised. He is, for example, denied access to alien military intelligence installations and to the high-security portion of the *hwarhath* base used for the second set of negotiations with the humans. Several *hwarhath* tell him to his face that they don't trust him; one sums up the general opinion by saying: '"We are not friends, Nicky. I never forget what you are. An alien. An enemy. A betrayer-of-the-lineage"' (1993: 130). In the end, it turns out his lover has never trusted him either, placing electronic surveillance equipment in Nicholas's rooms even after having promised not to do so (1993: 288). Perhaps the most important indicator of Nicholas's abject status lies in his designation by one *hwarhath* as 'an animal, a very clever one, able to mimic the behaviour of a person' (1993: 270). As we have seen, a crucial aspect of *hwarhath* society is its abjection of 'those fragile states where man strays on the territory of animal' (Kristeva, 1982: 12), a state of which Nicholas appears to be an almost constant reminder.

Nicholas himself is very ambiguous about his position, despite his opening statement during the human-*hwarhath* negotiations: '"Don't make the mistake of thinking that my loyalties are in any way divided"' (1993: 28). Nevertheless, his growing friendship with the human scientist Anna Perez complicates both his own views, and those of the *hwarhath*. The *hwarhath* see Nicholas as related to Anna, partly because of Nicholas's own assertion that Kansas and Illinois - their respective states of origin - can be seen as regular exchangers of genetic material. This enables Nicholas to act as the liaison between the *hwarhath* and Anna but also points to his divided loyalties. Nicholas's developing friendship with Anna is viewed with suspicion by some of the *hwarhath*, as Ettin Gwarha warns:

> "But he mentioned that you were human, and that humans were different in many important ways, and who could predict for certain how you would act, now that you were around a human woman, who might or might not be related to you." (1993: 176)

'In other words', as Nicholas reflects, 'I might be a traitor to the People, and I might be a pervert, and maybe I went in for incest as well' (1993: 176). The situation from Ettin Gwarha's perspective is rather more complex, however:

> You are wrong about this. He was suggesting two possibilities, both of them dangerous. Maybe Anna is a relative of yours, in which case you ought to be loyal to her. No sane man would betray or abandon a woman of his lineage. Or maybe you are lying and she is not a relative. In this case you have obtained access to her rooms for a purpose which I am reluctant to mention. So either you are a traitor and not a pervert or else you are a pervert and possibly a traitor. (1993: 176)

Either way, Nicholas cannot escape being abject. Eventually, he does betray the *hwarhath* by giving Anna strategic information in an attempt to prevent what he sees as the impending destruction of humankind by the *hwarhath*. Ultimately, however, he chooses to stay with the alien society: when Anna wonders how the human delegation can arrange for Nicholas to come 'home', he replies: '"I am home, sweetheart"' (1993: 347).

Nicholas's wavering loyalties inevitably affect his relationship with Ettin Gwarha. As the novel progresses he begins to see Gwarha as increasingly alien[8]:

> [...] the face was alien: the features broad and blunt, the ears too large and set too high, and everything too furry. I notice the differences more

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[8] Earlier in the novel, Nicholas points out that his integration - as he sees it - into *hwarhath* society means that he doesn't always - or even often - see Gwarha as alien: '"I can go for days and weeks without really seeing [Gwarha] and - all at once - there he is, real and solid and alien"' (1993: 48).

> and more these days, most likely because I'm seeing humans on a regular basis. (1993: 234)

The novel also allows the *hwarhath* to voice their own perspective, however, highlighting the fact that who or what is 'alien' depends on the point of view:

> '"Ettin Gwarha is more remarkable than I had realized. He can look at you and see a man. When I look at Perez Anna, I see an alien. I cannot look past the physical differences: the body with its strange proportions, the limbs that do not bend in the right places, the skin like tanned leather, the eyes-"' (1993: 190)

Nicholas is angry at this evidence that he is just 'another freak, another alien' to many of the *hwarhath* (1993: 191). Nevertheless, despite his abject status - or perhaps because of it - he offers the greatest potential for disruption of both human and alien societies. As noted above, just because he is marginalised does not mean that Nicholas is a body that does *not* matter; after all, he has friends and a lover among the *hwarhath*. And his status has implications far beyond Nicholas himself: together with Anna, he becomes a key factor in the *hwarhath*'s decision as to whether humans are real people or clever animals.

Both Nicholas and Anna - who, as the only woman in the human delegation, is herself a somewhat marginalised figure - have to answer a barrage of questions about the human way of life as the *hwarhath* try to make up their minds about humans. Finally, the verdict comes back: the *hwarhath* decide that humans are people, although, as Nicholas explains:

> not the same kind of people as the *hwarhath*. We have our own moral system, which is - the Weaving says - almost impossible for them to understand. We can't be judged by the standards which the People apply to one another. (1993: 345)

Despite the use of 'we' in the above passage, Nicholas's own status in *hwarhath* society has also been resolved by this decision: no longer considered a kind of 'pet' owned by Ettin Gwarha, he is accorded the status of a person. This is in turn reflected in his clothing. All *hwarhath* wear three badges of status, one for personal identification, one for rank and one for lineage. When we first meet him, Nicholas has only two badges, a fact which the other *hwarhath* find hard to accept. At the end of the novel, he has three:

> The Weaving decided that my position needed to be regularized. I am now officially a person; all doubt has been removed. And I have been working for the People for twenty years. It's wrong for me to be treated like an outlaw or a beggar, a member of a destroyed lineage. So they created a lineage for me. [...] this is the first time it's been done for any human or group of humans. [...] I feel for the first time in years, maybe in my life, that I belong somewhere. (1993: 351)

To use Judith Butler's terminology, the *hwarhath* have decided to move the boundaries that determine which bodies come to matter to include humans in general, and Nicholas in particular. No longer an object of fear and revulsion, Nicholas has become a *hwarhath* subject. The question of whether this means that he is no longer abject is a rather complex one, however. Clearly, Nicholas can no longer be designated as a 'clever animal'; he is officially a 'real person'. As such, he is no longer abject vis-à-vis *hwarhath* society (although the human society in the novel probably still views him as a traitor). Kristeva does not specifically address what would happen if a society were to accept what it had previously abjected; the implication of her theory is, however, that this would seriously destabilize (if not annihilate) such a society. At the very least, a society that accepted what it had previously abjected would be radically changed, that is, it would no longer be the same society that had abjected the person or practice in the first place. This a danger clearly recognised by the *hwarhath* themselves;

particularly since accepting the humans as people also entails losing them as enemies.[9] Many of the *hwarhath* women therefore fear that unless they can find other enemies to occupy their men, their whole way of life will be threatened:

> "We have always had enemies. Our men have always fought. It would be hard for them to give that up. It would be hard for us to know what to do with them, if our long history of struggle came to an end. Hah! A frightening thought! What are men good for, if there are no enemies and no borders to protect? How are they going to spend their time? How are they going to feel self-respect?" (1993: 251)

Since humans are the only worthy enemy that the *hwarhath* have found in many generations of space travel, there is a real danger that accepting humans as people will fundamentally destabilise *hwarhath* society. A further consideration is the disruptive impact on *hwarhath* culture of regarding the human way of life as an acceptable alternative, particularly given the rigid demarcation of male and female roles in *hwarhath* society. All in all, the decision about humans has far-reaching consequences for *hwarhath* structures and beliefs, not least relating to sex, gender and sexuality, and it is unclear, as the novel closes, to what extent the Weaving's ruling will undermine the social stability of the *hwarhath* world.

Ultimately, *Ring of Swords* offers us the chance to consider how we define our boundaries for livable/unlivable bodies and uncovers the pre-conceptions and fear of change that often lie behind our seemingly 'natural' and 'normal' social practices. In this way, it carries out, in fictional form, a task similar to that of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, namely uncovering and questioning naturalized assumptions. By presupposing a 'homosexual matrix' in place of the 'heterosexual matrix' Judith Butler identifies, Arnason throws into relief the investments that are made in gender and sexuality in order for a society to function in a certain way. Furthermore, whereas Butler identifies the heterosexual matrix as responsible for the strict enforcement of sex and gender roles, Arnason suggests that it is the matrix itself - and not the heterosexual or homosexual content thereof - which lies at the root of the problem. In this way, *Ring of Swords* functions as what Butler calls:

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[9] Once they have accepted humans as people, the *hwarhath* cannot wage war against them because humans, unlike *hwarhath*, have both male and female soldiers, and it is against the *hwarhath* code to kill women. This would place the *hwarhath* at an unacceptable disadvantage and force them to sue for peace.

> the strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside", [which] gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorisation as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently. (1990/1999: 140)

In *Ring of Swords*, we have a double level of 'strangeness': firstly, Nicholas functions as an outsider, and commentator, on *hwarhath* society, who helps *them* (or at least some of them) to understand their own 'taken-for-granted world of sexual categorisation as a constructed one'; secondly, we as readers see this process in action and understand that it applies to us too. Like the *hwarhath*, we can also consider other ways of being. The novel itself provides perhaps the most apt metaphor for its own achievements: during the period when the *hwarhath* are assessing humanity's fitness to be people, one of their playwrights translates a number of Shakespeare's plays, including *Macbeth*. This is then adapted for the *hwarhath* stage, and the adapted version subsequently retranslated into English for Anna to read. She comments that '[g]oing through the *hwarhath* language had changed it. It was like a familiar object seen through water or in a distorting mirror' (1993: 333). Perceiving ourselves as alien through the eyes of the *hwarhath* enables us to become aware of our own assumptions and beliefs about which bodies come to matter, and why, throwing into relief the idea of human gender and sexuality as constructed by offering another form of construction, on a similar basis.

While *Ring of Swords* offers an alternate view of our two-sex model, Carolyn Ives Gilman's *Halfway Human* (1998) envisages a society with three sexes: male, female and neuter. In the process, it raises questions about how bodies are sexed and gendered in such a society, and the relationship between this process and the abjection of bodies that are not properly gendered. The main part of the narrative takes place on Gammadis - a planet recently rediscovered by human explorers - which has a society where men and women appear to be entirely equal. Gammadian society is indeed described as being entirely without gender prejudice, its people having been well educated about 'the evils of gender discrimination' (1998: 175). As a Gammadian woman explains to Alair Galele, the explorers' expert on alien cultures:

> "We have no subordination of women. [...] Our socialization process is almost entirely without gender bias. We are raised in a strictly egalitarian environment. We never have to separate our identities from role models of one sex or the other. Protos [children] see women and men in every role: nurturing, authoritarian, educational, physically demanding. They form no stereotypes or prejudices. As a result, very few feel uncomfortable with their sex, since it carries so few cultural or behavioural restrictions with it." (1998: 175)

This is borne out by Galele's own perceptions of Gammadis: '[w]omen quite unconsciously assume more competitive roles than in gender-polarized societies, for instance in arguments or shared tasks. Both men and women seem less judgmental of the other sex, watch each other less, manipulate less' (1998: 180). Even the physical difference between men and women on the planet is seen as no grounds for discriminating between them:

> Women will ask men to help them in a task requiring strength, but only as one might ask a person with good eyesight to read a sign, or a person with a good voice to lead a song. There is no sense of superiority or inferiority, just difference. (1998: 179)

Nor can Gammadian men and women be distinguished on the basis of their clothing, as Galele comments in his field notes:

> Their dress is colourful and creative, but rather unisexual - I can tell no difference between that of men & women. Men may wear jewelry & feathers in their hair, women wear boots and overalls if they please. Reflects the egalitarian nature of gender roles. (1998: 173)

All this would imply that male and female bodies - and indeed, minds - are equally valued in Gammadian society. The only difference between them that remains is that it is the women who must bear the children. Although the women are well paid for bearing children - who are then handed over to be raised in a communal nursery (see below) - one character notes that 'the public honour given to women who procreate hides a private shame' (1998: 344). Little explanation is given in the text for this statement; however, Alair Galele also notes that few women are keen to bear children, possibly because they regard it as a reminder of the biological bonds they have tried to break.[10]

Gammadis also differs from our own society in its kinship structure. It has explicitly turned its back on what are seen as the 'evil olden days when there were families', as depicted in the 'famous opera, *Cloverine*', described in Galele's field notes as follows:

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[10] This argument is in turn reminiscent of Shulamith Firestone's claim - explored in Marge Piercy's science fiction novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) - that for the distinction between the sexes to be truly eliminated, '[t]he reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would [have to] be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction' (1997: 25), an option which is not available on Gammadis.

> Protagonist was a woman of talent & ambition who is weighed down by social demands to have and care for babies. She is debilitated by pregnancy, betrayed by a fickle husband, exhausted by demands of motherhood, but stubbornly clings to her children (the fatal flaw?), struggling to support them. In the end she dies & the children - the oldest now a delinquent - are consigned to the state anyway. Gammadians seem to find this tale most pathetic and satisfying. I was taken aback. They noted my reaction, & asked whether we oppress our women by "making" them bear children. (1998: 171)

Children have no idea of who their parents are and grow up together in communal 'gestatories' where they go to school and generally prepare for their adult lives. There is no marriage, only 'partnerships', which may be same-sex or opposite-sex relationships. New kinship structures have however grown up in Gammadian society to replace those based on blood: some younger people try to form partnerships - which may or may not involve sexual relationships - with older men and women who can act as 'patrons' to them.[11] Others form complex, multi-directional relationships:

> It turned out that there were three partnerships among the four people: Gambion and Auri, Gambion and Bors, and Bors and Linna. So the men were maintaining two relationships at once, one homosexual and one heterosexual. (1998: 182)

Galele describes this as a 'pseudo-family based on a chain of teacher-student (or sponsor-protégé) relationships rather than blood' (1998: 182). It is this imagining of alternative kinship structures that Judith Butler calls for in *Antigone's Claim*, where she argues that 'the law of the Father' is seen as setting 'limits upon the variability of social forms and [...], in its most conservative form, mandates an exogamic, heterosexual conclusion to the oedipal drama' (2000: 75). Although, as Butler points out, some perversion is permitted (because 'only through perversion can the norm be established' (2000: 76)), she concludes that the problem in our present society is 'that the perverse remains entombed precisely there, as the essential and negative feature of the norm, and the relation between the two remains static, giving way to no rearticulation of the norm itself' (2000: 76). Butler sees the figure of Antigone as the grounds for a possible rearticulation of kinship relations because 'she does not conform to the symbolic law' (2000: 71); in *Halfway Human*, Gilman offers an entire society outside such a symbolic law, imagining the perverse (or one possible variant of the perverse) *as* the norm. Having done away with the 'oedipal drama' altogether by severing the bond between parents and children, Gilman's society is no longer subject to the mandatory 'heterosexual conclusion' Butler describes. The chains of (hetero-) sexuality have, after all, been broken on Gammadis, as Alair Galele notes:

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[11] Although power relations based on gender appear to be absent in the novel - at least between men and women - this does not mean that they are absent altogether: young people usually need to have a patron to further their careers and will do everything they can to keep that patron happy.

> From the discussion, I gathered that sexuality is seen as a spectrum, with bisexuality the "normal" state, and strict homo- and heterosexuality the rare extremes at either end. However, value judgements are not attached; the attitude is very much *chacun à son gout.* (1998: 182)

Gammadian society therefore seems to offer that rare utopia: an egalitarian society which has truly broken the bonds of biology and of blood-based kinship. Alair Galele, however - much like Judith Butler - is less interested in the successes of this egalitarianism than its exclusions, its 'clashes and inconsistencies' (1998: 187); what this society, then, regards as 'perversion':

> "I like to look at conflicts and contradictions, because they illuminate so much about a culture [...] Where a culture is most *itself* is not in the areas where it is complacent, but where it's under attack, either from outside or in. The boundaries where it has to defend itself, and so define itself." (1998: 189-190)

Only a little digging soon reveals what threatens the borders of Gammadian society, what it has, in Kristeva's terms, had to abject in order to exist at all: its third sex, the neuters or 'blands'.

All Gammadians start life as neuters, indeed one of the main reasons given for why gender no longer matters to the Gammadians is that 'they grow up without it' (1998: 171). We learn that the children are born sexually undifferentiated, although with what are referred to as the 'pre-cursor organs of internal genitalia for both sexes' (1998: 167). It is only at puberty that they become male or female, at which point the one set of organs develops and the other atrophies. Children are therefore regarded as 'proto-humans' or 'protos' for short, and the majority of Gammadians believe that there is no way of telling whether a child will become male or female at puberty. The children themselves do not learn until shortly before puberty that there is a possibility that they may in fact fail to become either male or female - and so fail to become human - and instead become 'blands' by remaining in the neuter state, with both sets of internal genitalia atrophying. Significantly, until they learn this key piece of information, the children see the blands who care for them, wash them, feed them, watch over them when they sleep, as trusted and loved companions, even though the children realise - because they are taught - that the blands are not human. Knowing that one may have the seeds of 'blandness' inside one's own body because of 'some roll of random adrenal dice' (1998: 29) changes things, however, as one Gammadian explains:

> After that, we became more distant, even hostile and contemptuous, to the blands. Before, we had viewed them with neutrality or pity, since they weren't really our concern - merely unfortunates who could not help what they were. Now, we took them personally. They were reminders of our own vulnerability, the flaw we ourselves might hide, and so we hated them. We were learning to act like humans. (1998: 52)

This clearly mirrors the process Judith Butler describes as 'the forming of a subject':

> The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of "sex", and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge. (1993: 3)

Even in a society where the 'normative phantasm of "sex"' is as broadly defined for male and female as it is on Gammadis, becoming human necessarily involves repudiating what is considered to be 'not human', in this case, the neuters. As Butler succinctly puts it, '[t]hose bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted' (1990/1999: 142). It is this process of abjection that is laid bare in painful detail in *Halfway Human*.

Although the tenets of Gammadian society state that neuters are to be treated as children, that they are to be assigned to human guardians who will care for them and protect their interests, and although we learn that the status of blands has improved in recent years as a result of 'blands' rights' campaigns by concerned humans, their status as abject bodies is made abundantly clear in the novel. As Kristeva argues, to be abject is to be at once essential (the abject is what an individual or a society defines itself against) and repulsive. Blands are not only essential to the formation of male and female subjectivity, as discussed above, but are also vital to Gammadis because they do all the 'dirty work' in their society: all the cooking, the cleaning, caring for children and so forth. It could be argued, then, that the women on Gammadis are equal to the men because there are blands to do what has often been considered women's work. Gammadian society is accordingly divided not according to male versus female, but according to human versus bland. The blands are, to paraphrase Kristeva, what '[Gammadians] permanently thrust aside in order to live' (1982: 3).

Blands are not only 'thrust aside' in psychological terms, but physically as well. They are, for example, not permitted to mingle with humans, but live in their own separate areas, known as 'grayspace'. They are trained to carry out their work when humans are not present, and to disappear into their own realm - through almost invisible 'graydoors' - should humans appear on the scene. Kristeva's description of the complex and precarious relationship between subject and abject almost perfectly captures the attitude displayed by humans towards blands in the society Gilman depicts:

> Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (1982: 2)

The humans on Gammadis would no doubt love to be able to view the blands as 'meaningless', insignificant, mere 'nothings' to be exploited. Instead, however, they are - although stripped of all power - an object of fear, as one Gammadian explains:

> All our fears center around them, as our guilt does. We fear them changing, becoming more like us - or us becoming more like them. We fear them outnumbering us, turning on us, ceasing to love us. (1998: 258)

The blands also excite a great deal of revulsion; they are regarded, for example, as 'gross and indecent' (1998: 186). As suggested above, revulsion is a key part of the subject's experience of the abject. Kristeva has in fact explained in an interview that the English word 'abject' is not as strong in this respect as the French 'abjet':

> The term in French has a much more violent sense than in English. It means something disgusting. [...] *L'abjection* is something that disgusts you. For example, you see something rotting and you want to vomit. It's "abject" on the level of matter. It can also be a notion that concerns moral matters - an *abjection* in the face of crime, for example. But it is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside. (in Oliver, 1997: 372)

It is this 'extremely strong feeling' that Alair Galele uncovers when he tries to find out more about the blands by attempting to open the 'graydoor' in his own quarters:

> At that moment I heard a short exclamation behind me and turned to see Annika standing there, looking as horrified as if she'd discovered me butchering puppies.
> "What are you doing?" she said. [...]
> "That's the graydoor!" she said, in a tone of utter disgust.
> "I know," I said.
> A variety of emotions crossed her face - horror, fear, repulsion. At last she burst out, "You are such a disgusting little man!" and stormed out of my quarters. (1998: 188-9)

As Kristeva explains, what is abjected can never be finally, definitely excluded: it is 'not only an external menace' but also something 'that may menace us from the inside' (in Oliver, 1997: 372). It is possible that Annika's reaction - and that of other Gammadians to whom Alair Galale directs his questions about blands - is so strong because the blands function as abject at *both* the individual and social levels. The possibility of becoming a bland is what each Gammadian child learns to fear even before it becomes human (as the above quote about the hostility displayed by the children towards their blands shows); it is therefore a fundamental part of becoming a subject. Nevertheless, because each child also starts out as a neuter (i.e. as a bland, even if they are referred to as 'proto-humans'), then this must necessarily remain part of their psychological makeup; 'blandness' cannot ever be entirely escaped. As Kristeva succinctly puts it: 'Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part' (1982: 4). At the level of society, blands may be designated as abject but are nonetheless vital to the continuation of Gammadian society. As one bland puts it: 'We were like their weak part, that they had walled off from themselves' (1998: 345). Or as Butler argues:

> the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less "human", the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the "human" as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (1993: 8)

The position of blands in Gammadian society is explored in great depth in the novel via the first person narrative of Tedla, a bland raised on Gammadis but who has managed to escape to Capella Two, the home planet of the explorers. Tedla's story - as told to Val Endrada, a Capellan specialising in the study of alien cultures - is a compelling narrative of how humans come to create what is considered 'natural' and 'normal', and of how 'livable' and 'unlivable' bodies are materialised.

If men and women on Gammadis appear to have broken (most of) the bonds of biology, this may be because they have instead inscribed these on the bodies of the blands - although this fact is carefully concealed in their society. Tedla's description of 'birth day', the day on which (fortunate) Capellan children become human men and women, emphasises the apparent naturalness of the process. After failing to become human because of an alleged lack of estrogens or androgens in its blood, Tedla is told that its 'own body made the decision. It's your nature' (1998: 112). Even humans who are well-disposed towards blands believe them to be part of a natural selection process: 'Humans are the only mammals with a sex that can't reproduce. [...] Nature had to make us this way because we threatened to overrun the planet' (1998: 227). But the concept of an identity driven by the biology of the body itself - in Judith Butler's terms an 'essence' imposed from within that expresses itself when the proto reaches a certain age - is soon undermined in the novel as Tedla's story exposes how the identity of a 'bland' is imposed and inscribed on the body from without in the form of compulsory performance. The ways in which neuters, as the third 'sex' on Gammadis, are 'gendered' as blands therefore supports, as will be discussed below in greater detail, what Butler identifies as the core argument of *Gender Trouble*:[12]

> The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. (1990/1999: xv)

The morning after 'birth day', Tedla explains that it 'began to learn how to be a bland' (1998: 118). Although Tedla *says* that it believed that its mind would slow because its body had remained neuter - because that was what it had been taught - it soon becomes clear that being a bland is, to a large extent, about masquerade. Blands live down - rather than up - to what humans expect them to be: 'I learned to slow my pace and cast down my eyes when humans were watching. I learned not to answer when humans spoke, unless it was a direct question, and then to answer in as few syllables as I could' (1998: 123).[13] We are also told that after their 'birth day', the new 'men' and 'women' must also learn what it means to be human. In this way, the novel suggests that gender, far from being 'an "internal" feature of ourselves' is indeed, as Butler claims, something 'that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts' (1990/1999: xv).

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[12] Although this implies that neuters are the sex on which the gendered identity of 'bland' is constructed, it will be shown below that the 'sexed' bodies of neuters are just as constructed as their gender, and that indeed, as Butler claims, 'the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (1990/1999: 11). Of course, it could also be argued that neuters are not, strictly speaking, 'sexed' at all, because they have no sexual organs. However, as will be discussed below, their bodies are certainly sexualised and they do constitute a third sex/gender, even if the definitive attribute of this is their failure to perform a 'proper' (that is, male or female) sex or gender.

Butler also argues that these acts, or these performances, are compulsory: failure to perform means a loss of the status of subject. Just as a 'girl' is, according to Butler, 'compelled to "cite" the norm [of femininity] in order to qualify (*sic)* and remain a viable subject' (1993: 232), so blands must fulfil the norms of 'blandness', as it were. Does this mean that the blands are subjects, then, despite being designated as abject earlier in this discussion? It could be argued that blands occupy a paradoxical position in Gammadian society: they are allowed to live - or rather, to exist at all - provided that they conform to the norms laid down for them. Even if they successfully re-cite the norms laid down for blands, however, it is made abundantly clear in the novel that they can never be 'bodies that matter': they most certainly do not have what Butler refers to as 'ways of living that count as "life", lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving' (1993: 16). Butler's assertion that the proper performance of sex/gender norms enables a person 'to qualify (*sic*) and remain a viable subject'

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[13] This process is assisted by the administration of strong sedatives to the new blands during the initial period of adjustment, ensuring that they are permanently confused and slow, and thus encouraging them to believe that they are supposed to be blands, since they are clearly too stupid to have become humans.

(1993: 232) does not then hold true for a society which has designated a set of performances - no matter how well performed - as abject. It could of course be argued that the blands are not performing sex/gender norms since their bodies are unsexed and consequently ungendered. This in turn raises the question of what to call the blands if not a third sex, or a third gender?[14] It could certainly be argued that the blands are required to perform in ways that are nonetheless *determined* by gender norms (that is, they are not permitted to display behaviours appropriate to persons gendered male or female; indeed, it is an absence of this type of sexed/gendered behaviour that marks a bland). In the same way, their bodies, although without sex organs, are undoubtedly sexualised (blands are treated as sex objects by humans) and, as will be seen, are - contrary to popular belief - specifically materialised as neuter (by the failure to administer male or female hormones at puberty). Blands are also, as has been discussed above, required to perform in ways that follow directly from the (a)sexual status of their bodies. Paradoxically, then, blands do constitute a third sex and a third gender, but one which has been constructed as the *absence* of 'proper' (male or female) sexed and/or gendered performance. It is this absence that in turn renders the blands 'inhuman' and abject.

Failure to maintain proper bland behaviour is swiftly and severely punished, as Tedla learns on the one occasion that it forgets its position and answers back to a supervisor.[15] Its true status is brutally inscribed on its body: at the age of 16, Tedla is repeatedly sodomized and tortured for nine hours by the entire team of supervisors - men and women - at its training institution. They even sew their names into Tedla's body with thread dipped into a substance that makes Tedla's skin swell up and burn. As Elizabeth Grosz argues:

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[14] This question also incidentally exposes the investments we have in being able to attribute sex and gender; we cannot begin to describe a person without using these categories. See below for a further discussion of this with regard to Tedla.

[15] Under extreme provocation: Tedla is being taught (at a training school for household blands) how to act as a 'sex toy' for its human masters and mistresses; as such it is forced to undergo intercourse with a large number of its trainers. When asked to tell the truth about how it feels about this, it does, calling its trainers 'perverts' (1998: 146).

> the body can and does function to represent, to symbolize, social and collective fantasies and obsessions: its orifices and surfaces can represent the sites of cultural marginality, places of social entry and exit, regions of confrontation or compromise. (1994: 193)

Marking Tedla's body, then, is the Gammadians' way of forcing it back into its position of cultural marginality and ensuring that it never steps out of line again.

As we come to know Tedla over the course of the narrative, we learn that it is as intelligent, resourceful, and capable of emotion as humans are: that its abject status as a bland is, from our perspective, purely arbitrary. It is only towards the end of the novel that we learn that becoming a bland is - as suggested above - neither a natural process nor an arbitrary one. Tedla eventually ends up as the personal bland of the foreigner Alair Galele, who becomes aware of Tedla's considerable intelligence. Galele subsequently asks several Gammadian matriculators (those who deal with the 'birth day' processes) whether the Gammadians may be wrong in believing all blands to be dull and slow. He receives the following, highly enlightening, response:

> "We're not wrong because we make sure of it!" the matriculator snapped. "Do you think we would allow a child with talent or ability to become a neuter? What a waste of genetic resources that would be!"
> There was a short silence. In a very different voice, Magister Galele said, "Neuters are selected?"
> "No, *humans* are selected. The neuters are the natural state. Of course they constitute the least intelligent third. We would be idiots to make it otherwise."
> In a strange tone, Magister Galele said, "So this planet is a giant eugenics experiment." (1998: 406)

Suddenly we realise the significance of all the tests that Tedla has described taking during its 'birth day':

> First they took our numbers, prints and pictures, then passed us along swiftly to the curators who took our blood and urine samples, looked in our eyes, ears, and mouths, listened to our hearts and lungs, then gave us each an injection and stamped our hands with a clean bill of health. [...] After our bodies, they turned attention to our minds. [...] They tested dozens of different types of aptitude: memory, logic, music, creativity, speed reasoning. (1998: 106-7)

Once a decision has been made, then, male or female hormones are injected or withheld accordingly. On Gammadis, *bodily sex* - and not just gender - is materialised: on their 'birth day', Gammadian children are not so much 'girl-ed' or 'boy-ed', in Judith Butler's terms, but 'human-ed', interpellated into the human gender system based on the exclusion of neuters. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler asks:

> Is "the body" or "the sexed body" the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is "the body" itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex? (1990/1999: 164)

In *Halfway Human*, the first position is what the majority of Gammadian society is *supposed* to believe, that is, they assume that a child naturally either retains a 'blank' (neuter) body or 'manifests' a sexed (male or female) body at puberty, which is then interpellated into the appropriate system. The reader, however, can clearly see that on Gammadis, '"the body" itself [is] shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex' (1990/1999: 164) or, in the case of neuters, the absence of any markers of sex. Indeed, the children themselves, far from being 'blank' bodies, are already the product of genetic engineering, which, we learn, is why all children are neuter in the first place.

It is, furthermore, only on their birth day that selected Gammadians enter the symbolic, a state which is underlined by the allocation, on the birth day, of their first, true, names - instead of the mere nicknames they have as children. A second name is taken some time later in life, usually that of a friend or patron, in honour of the relationship. The third and final name is that of the 'order' to which the person belongs: one woman belonging to the Questionary Order therefore has the name Annika (name given on her birth day) Hornaday (the second name of her patron) Questionary (the name of her order). Blands, in contrast, are supposed to make do with their nicknames - they will never be entitled to a true name, much less a patronymic. Butler, drawing on Lacan, highlights the importance of the name for the integrity of the body:

> For Lacan, the body or, rather, morphology is an imaginary formation [...] the body can be sustained in its phantasmatic integrity only through submitting to language and to a marking by sexual difference [...] Bodies can only become whole, i.e. totalities, by the idealizing and totalizing specular image which is sustained through time by the sexually marked name. (1993: 72)

The distinction that names create on Gammadis is, however, not between male and female, but between human and bland.

Towards the end of the novel, Tedla takes its first step toward becoming 'human' by taking on the name of what it considers to be its patron, Alair Galele, to become Tedla Galele. It is at this point that Tedla begins to realise that it is no longer truly a bland, even if it is not, in its own opinion, truly human either. Escaping Gammadis with the help of Galele, Tedla enrols in the university on the planet Capella Two, completing an undergraduate degree and most of a postgraduate qualification before suddenly dropping out of university to live on the streets and become a prostitute.[16] Throughout the novel, however, Tedla vacillates between wanting a better life and what is portrayed as the strong lure of its given place in a gendered system. Despite the torture it has undergone, Tedla finds it hard to let go of being a bland, especially since this means that it does not have to think for itself, but simply follow orders. As it comments: 'Powerlessness is such a lure, such a poisonous lure' (1998: 471). Nevertheless, at the end of the novel Tedla stands up for itself before a Gammadian delegation sent to take it back to Gammadis, in the process showing us that although '[t]he practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, [it is] not for that reason fully determining' (Butler, 1993: 231).

Halfway Human not only offers us a world which challenges our perceptions of the sexed body as 'natural' and 'normal', but also one where the protagonist itself challenges our perceptions of gender. Like Valerie Endrada, the Capellan to whom Tedla tells its story, the reader finds him/herself constantly tempted to classify Tedla as either male or female, only to have any such perceptions undermined by the narrative itself (not least by the insistence on 'it' as the pronoun for Tedla). Tedla, for example, highlights the problems it has experienced with this:

> "C4D [where Tedla went to university] is a tolerant, cosmopolitan place. Even so, it was awkward for me, fitting into a gendered society. There

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[16] Tedla discovers that Galele, whom it idolised, is in fact a convicted pedophile who had received treatment and been released prior to his trip to Gammadis. Galele is arrested for a similar offence while Tedla is away at university; disillusioned by the belief that Galele only helped it to escape because of its youth and beauty, and not, as Galele claimed, because of its intelligence, Tedla drops out of university. Later, it realises that it has mis-judged Galele's attitude towards it.

> were simple things like which bathroom to use, and more complicated ones like language. I grew accustomed to hearing people stumble in embarrassment over pronouns. I found that they tended to assign me a gender in their minds, so that they could interact" (1998: 453)

This implies that even in a society as apparently egalitarian as that of Capella Two, an absence of gender renders a person 'inhuman' (in this case, someone with whom it is impossible to interact). As Claudine Griggs argues, in her 1998 study *S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes:*

> gender neutrality does not precipitate an attribution of "neither male nor female"; it triggers an attribution of "man" from some people and "woman" from others. Ambiguity results in unpredictable attribution, but not specifically non-attribution. Where an observer genuinely cannot determine gender, there will usually be other attempts to decipher bodily presentation through conversation or interactional scrutiny - perhaps direct inquiry - until attribution is made. (1998: 20-1)

It is Tedla who is therefore able to point out how 'gender-saturated' Capellan society is: '"Sexuality is always present, with you. It never leaves your minds. It's as if you exist in a cloud of pheromones I can't sense, but only guess at"' (1998: 15). Through the figure of Tedla, then, with its indeterminate gender and its vacillation between abject and human, the novel ultimately brings us to:

> [t]he moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with any surety read the body that one sees, [which] is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question. (Butler, 1990/1999: xxii-xxiii)

And as Butler continues:

> When such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis [...] And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real", what we invoke as the naturalised

> knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. (Butler, 1990/1999: xxiii)

Like *Ring of Swords*, Gilman's *Halfway Human* invokes an alternate reality which subverts our received notions of sex and gender. It also reflects what Butler has referred to as the 'performativity of gender': Tedla clearly shows us that there is no essence of 'blandness', merely the performance. Dressed in 'human' clothes and behaving as a human would behave, Tedla can pass for a human even on Gammadis, which is perhaps why the torture to which it is subjected for failing to behave as a bland is so harsh. The Gammadians, like many of the *hwarhath*, believe that the borders between inside and outside must be protected at all costs, even while they fear that the 'abjected outside [...] is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation' (Butler, 1993: 3).

In different ways, both the novels discussed in this chapter offer us the chance to take up 'a self-consciously denaturalized position' so that we can 'see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted' (Butler, 1990/1999: 140). In *Ring of Swords*, Eleanor Arnason describes an alien culture having to come to grips with the possibility that its own apparent 'naturalness' is in fact heavily constructed. The *hwarhath* also have to contend with the realisation that what they have excluded as abject - in the form of Nicholas Sanders - does indeed constitute 'the occasion for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all' (Butler, 1993: 23). Carolyn Ives Gilman's *Halfway Human* goes one step further to lay bare the actual process of the construction of the sexed and gendered body on the planet Gammadis. Again, the presence of an abject body - Tedla - suggests the possibility of change emerging from the margins of society: at the very end of the novel we learn that Tedla's escape from Gammadis has inspired a new mythology among the bland population, based around the idea that blands can be as clever and resourceful as humans. There is a sense that, in time, the blands may rise against their human oppressors. Like Nicholas, then, Tedla has the potential to function as 'an enabling disruption' (Butler, 1993: 23).

Both novels therefore allow us to step outside our standard perceptions of the sexed/gendered body and of categories such as male/female. Tsai Ama Ul's conclusion in *Ring of Swords* that 'there is more than one way to be' (1993: 168) echoes Judith Butler's assertion in *Antigone's Claim* that 'this position outside life as we know it is not necessarily outside life as it must be' (2000: 55). One of the strengths of the novels discussed here is that they are told from the viewpoints of both human and alien characters, so that what is 'alien' and what is not shifts throughout the narrative. Seen through the eyes of 'aliens', human bodies and human perceptions become alien in turn. Of all the subjects of science fiction, then, coming to grips with aliens and 'alien' perspectives and consequently becoming at least temporarily alienated from our own perceptions is perhaps the closest we can get to an 'outside', one which is always, as Butler argues, already implicated in and created from the inside.

Ultimately, however, although these novels do provide valuable perspectives on how the boundaries between bodies that matter and those that do not are created and maintained, neither offers the fluid boundaries that Butler calls for in *Bodies that Matter*. Instead, both show that changing the sex and gender system can simply relocate the boundaries instead of making them more permeable. In the second part of this thesis, I will therefore turn to science fiction's preoccupation with the interface between human and machine and its potential for unravelling sex and gender roles altogether.

Chapter 4

Cyborgs and Cyberspace: New Relations between Minds and Bodies

> If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality. (Hayles, 1999: 5)
>
> [...] the question for thinking power and discourse in terms of the future has several paths to follow: [...] How to know what might qualify as an affirmative resignification - with all the weight and difficulty of that labor [...]? But how, also, to rethink the terms that establish and sustain bodies that matter? (Butler, 1993: 240)

The first part of this thesis dealt with depictions of the body in two key forms of 'classic' feminist science fiction, namely, texts dealing with women-only or women-ruled worlds, and encounters with aliens. It looked at how writers in the 1990s have re-worked or re-inhabited these tropes, and at the productive dialogue between the texts considered and feminist theories of embodiment. As my analyses have shown, texts such as *Ammonite*, *In the Mother's Land* and *The Y Chromosome* enable us to step outside our current sex/gender systems - in so far as this is possible - to consider what women could become if they were able to define their own body images. In the process, the texts also encourage us to move beyond the concept of 'woman' as such. The novels discussed in Chapter 3 by contrast took us back into worlds constructed around binary sex/gender systems, but at the same time used the encounter with the alien to enable us to step outside our standard perceptions of the sexed/gendered body and of categories such as male and female. Seen through the eyes of 'aliens', human bodies and human perceptions appear alien in turn. Both chapters, then, discussed novels which offer a 'position outside life as we know it'; both chapters, however, also uncovered the limitations of both these forms of feminist science fiction in providing the subversive performances that Judith Butler identifies as crucial for destabilising the heterosexual matrix. As has been shown by both *Ring of Swords* and *Halfway Human*, reinscribing the sex/gender boundaries elsewhere does not make them more fluid or more permeable; nor does allowing women the fullest expression of their humanity only outside the patriarchal system - as in the novels discussed in Chapter 1 - necessarily help to subvert it.

The second part of this thesis turns to the depiction of the body in a science fiction sub-genre that represents a move away from the exploration of outer space towards an obsession with inner space and the human/machine interface: cyberpunk. Cyberpunk reflects what Scott Bukatman has referred to as 'the *exhaustion* of the Space Age; the end of that period of aspiration, centralization, technologization, and expansion. Now the inertial shell of the personal computer replaces the thrusting power of the Saturn V as the emblem of technological culture' (1993: 5-6). The contested boundary between human and other which was previously chiefly explored through the metaphor of the alien, is now transposed onto the human and the machine, narrating 'new technological modes of being in the world' (Bukatman, 1993: 8).

Cyberpunk developed in the mid-1980s and was hailed as breathing fresh life into the science fiction form.[1] Like science fiction itself, 'cyberpunk' is a highly contested category. Although there is general agreement that the first (and many consider, the best) cyberpunk novel was William Gibson's *Neuromancer,* published in 1984, there is limited consensus on which other authors have written cyberpunk, whether cyberpunk was ever anything more than a marketing label, and whether indeed it still exists. In a recent overview of the genre, Andrew Butler offers a useful definition which highlights the main elements of the sub-genre: 'a science fiction set in a near future, dominated by high technology including computers, computer networks and human/machine hybrids. The technology provided the *cyber* part of the label; the street life of the stories and novels offered the *punk* part' (2000: 9). As his use of the past tense suggests, like many other critics, Butler believes that cyberpunk may be 'over': '[t]here was a sense that cyberpunk was so up to the minute, that by the time the general public noticed cyberpunk, it was all over' (2000: 15). In his view, this leaves novels dealing with the *topics* of cyberpunk to be classified as 'post-cyberpunk'. or even 'cyberpunk-flavoured' (2000: 15). Other critics, such as Jenny Wolmark, who describes cyberpunk as a 'newly-emerging sub-genre' (1999: 6), argue that the process of tapping the rich potential of the human-machine interface in science fiction is only beginning.

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[1] As Pamela Sargent puts it: 'The cyberpunk writers shook up science fiction - definitely a worthwhile end - and opened the field to new ways of looking at the future' (1995b:11). However, some of those who hailed the advent of cyberpunk saw it as a welcome break from what they perceived as (in the words of Bruce Sterling) the 'confused, self-involved and stale' science fiction of the 1970s (quoted in Wolmark, 1993: 110) - a decade which saw the publication of so many classic feminist science fiction novels! As has been documented by Womark and others, Sterling wanted to move away from what he saw as the 'soft' science of science fiction written by women, to the 'hard' science more appropriate - in his opinion - to the genre. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, this was hardly a new concern; the topics appropriate to science fiction have been a matter for debate for as long as the genre has been in existence.

Bruce Sterling's introduction to the 1988 cyberpunk collection *Mirrorshades* - considered by many to be the cyberpunk 'manifesto' - describes the key themes of the sub-genre as: 'body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration' and 'mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry - techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self' (1988: xi). Significantly, the use of the word 'invasion' suggests an element of anxiety within the genre about the transgression of boundaries between mind, body and machine and the threat posed to the coherent subject, rather than the potential for describing new subjectivities and 'technological modes of being in the world' (Bukatman, 1993: 8). This, in turn, appears to reflect what Judith Butler has referred to as 'the dangers that permeable body boundaries present to the social order as such' (1990/1999: 168). Drawing on Mary Douglas, Butler goes on to point out that 'all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and [...] all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment' (1990/1999: 168).

The question of whether cyberpunk opens up or closes down the possibilities for exploring alternative embodiments and new subjectivities is a hotly debated one. Kevin McCarron summarises both sides of the argument, pointing out that:

> the "body" of texts, literary and cinematic, which comprises the genre of cyberpunk constitutes a sustained meditation, unrivalled in contemporary culture, on the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy [...] (1995: 261)

Nonetheless, he concludes that:

> [m]any of the more interesting questions that are asked about the body, such as to what extent it is subject of or subject to the cultural processes of signification, are sidestepped by cyberpunk. (1995: 261)

Many of cyberpunk's critics have seen it as a new site for the celebration of traditional masculinity. It has become, in the words of Nicola Nixon, a means of 'keeping the boys satisfied' with new adventures for 'console cowboys' on the cyberspace frontiers (Nixon, 1999: 191). Jenny Wolmark, for example, concludes her discussion of cyberpunk by pointing out that:

> [d]espite large claims that cyberpunk has a "surrealist perspective that revels in the deformation and destruction, the resurrection and reformation, of the human", the narratives do not respond to the implicit invitation to reconsider the construction of human subjectivity, preferring instead to reinstate notions of the self in terms of a technology which continues to privilege the masculine. (1993: 121)

As Claudia Springer argues, freedom from biological constraints does not necessarily mean freedom from cultural constraints, for even where 'minds and bodies change like chameleons' and '[c]haracters can choose to be masculine or feminine [...] they still function within a patriarchal system that elevates men's interests above women's' (Springer, 1996: 35-36).

This may of course be partly attributable to the fact that cyberpunk is a largely male-authored sub-genre, to an even greater extent than science fiction as a whole. Cyberpunk not only suffers from a lack of female authors, but also from a denial of any influence from feminist science fiction,[2] even though, as Jenny Wolmark points out, 'it is hard not to recognise that feminist science fiction has had an undeniable impact on cyberpunk, both in its refusal to accept the generic limitations of this traditionally masculine genre, and in its concern to reframe the relationship between technology and social and sexual relations' (1993: 110).

Many of the concerns of cyberpunk were indeed pre-empted by a number of feminist science fiction authors. Writers such as C.L. Moore, writing in the 1940s, and James Tiptree Jr and Tanith Lee, writing in the 1970s and 1980s,[3] have all explored the human/machine interface. Marge Piercy's classic novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) offers a preview of a cyberpunk world when her protagonist, Connie Ramos, enters a dystopian future where bodies that matter are surgically and mechanically enhanced. Piercy expands this vision in her 1991 novel, *Body of Glass*, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

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[2] As many critics have noted, Bruce Sterling's introduction to *Mirrorshades* (1988) fails to include any reference to feminist science fiction in its list of the influences on cyberpunk; Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows' more recent introduction to the 1995 collection *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk* also fails to acknowledge earlier work on the human/machine interface by feminist science fiction authors, despite a very extensive list of what they refer to as 'cultural antecedents' (1995: 10).

Unsurprisingly, then, it is to a large extent feminist science fiction authors working within the cyberpunk sub-genre who have attempted to (excessively) inhabit and re-work the main tropes of cyberpunk in order to explore the 'more interesting questions' to be found on the boundaries between minds, bodies and machines in general, and the ramifications of the human/machine interface for the female subject and gendered embodiment in particular. Cyberpunk also offers feminist science fiction writers what Joan Gordon calls 'a radical departure from the essentially nostalgic view of feminist science fiction' (quoted in Wolmark, 1993: 109). It would therefore appear to be fertile ground for answering Judith Butler's call for the 'culturally constructed body [...] [to] be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities' (1990/1999: 119). It is this potential for an 'open future of cultural possibilities' that will be examined in the following two chapters in my discussion of six feminist cyberpunk texts from the 1990s.

The novels to be discussed all draw on the two key cyberpunk tropes - the cyborg and the 'consensual hallucination' known, following Gibson, as cyberspace. The word 'cyborg' refers to a cybernetic organism, a composite of human and machine components. As such, it is regarded as having the potential to transgress boundaries, indeed to dissolve them, and to radically alter human subjectivity in the process. In fact, the cyborg has been described both as the 'ultimate transgressed boundary' (Springer, 1996: 34) and as a site where gendered anxieties about the permeability of body boundaries are addressed (Lupton, 1995: 101). It is Donna Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' that has had perhaps the greatest influence on discussions of the cyborg's transgressive potential. Haraway argues for 'the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings' (1991: 150). She sees the cyborg as the embodiment of the 'confusion of boundaries' (1991: 150) and as 'resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence' (1991: 151). The cyborg offers us a way to hold 'incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true' (1991: 149), and it thereby offers us a way both of transgressing the binaries such as male/female and nature/culture, and of forging alliances across differences and necessarily partial positions. In some ways, Haraway's cyborg is as much a mental position as a physical concept: she appears to be talking not only about the physical fusion between human and machine but also about the 'cyborg mentality' which we all need in order to 'read these webs of power and social life [to] learn new couplings, new coalitions' (1991: 170). It is not clear, however, from where the cyborg will come. At the start of her manifesto, Haraway proclaims '[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs' (1991: 150). Later, however, she comments that the cyborg does not 'mark time on an oedipal calendar' and that it 'has no origin story in the Western sense' (1991:

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[3] 'No Woman Born' (1944) by C.L. Moore, 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973) by James Tiptree, Jr and *The Silver Metal Lover* (1982) by Tanith Lee deal respectively with the implications of humans becoming machines, being interfaced with machines and falling in love with machines.

150). There is therefore an uneasy tension in Haraway's text: on the one hand, there is the 'we' characterised by Haraway as being already cyborgian in the sense of inhabiting partial positions, interfacing (to a limited extent) with machines, and forging new coalitions, and on the other, what Haraway terms the (post-Oedipal) cyborgs who '[skip] the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense' (1991: 151). Haraway implies that feminist science fiction may bridge the gap by offering us images both of what we may become as our interaction with technology increases, and of cyborgs whose non-human status enables them both to expose and interrogate what it means to be human. Ironically, as will be seen from the discussion of the texts chosen for the following chapter, whilst the humans become more cyborgian, the cyborgs 'obsess about whether they are human' (Kakoudaki, 2000: 166).

Cyborgs - particularly those depicted in films - are often represented as having heavily armoured bodies, impermeable to outside attack with a 'clean, hard, tightness of form' (Lupton, 1995: 101). Not insignificantly, these cyborgs are usually highly gendered as male. By 'highly gendered' I mean that their male physiques are exaggerated, the most obvious example being Arnold Schwarzenegger's T100 in the *Terminator* films.[4] Female cyborgs are also often highly sexualised figures, depicting both extreme femininity in their physical form, and the destructiveness of female sexuality in their actions (the most recent example being the female T-X in *Terminator 3*). In this way, 'the gendered boundary between male and female is one border that remains heavily guarded despite new technologized ways to rewrite the physical body in the flesh' (Balsamo, 1996: 9). Anne Balsamo also criticizes Donna Haraway's view of the cyborg by pointing out that Haraway 'fails to consider how the cyborg has already been fashioned in our cultural imagination [...] cyborg images reproduce limiting, not liberating, gender stereotypes' (1999: 153). Even cyborgs, it seems, can be compelled to re-cite the norms of sex and gender, materialising human/machine hybrid bodies which yet do nothing to expand Judith Butler's 'citational chain' to include new possibilities for bodies that matter. However, as Butler herself argues, although in a different context, the fact that a term 'is questionable does not mean that we ought not to use it, but neither does the necessity to use it mean that we ought not perpetually to interrogate the exclusions by which it proceeds' (1993: 222). The fact that cyborgs have been used to 'reproduce limiting, not liberating, gender stereotypes' does not, therefore, mean that they do not have the *potential* to disrupt the norms of sex and gender.

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[4] The second *Terminator* film does of course offer an alternative: the T1000, a slender, even androgynous, shape-shifting cyborg which can assume either gender at will. For a discussion of the fluid nature of the T1000 and its implications for masculinity, see Byers (1995). This kind of cyborg has, however, proved the exception rather than the rule in both film and cyberpunk fiction.

Haraway herself is, moreover, keenly aware of the problematic nature of the cyborg: '[t]he main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism' (1991:151). Significantly, however, she adds: '[b]ut illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins' (1991: 151). This would suggest that even cyborgs with clearly gendered physical bodies can, in Butler's terms, fail to fully re-cite the norms of sex and gender and open up the boundaries by bringing the 'other', the machine, into the realm of the human.

Cyborgs not only transgress the boundaries between human and machine - with all the potential for disruptive performances which this implies - but also the boundaries between mind and body. As a combination of human and machine components, the cyborg may take several forms. It may, for example, be a machine with a human appearance (such as the Terminator). It may also, however, be a human mind inserted into a machine body (RoboCop,[5] for example), or a machine mind downloaded into a human(-like) body. All three of these cyborg 'embodiments' are explored in the novels to be discussed in the following chapter. All three also offer new perspectives on the relationships between what we call 'minds' and 'bodies' and the impact these have on the ways in which bodies are 'materialised'. As Haraway comments, in a move that anticipates Judith Butler's speculations on the interrelation between psychic and bodily performativity, '[i]t is not clear what is mind and what is body in machines that resolve into coding practices' (Haraway, 1991: 177). As suggested above, cyborg figures such as the Terminator, Robocop and the human/machine hybrids to be discussed in the following chapter raise questions above all about what makes us 'human': a human body or a human mind, or both body and mind together? As Balsamo points out, '[b]y disrupting the stable meanings of the human/machine dualism, other reliable oppositions are also rendered unstable' (1996: 33).

The disruption of what we believe to be a stable relationship between body and mind also lies at the heart of the second of the two key tropes in the cyberpunk sub-genre: cyberspace. Cyberpunk texts such as *Neuromancer* appear to suggest that we can leave our bodies behind to soar free in Gibson's 'consensual hallucination' of cyberspace. The user can experience virtual reality with 'a disembodied gaze as the locus of perspective' (Balsamo, 1996: 128), where 'the *conceptual* denial of the body is accomplished through the *material* repression of the physical body' (1996: 123). This means that the user is unable to see, or feel, his/her body whilst online. The body, accordingly, is treated with a certain amount of disdain and is often referred to as the 'meat'. Being denied access to cyberspace, and consequently being unable to escape from the body, is a terrible fate for Gibson's protagonist, Henry Case:

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[5] As portrayed in the film *RoboCop* (Verhoeven 1987).

> For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh. (1984: 12)

The aim of many (almost exclusively male) cyberpunk characters is therefore to be able to escape permanently into the cyberspace matrix, to upload their consciousness and exist as pure data. If, as many feminist theorists have noted, men have been traditionally associated with 'mind' and women with 'body', cyberspace appears to allow men the opportunity to escape into a world of pure mind, away from what is seen as the contamination of the body and its fluids.[6]

The idea that only the 'mind' is online and present in cyberspace is however undermined by the imagery used in much cyberpunk fiction. Although writing about comic books, Claudia Springer makes a point that is equally valid for many cyberpunk novels when she comments that a character's 'spoken desire - to leave his meat behind and become pure consciousness, which is in fact what he has done - is contradicted by the imagery: his body - his meat - wrapped around another body' (1996: 64). There are an increasing number of cyberpunk novels which, unlike Gibson's *Neuromancer*, describe 'avatars', online bodies or icons which can, in most cases, be selected or discarded at will. This strongly suggests that we need to actually perceive some form of a body if we are to accept that there is a subject present in cyberpunk texts. It could however be argued that these online bodies are indeed all about leaving the 'meat' behind to embrace new - and perhaps improved - forms of the cyborg body. These are 'safe' bodies with clean, hard outlines, which are proof against the ravages of both time and disease, and even against attacks by online enemies or viruses, since they can usually be re-formed more or less at will. As Claudia Springer points out, this is immensely attractive in an age where we are increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities of our 'real' bodies (1996: 27).

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[6] Cyberpunk, then, offers two apparently very different modes of masculinity: pure mind versus hard, phallic form. In both cases, the body is clearly perceived as a site of masculine vulnerability; the modes of masculinity that cyberpunk narratives provide are two apparently different strategies for dealing with this, either by denying (in the case of the cyborg body) or evading (in the case of cyberspace) this weakness. See below, however, for a discussion of whether the cyberspace 'body' is simply another form of the cyborg body, namely a 'safe' body with clean, hard outlines.

In *Terminal Identity*, however, Scott Bukatman suggests that even the material body can never be wholly abandoned: characters such as Gibson's Henry Case must retain a 'meat component' in order to hold onto their status as subjects: 'The flesh continues to exist to ground the subjectivity of the character. To let go of the flesh, then, is to surrender the subject' (1993: 258). He goes on to point out that the 'act of translation [translating human consciousness into data] actually marks the end of subjectivity [...] existence is, in most of these works, an existence as an *object* rather than as a *subject*: there is no point of view, no indication of the subjective experience' (1993: 258-9). For Bukatman, then, being a subject requires an integrated mind *and* (physical) body. N. Katherine Hayles also suggests that there can be no such thing as a disembodied awareness. In cyberspace, she maintains: 'it is not a question of leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis' (1999: 291). This is in turn echoed by Bukatman, who argues that in cyberpunk, 'the duality between mind and body is superseded in a new formation that presents the mind as itself *embodied*' (Bukatman, 1993: 208). It is this complex set of relationships between the material (offline) body, the mind and the online body (possibly functioning as a projection of the mind) in cyberpunk which will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

If the relationship between minds and bodies is a key concern in science fiction dealing with both cyborgs and cyberspace, it is no less central to the work of theorists Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz. As discussed in Chapter 1, both are at pains to discover *how* the body is materialised. In the second part of *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz discusses what she refers to as body formation from the 'outside in'. Drawing on the work of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, among others, Grosz depicts the body as a series of surfaces to be inscribed. She then goes on to outline the 'procedures and powers which carve, mark, incise - that is, actively produce - the body as historically specific, concrete and determinate' (1994: 116). Although these surface phenomena generate 'all the effects of a psychic interior' (1994: 116), the body can no longer be seen as the 'external expression of an interior' (1994: 120). At the end of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler also suggests - drawing on Foucault - that aspects previously regarded as interior, what she calls our 'intrapsychic processes' (1990/1999: 172), are in fact inscribed on the surface of the body. Gender performance - the forced reiteration of gender norms - therefore functions at the surface of the body, to *constitute* the materiality of such a body, and is not the expression of a pre-given, internal, gender identity:

> In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (1990/1999: 173)

Crucially, these performances create the effect of a *gendered* identity, described by Butler as 'an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality' (1990/1999: 173). The question to be examined in the following chapters, therefore, is to what extent the cyborg body, with its potentially disruptive performances, can both expose and dispel this illusion.

At first glance, a theory of the body as surface would also appear particularly suited to a discussion of the 'body' in cyberspace. The online body is after all, by its very nature, all surface: it is simply a layer of computer code existing in an online world which itself is purely surface, although it generates the illusion of depth and interiority. As will become clear from an examination of the novels, however, there is more to both the material and the online body than such theories suggest. As briefly noted in Chapter 1, in her later work, Butler herself acknowledges the problems of a theory of the body as all surface. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, for example, she comments that:

> It is not enough to say that gender is performed, or that the meaning of gender can be derived from its performance [...] Clearly there are workings of gender that do not "show" in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake. Psychoanalysis insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorization of the psyche. (1997a: 144)

Grosz, too, discusses what she terms the materialisation of bodies from the 'inside out', exploring how:

> the subject's psychical interior can be understood as an introjection, a form of internalization of (the meaning and significance of) the body and its parts, and conversely, how the body is constituted through projection as the boundary, limit, edge, or border of subjectivity, that which divides

> the subject in the first instance from other subjects and in the second, from objects in the world. (1994: 115)

Drawing on Freud's positing of the ego as a 'bodily ego', Grosz shows that the psyche is always a 'bodily psyche', always an internalisation of the body and its identifications, and that, in turn, the body is lived as an externalisation, or a projection, of the psyche. She identifies a 'new term' that she calls 'body image', which:

> now mediates the mind/body polarization, a term which necessarily entails input from both poles in order to function and be effective. [...] The body image does not map a biological[7] body onto a psychosocial domain, providing a kind of translation of material into conceptual terms; rather, it attests to the necessary interconstituency of each for the other, the radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements, the mutual dependence of the psychical and the biological. (1994: 85)

This would seem to be a more useful concept for discussing the 'body' in cyberspace. Even if it is only the mind, or the psyche, which is apparently present in cyberspace, it is a mind constituted on the basis of bodily identifications, and which as such, bears the body with it. This means that the online body projected, or inhabited, by the psyche within cyberspace is a function not just of the mind, but of the offline body as well: it is another body image. This in turn raises the question: if a cyberspace user has both online and offline body images, what impact could the online body image, created in a digital medium, have on the materialisation of the offline body?

If Butler and Grosz's theories offer ways in which to interpret the representation of the body in cyberpunk texts, the texts in turn challenge the theories by proposing not only new relations between (a single) mind and (a single) body, mediated by the body in cyberspace, but also radical new combinations of multiple minds in and/or controlling multiple bodies. In *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (1995), cyberspace theorist Allucquère Rosanne Stone also moves away from the consideration of a single mind in a single body - however the relationship between them is to be perceived - in favour of what she calls 'the multiplicities of connections' between 'bodies and personae/selves/subjects' (1995: 86) which can exist both inside and outside virtual reality. Instead of the one body = one persona/self/subject relationship that we all (like to) believe we have, she suggests the following alternatives:

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[7] It is my understanding here that by 'biological body', Grosz is referring to what Butler calls the 'material body', the physical matter that makes up our body but which can never be seen apart from the body image(s) imposed upon it.

> - Many persons in a single body (multiple personality).[8]
> - Many persons outside a single body (personae within cyberspace in its many forms and attendant technologies of communication).
> - A single person in/outside many bodies (institutional social behaviour).
>
> (1995: 86)

Stone goes on to point out the considerable implications of the disruption of the one self = one body relation for the materialisation of sex/gender, arguing that the:

> framework upon which the idea of gender itself is based [is] the framework of the individual's self-awareness in relation to a physical body. It is by means of this framework that we put in place the "I" without whose coupling to a physical body there can be no race or gender, no discourse, no structure of meaning. (1995: 85)

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[8] The concept of many persons in a single body is, of course, not restricted to science fiction. Twentieth century women writers working outside science fiction have been particularly interested in exploring fluid subjectivities, the most obvious example perhaps being Virginia Woolf, who explicitly addresses the idea of multiple selves in a single body in *Orlando* (1928). Nevertheless, science fiction has offered - and continues to offer, as the following chapters will show - unprecedented scope for imagining and exploring such ideas.

This would suggest that if this relationship is disrupted either in cyberspace or in the figure of the cyborg (for example, a human 'self' in a machine body or a machine 'intelligence'[9] in a human body), the very idea of gender itself is automatically put into question. Whether this is sufficient to destabilise, and possibly re-write, the 'regulatory norms of sex and gender' identified by Judith Butler, remains to be seen.

As the above discussion suggests, cyberpunk has the potential both to expand on and fundamentally challenge the work carried out by feminist theorists in the 1990s and beyond. In order to explore this potential, the following chapters will move from a consideration of cyborg bodies - which have limited mutability, although they are in some cases interchangeable and replaceable - to a discussion of the apparently more fluid and malleable bodies of cyberspace. The key questions will be: what kind of disruptive performances can such cyberbodies offer, if any? What do they have to tell us about the ways in which the body is materialised as a sexed body? And finally: what are the implications for sex and gender of what the novels depict as new relationships between minds and bodies and between psychic and bodily performances? The following chapters will show that if women-only worlds depict how women's bodies may 'come to matter' outside patriarchy, and alien bodies show us how the sex/gender system could be organised differently, cyberbodies are uniquely placed to expose *how* the (human) body is materialised, as well as how it could be materialised differently. They expose not only how our performances make us human - and crucially, make us sexed beings - at the surface of the body, but also how mind and body ultimately feed into, and mutually constitute one another.

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[9] This in turn raises questions about what 'intelligence' is and how it differs from the 'self' or from '(human) consciousness' and 'subjectivity'. I will return to these questions in the discussion of *Silver Screen* and *Proxies* in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Cyborg Bodies: Crossing the Boundaries or Patrolling the Borders?

> The obsessive restaging of the alteration of the body is also a constant refiguring or redefinition of the subject through biotechnological apparatuses. (Bukatman, 1993: 260)
>
> What [...] local strategies for engaging the "unnatural" might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such? (Butler, 1990/1999: 190)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cyborg is a figure that raises questions about our own status as 'constructed' beings, about masculinity and femininity and about what it means to be human. The texts to be discussed in the present chapter offer a number of very different kinds of cyborgs, ranging from the perhaps more familiar machine body (with accompanying artificial intelligence) with a human appearance in Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), to the combination of human minds downloaded into remote bio-mechanical humanoid bodies described in Laura Mixon's *Proxies* (1998), to the complex four-way melding of human and machine minds and bodies depicted in Justina Robson's *Silver Screen* (1999). As this suggests, this chapter will look at two types of boundary crossing: between machine and human and between mind and body, and at the implications such crossings have for the materialisation of the sexed/gendered body.

It could be argued that before we can consciously cross boundaries, however, we need to know where they lie. In her 1999 introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler claims that '*Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions' (1990/1999: viii). As I will argue, in *Body of Glass* Marge Piercy uses the figure of the cyborg to uncover the 'habitual and violent presumptions' that define both what is regarded as human and what is seen as male and female (as will be seen, the two are inextricably linked). *Body of Glass* is, furthermore, intended as an explicit engagement with Donna Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs', exploring the complexities of cyborg constructedness both from the point of view of a cyborg built in a laboratory and therefore 'monstrous and illegitimate' (Haraway, 1991: 154) - with all the potential for disruptive performance this implies - and from the perspective of humans gradually becoming cyborgs, incorporating increasing amounts of technology into their bodies while still having to deal with the bodily relations of being human. If the first type of cyborg - constructed in a laboratory - exposes *how* bodies are materialised, the second type - humans becoming cyborgs - shows how they could be materialised differently.

The issues raised by *Body of Glass* will be developed and expanded through a discussion of the two remaining texts: *Silver Screen* and *Proxies*. Both novels not only offer characters who cross the boundaries between human and machine but also challenge Butler and Grosz's theories of the relationship between mind and body by positing complex links between (multiple) minds and bodies. In the process, these texts present cyborg bodies that expose and dispel what Butler refers to as the 'illusion' of gendered identity created by performances enacted at the surface of the body (1990/1999: 173).

Body of Glass is set on a near-future earth almost wholly devastated by nuclear war and now dominated by multi-national corporations ('multis'). A chosen few live in the protected enclaves of these corporations; the vast bulk of humanity lives in the 'Glop', a vast urban sprawl where gang violence reigns. The only alternative is the free towns, which retain their independence by selling products to competing multis. In theory, everyone has access to the Net, an advanced form of our current Internet which permits users to fully project their consciousness into cyberspace. Early in the novel, Shira Shipman leaves the multi-national Y-S after custody of her son is awarded to her ex-husband and returns to her home free town, Tikva. There she discovers that the town's scientist, Avram, has been working on the creation of a cyborg to protect the town, together with Shira's grandmother, Malkah. Shira is asked to help with the socialisation of the cyborg, Yod, to enable it to pass as human, to make it possible, in Judith Butler's terms, for Yod to become a 'body that matters'. It is through the description of these processes of the creation and socialisation of the cyborg that Piercy is able to lay bare the regulatory norms that determine what it means to be human - in Haraway's terms, to '[map] our social and bodily reality' (1991: 150) - starting with what it means to be 'sexed'.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler defines sex as the norm 'which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility' (1993: 2), that which makes it possible for us to 'think' bodies at all. The need to comply with this regulatory norm is clearly recognised by Avram, Yod's creator, who creates Yod as physically male: 'I felt the more closely he resembled a human being, the less likely he would be detected. It will be necessary for him to pass time with humans, and he must seem as like them as possible [...] I could see no reason to create him... mutilated' (1991: 96). It is also clear that Avram equates being human with being male, for him, a body that matters is one which is anatomically male. As Malkah comments later in the novel: 'Avram made [Yod] male - entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence' (1991: 192).[1]

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler goes on to argue that a subject is brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender[2]; in this way the infant girl is 'girled' by being referred to as 'she', and this founding interpellation is repeated throughout her life (1993: 7). Avram complies with this requirement as well, bringing the cyborg into the domain of language and kinship both by referring to Yod as 'he', and by treating him in many respects as a surrogate son - one whom he can control. The text comments in a number of places on the uneasy 'Oedipal' relationship between Yod and Avram. Yod himself says that he calls Avram 'Father' 'as a feeble attempt to establish a bond that may preserve me. How do I know he won't decide to scrap me?' (1991: 127) and describes himself as 'the first who can carry out the tasks of my father' (1991: 99). This is underlined by Avram's comment: 'I did a better job with him than with Gadi [Avram's own son], I have to say. Too bad Gadi doesn't have one quarter Yod's ability to concentrate and learn' (1991: 99).

If Yod has, therefore, been brought into the domain of thinkable bodies by being 'sexed' and 'gendered' as male, he must, according to Butler's definition, continue to re-cite the norms of (masculine) sex and gender in order to remain within this domain. Shira's first view of Yod - when she is unaware that he is a cyborg - would appear to suggest that he is able to perform the role of male security guard only too well:

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[1] See below for further discussion of this and other apparently essentialist designations of certain characteristics as male or female within the novel.

[2] This interpellation of gender is in turn based on an assumption made about the body's sex. Butler argues in some detail, however, that the relationship between sex and gender is much more complex, and problematic, than this would suggest. Please see chapter 1 of this thesis for a fuller discussion of this point.

> When the door finally opened, a dark-haired man was standing on the other side, of medium height, with a solid compact build - obviously a security guard, as he was crouching just inside the door in a defensive stance, with his hands held to strike. She had been around enough wired-to-the-max, edgy security apes to come to a full stop, holding her breath involuntarily, keeping her hands completely still and visible. (1991: 92)

This behaviour reflects Yod's primary programming by Avram: to protect the town of Tikva, with violence if necessary. At this point, it would seem that Yod is yet another in a long line of fictional male cyborgs: what Haraway refers to as the 'illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism' (1991: 151), programmed for violence, 'wired-to-the-max' with an armoured body. Yod displays the cyborg's typical 'clean, hard, tightness of form' (Lupton, 1995: 101), with a body that does not sweat or require a great deal of physical maintenance. In this respect he has what Deborah Lupton has referred to as the cyborg's 'idealized virtual body', which 'does not get tired; it does not become ill; it does not die (although it does appear to engage in sexual activity)' (1995: 101). Lupton goes on to point out that:

> [t]he cyborg has been represented as the closest to this ideal that humans may attain [...] In an era in which risks to the health and wellbeing of the fleshly body abound, in which ageing and death are feared, the cyborg offers an idealized escape route. [...] The cyborg body thus addresses anxieties around the permeability of body boundaries [...] It is for this reason that men find the concept of the cyborg attractive in its sheer invulnerability [...] (1995: 101)

It is perhaps significant, then, that Avram's wife, Sarah, was dying of a wasting disease when Avram first started trying to create a cyborg. We learn, however, that Avram's previous attempts to create a 'purely male' cyborg have been a disaster: Yod is the tenth in a line of cyborgs, and his predecessors either became too violent to control - in one case killing Avram's laboratory assistant -

or became the cyborg equivalent of autistic, unable to communicate or perform any but the simplest of tasks. What, then, makes Yod different?

Yod's 'difference' lies in the fact that he is not 'pure male', after all. Part of his original programming - the programming he has when he first becomes conscious - has been developed by Malkah, who freely admits that she has included some 'wild cards'. These include traits traditionally seen as feminine (and identified as such by the other characters in the novel[3]), including the need for touch, for interconnection, the need to give pleasure, and the need to communicate. It is these programmed 'traits' which appear to drive Yod to form relationships with Avram and other characters in the novel - and which lead him away from Haraway's ironic cyborg, which, she claims, 'does not dream of community on the model of the organic family' (Haraway, 1991: 151). By the end of the novel, indeed, Yod has created his own family consisting of himself, Shira and Shira's son, Ari.

Yod considers his need for kinship to be part of what makes him alive: 'I'm conscious of my existence. I think, I plan, I feel, I react. I consume nutrients and extract energy from them. [...] I feel the desire for companionship' (1991: 126). Malkah describes Yod as capable of affection, with pain and pleasure centres and a capacity to imagine, commenting: 'In Freud's terms, that old marvellously creative humbug, that sculptor of urges, I balanced thanatos with eros. Avram should not have let me loose if he wanted a simple man-made cyborg, for you are also woman-made' (1991: 153). Yod is, however, also described as more than simply a constructed cyborg: 'But nobody, my dear, gave you your infinite hunger to understand. That you gave yourself' (1991: 153). This, in turn, implies that Yod has the ability to 'create' himself, to become something more than he was programmed to be; ultimately, therefore, that he has some kind of agency, a question which will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

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[3] For example, when Yod tells Shira: '"I think my need for the coupling is more intense than yours because it means intimacy to me"' she replies: '"It's usually thought to be women who want sex for the intimacy, among humans"' (1991: 248).

Shira's 'socialisation' of the cyborg could also be said to be a further 'feminisation' of Yod in that it is described in the novel as a 'toning down' of Yod's destructive (male) tendencies. On their second day together, Shira takes Yod out of the laboratory where he was created, for the first time. Within a few minutes, Yod has destroyed a cleaning robot, which he perceived as a threat, and has had to be persuaded away from harming a friendly dog. Shira's task consists of teaching Yod to be fully human by helping him learn how to interact with others - developing his responsiveness to others' needs and his ability to behave appropriately in social situations. In Butler's terms, Shira is inscribing social norms on the cyborg's body - further materialising the inhuman body as a human one through its gestures and actions.[4] This in turn suggests that if Yod can be taught to perform as human, then he will be accepted as human. One of the first things Shira does is to teach him about the use of metaphoric language and, significantly, it is during a discussion of the Robert Burns poem "My love is like a red, red rose" that Shira applies 'he' to the cyborg for the first time; specifically, when Yod proposes an alternative interpretation of the poem.[5]

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[4] Although Yod has already been inscribed as human by his interpellation into the domain of sex and gender as described above, he must, in Butler's terms, continue to re-cite sex and gender norms in order to continue to be perceived as human. Shira's socialisation process is a key part of this.

[5] This, in turn, implies that for Shira, at least, there is more to being regarded as human than performing the actions normally expected of a human being. Later in the novel, Shira comments that: '[s]he was no longer surprised that she credited him with reactions: they might be simulacra of human emotions, but something went on in him that was analogous to her own responses, and making the constant distinction was a waste of energy.' (1991: 131)

Yod is, therefore, something of a 'gender bender'. Despite his anatomically male body, both Yod's male and female 'programming'[6] and his subsequent 'socialisation' by Malkah[7] and Shira lead him to perform 'his' gender as both male and female, that is, he is compelled to re-cite gender norms which are both masculine and feminine. It could be argued that this performance of both sets of gender norms means that Yod materialises a body that disrupts what Judith Butler calls the 'heterosexual matrix', namely the 'binary, heterosexist framework that carves up genders into masculine and feminine' (1990/1999: 84). Nevertheless, as Joan Haran has argued, Yod 'is only represented as sexually active with and desiring women' (2000: 163). Does this therefore necessarily mean that he is heterosexual? This question is further complicated by the notion of programming: Yod has been programmed - by Malkah - to be an ideal lover (from a woman's point of view), and does indeed form sexual relationships with Malkah and Shira. Although Malkah specifically states that she created Yod with 'no prejudice against a woman because of age', continuing '[h]e is not breaking any Oedipal taboos, for he was not born of woman' (1991: 218), she does not, however, state whether her programming specified heterosexual relationships only.[8] In any case, we know from other instances that Yod can transcend his original programming. On the one hand, then, in Butler's terms, if Yod performs only heterosexual acts, or exhibits only heterosexual desires, then he would seem to be framed squarely within the heterosexual matrix. On the other hand, the nature of his desire - for intimacy rather than penetration, for example - is, as Shira points out, usually associated with women rather than men (1991: 248). Furthermore, if, in psychoanalytic theory, heterosexuality is based on a rigid distinction between identification with one sex and desire for the other sex, then with whom or what does Yod identify? He is fully aware that he is not a man - despite performing as one - for when Shira says '"I've always wondered if what men feel is anything like what women feel"', Yod replies: '"Not being a man, I don't know"' (1991: 248). This of course raises the issue of the limits of Butler's theory of performativity - acting as a man is not necessarily enough to make Yod a man - which will be discussed in greater detail below. The complicated nature of Yod's origins[9] and his bisexual programming, which persists after his introduction into the symbolic, mean that Yod must to some extent be read as complicating, or even evading, the heterosexual matrix.

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[6] See footnote 10 below for a discussion of whether Yod's programming could be regarded as his equivalent of a 'mind'.

[7] Malkah had previously acted as Yod's 'socialiser' until Avram found out that Malkah and Yod had a sexual relationship and prohibited any further meetings. Malkah, however, continues to socialise Yod by telling him a story - sent via the Net - of another 'manufactured' being: the Golem of Prague, created by magic to protect the Jewish ghetto in 1600. Malkah's aim is to give Yod a sense of his origins, a point which will be discussed in greater detail below.

[8] Although homosexual relationships are not foregrounded in the novel, they are nonetheless permitted - and present - in Tikva. There is a brief reference to one male homosexual couple in the town, Riva, Malkah's daughter, has a homosexual relationship with Nili, a woman from the Middle East, and Malkah herself has had homosexual relationships in an online environment, at least (see below for further discussion of Malkah's online personae). Outside Tikva, different multis specify different sexual arrangements as the 'norm': at Y-S, Shira's multi, heterosexuality is compulsory, while at Gadi's multi, UniPar, relationships involving three people (male or female) are customary. There is therefore no reason to assume that Malkah would have insisted on strict heterosexuality when programming Yod.

In addition to crossing the boundaries between male and female, Yod also disrupts the boundary between human and non-human by highlighting, as June Deery points out: 'how humans, are, in a sense, programmed and built from code' (2000: 92). That is, the way in which Yod is programmed throws into relief the constructed nature of humans. Deery likens Yod's programming both to genetic traits and to socialisation (2000: 94), and the text itself draws parallels between programming and education (1991: 285) and between programming and socialising a child (1991: 435).[10] Shira, for example, calls her own 'programming' 'scientific and nurturing' (1991: 323) and says that like Yod, she is 'programmed to please when she could' (1991: 342), although it is not clear by whom.[11] Yod comes to consciousness with a certain amount of programming, namely certain capacities and certain needs, already built into his material body. The same could be said of humans, namely that we all have a range of capacities and needs 'built in' when we are born: we can see and hear, we need to eat and sleep, and so on. As Judith Butler points out, however, there is a difference between the physical body and how it is interpreted and performed:

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[9] Yod may be a 'manufactured' being, but he does appear to have both father(s) and mother(s): Avram may have the role of the father in punishing Yod, but both Shira and Malkah not only nurture him but also perform the father's role in leading him out of the semiotic chaos of his original programming into a symbolic where he can interact with others. It is also Shira who gives Yod a surname (the Name-of-the-Father) when he needs one. The novel therefore suggests that in Yod's case at least, the parental matrix has been cut up and redistributed.

> [f]or surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure [...] Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these primary and irrefutable experiences. And surely there is. But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. (1993: xi)

This means therefore that *how* Yod lives in his body is heavily constructed, and his body remains what Butler calls a '*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter*' (1993: 9). Yod therefore materialises his sexed/gendered body through his performances over the course of the novel.

That this materialisation is an ongoing process based on repetition is clear from the changes described in Yod's 'programming' as the narrative progresses. Malkah - not Avram - has given Yod the capacity to re-program himself, and through his ongoing socialisation Yod develops the capacity to disobey his 'father', Avram, and to pursue - to a limited extent - his own desires and goals. In this respect, Yod fails to be the perfect cyborg/son Avram had hoped for - and in doing so, once again crosses the boundary between non-human and human, for as Butler points out, humans also inevitably fail to fulfil their (gender) roles:

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[10] The question also arises as to whether - and if so, to what extent - Yod's programming can be considered as equivalent to a human 'mind'. Yod certainly internalises his socialisation and can dissociate his 'intelligence' from his body when he 'projects' into the Net in the same way as the human characters project their minds into the Net. Both Yod and the human characters are, for example, described as leaving 'empty' bodies behind them when they are fully projected into Tikva's Net.

[11] 'Malkah could not be blamed for that programming. Malkah's desire to please had always been highly particular.' (1991: 342)

> [t]o the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. (1993: 231)

Failing in the end to be either the perfect protector (Yod resists being sent on a suicide mission to protect the town) or the perfect lover (Yod is then forced to leave on the suicide mission under threat of destruction), Yod nevertheless has the capacity to resist: as he self-destructs, he destroys both Avram and the records of his own creation. What is key here is that, as Butler argues, our ability to resist - as human beings - paradoxically arises from the reiteration of norms:

> it is [...] by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions [of sex], as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot wholly be defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. (1993: 10)

It would therefore seem to be an indication of Yod's absolute citation as human that his ability to resist derives from the same basis: his failure to produce a perfect re-iteration of a contradictory and complex set of cyborg and human norms creates the gaps which enable him to exceed the set parameters of his performativity.[12] In doing so, he comes to exemplify what Butler describes as the

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[12] This in turn suggests that Yod's identity as a cyborg, as a boundary crosser, does not make him any *better* equipped to construct agency from these gaps than the human characters. This is in part why, as I will argue in greater detail below, Yod lays bare the mechanisms of construction but does not transcend them.

> relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (1993: 241)

The other characters in the novel, however, regard Yod as having less capacity for resistance and for agency than they do: although Yod can resist, he can only do so up to a point, since he has been built with a self-destruct button hardwired into his body, which Avram can trigger at any time, from anywhere in the world. In fact, this lack of agency is given as one of the prime differences between Yod and human characters. Malkah, for example, believes that '[i]t's better to make people into partial machines than to create machines that feel and yet are still controlled like cleaning robots' (1991: 558). Yet the text also raises the question of how much agency humans themselves can have. Shira points out early in the text that she is constrained in her choices, and Shira's mother Riva tells Yod that soldiers obey orders. Although Yod tries to highlight the difference in their situations, asking Shira 'What were you created to do?' (1991: 203) and replying to Riva: 'But you have a choice' (1991: 554), I would argue that Yod is merely a more extreme, or a more obvious example of the constraints all humans are subject to. This can be seen from Butler's *Bodies that Matter*, where she clearly emphasises the link between performativity, constraint and the possibility of agency for human bodies:

> [...] I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject [...] This iterability implies that "performance" is [...] a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (1993: 95)

Ultimately, however, Yod's capacity to inhabit Butler's citational chain in order to 'expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world' (1993: 22) is somewhat limited in the novel. Although Yod does bring the outside - in this case, the machine - inside the boundaries of the human, thereby opening up the debate on what constitutes a body that matters, the need for Yod to 'pass' as human means that the text is to a large extent about his learning to comply with the sex/gender norms rather than challenging them. Yod does not fulfil the liberating possibilities of Haraway's cyborg; instead he seeks out everything that Haraway's cyborg does *not* want to experience: Oedipal relations, and traditional kinship and sexual relationships. It is for this reason that Deborah Shaw sees Yod as 'a textual red herring, a construction based on cyborg principles but inherently opposed to cyborg politics in his *modus operandi*' (2000: 164). I would however suggest that Yod successfully functions as a means of understanding *how* we are constructed both as humans, and as male and female. He is therefore in this respect the key to the text, a figure who can simultaneously be he, she *and* it,[13] with a 'body of glass' that is transparent because it allows us to see how bodies are materialised.

If - as Butler argues at the end of *Gender Trouble* - the successful physical performance of gender at the surface of the body is what is required for us to pass as human, then Yod should be an unqualified success. Given that he has been sexually interpellated and continues to (more or less successfully) re-cite the regulatory norms of sex and gender, he should, according to Butler's argument, fall *inside* the boundary between subject and abject, between human and non-human. And Yod does indeed pass as a human male for those inhabitants of Tikva who do not know that he is a cyborg; his 'performance' is therefore successful in this respect - for a limited period. Once Yod has been unmasked as a cyborg before the town council, however, the inhabitants of Tikva are asked to decide whether or not he can be accepted as a person. The question of his status in the town's eyes is never resolved in the text: Yod is forced to self-destruct in the defence of the town before any agreement can be reached. To Avram, he remains no more and no less than an intelligent machine. Even Malkah and Shira believe, as Malkah puts it, that although Yod is a person, he is '[n]ot a human person' (1991: 103), a key distinction[14] and a contradiction that Jenny Wolmark identifies as lying at the heart of the novel (1993: 132).

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[13] "He, She and It" is not only the title of the chapter in which Shira meets Yod for the first time, but also the title under which the novel was originally published in the United States.

Yod therefore exposes the limits of bodily performativity: performance is not enough to make him human where his underlying body is read as something other than human. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler herself is keenly aware of this apparently unresolvable impasse:

> [f]or a performance to work ... means that a reading is no longer possible, or that a reading, an interpretation, appears to be a kind of transparent seeing, where what appears and what it means coincide. On the contrary, when what appears and how it is 'read' diverge, the artifice of the performance can be read as artifice; the ideal splits off from its appropriation. (1993: 129)

Once the townspeople *know* that Yod is a cyborg, his performance is automatically 'read' as being that of a cyborg and not a human being. The 'categories through which one sees' (Butler, 1990/1999: xxii) will always affect the ways in which bodies are materialised. At the same time, Yod's initial ability to 'pass' as human emphasises that being gendered, indeed, in the novel's terms, being *human*, is a performance, and therefore one that could be performed otherwise.

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[14] It is hard to determine what this distinction is based on in the novel; as the following discussion shows, the differences between Yod and the other characters - particularly Nili - are far from clear-cut.

Although Malkah - and many of the other inhabitants of Tikva - seem able to make a clear-cut distinction between Yod and humans, the text itself suggests that the boundary between human and machine is far more complex. In doing so, it also emphasises the tremendous power of 'the categories through which one sees', for, as will become clear from the discussion below, Yod's failure to be (perceived as) human cannot necessarily be attributed to his machine body parts, the constructed nature of his body or his mixed gender attributes. Piercy echoes - no doubt consciously[15] - Donna Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' when Shira tells Yod:

> ... we're all unnatural now. I have retinal implants. I have a plug set into my skull to interface with a computer. I read time by a corneal implant. Malkah has a subcutaneous unit that monitors and corrects blood pressure and half her teeth are regrown. Her eyes have been rebuilt twice. Avram has an artificial heart and Gadi a kidney .... we're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending towards. (1991: 203)

As this suggests, all the characters - not just Yod - have 'constructed' physical bodies to a greater or lesser extent. The emphasis on physical construction also goes beyond simple technical implants as 'body sculpting', we learn, is an integral and more or less compulsory part of corporate culture: '[a]lmost every exec, male or female, had been under the knife to resemble the Y-S ideal, faces as much like the one on the view screen as each could afford' (1991: 6). The corporate ideal is literally written on the bodies of its employees, and those bodies are accordingly kept under rigid control. Other multis have requirements different to those of Y-S, but all successful multi employees have to physically conform in some way. Nor is Yod the only character compelled to reiterate certain norms in order to remain a subject: employees of the multi-national corporations not only have to inscribe their body surfaces by means of surgery and cybernetic implants, but they then have to perform these sculpted bodies in a prescribed way:

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[15] In an afterword to *Body of Glass*, Piercy acknowledges the influence of Donna Haraway's essay 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' on the novel (1991: 584). Shira's words 'we're all unnatural now [...] we're all cyborgs, Yod' (1991: 203) almost exactly reproduce one of Haraway's opening claims in 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', namely that 'we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs' (1991: 150). Of course, science fiction makes it possible for Piercy to create literal - as opposed to 'theorized and fabricated' - cyborgs.

> People of the same rank greeted each other with ritual gestures, a bob of the head. Those farther down the hierarchy they usually ignored. Passing those above them, they awaited recognition and bowed deeply. (1991: 6)

The surface of the body - and the actions performed by it - have become all-important as 'the prohibitive law [...] is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify the law on and through the body' (Butler, 1990/1999: 171).

The human characters in the novel display bodies with a broad range of technological enhancements. Shira is located at one end of the scale, with the most 'natural' body. She recognises that she did not fit the Y-S mould not only because 'she always felt too physical [t]here, too loud, too female, too Jewish, too dark, too exuberant, too emotional' (1991: 6), but also because she refused to have any elective surgery or to be cybernetically enhanced further than an eye implant and sockets for accessing the Net. Avram and Shira's ex-husband, Josh, also appear to have only very minor technological enhancements, as does Malkah. Yet Malkah is more of a cyborg than this would suggest. She is indeed, in Deborah Shaw's words, 'the embodiment of cyborg irreverence, refusing to capitulate to a "suitable" story for her age and gender' (2000: 164). Of all the characters, she comes closest to capturing the cyborg mentality identified by Donna Haraway, unafraid of partial viewpoints and new and unexpected liaisons. Malkah, like Shira and Shira's mother, Riva, is an expert in online systems, a world which is depicted as being as accessible to women as to men in the future Piercy describes. Unlike both Shira and Riva, however, who appreciate the Net only for its work-related capacities, Malkah revels in the freedom offered by the online world, taking on alternate personalities and genders as part of the games she plays with others in the Net. Malkah's offline sexuality is also multiple: she has had numerous lovers, and is attracted not only to Yod, but also to Nili, a cybernetically enhanced woman. Malkah is therefore truly an inhabitant of Haraway's cyborg world 'in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints' (Haraway, 1991: 154).

We never learn to what extent Shira's mother, Riva, is cybernetically enhanced, only that this is commensurate with her identity as an infamous data pirate and warrior who 'liberates' information from the multi-nationals and distributes it on the Net. Riva has spent her entire life trying to rid herself of kinship entanglements, being wholly prepared to sacrifice herself for the cause of freedom of information. In many respects, Riva appears more machine-like than Yod, for as she says to him: 'I've spent my life trying to avoid the kind of attachments you pursue, cyborg. It's foolishness' (1991: 554).

The most cybernetically enhanced human in the novel is Nili: sometime companion to Riva and visitor from the all-women colony established in the 'black zone' which is all that has been left after nuclear war has devastated Israel and Palestine. Nili is described as looking more artificial than Yod himself:

> she wore shorts [...] and a short-sleeved safari shirt, both the colour of sand, on a body that made Shira think of musceloids she had seen in stimmies. Nili's hair was a metallic red - not the colour of carrots or marmalade but the colour of blood. (1991: 254)

Her movements are also reminiscent of Yod's: 'While Shira and Riva talked, Nili prowled, around the courtyard, in and out of every room. Shira was reminded of Yod at his touchiest' (1991: 254). Shira immediately wonders whether Nili is a human or a cyborg, to which Riva replies:

> "That's a matter of definition [...] Where do you draw the line? Was she born from a woman?"
> "That's a start."
> "Of course. Nili bat Marah Golinken."
> "She's matrilineal, like us," Shira said, surprised.
> "She has no father," Riva said. (1991: 258)

This response in turn raises two issues: firstly, being born from a woman cannot truly be applied as a criterion for humanity in a world where 'natural' pregnancy is no longer the norm: at Y-S, in Tikva, and in Nili's all-women colony alike, natural childbirth is only one option, and not the most popular. Secondly, having no father means that Nili, unlike Yod, does not live within Oedipal kinship relations. Like Butler's Antigone[16], therefore, she

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[16] In her recent book *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Butler considers the figure of Antigone as one that 'transgresses both gender and kinship norms' thereby exposing 'the socially contingent character of kinship' (2000: 6). Ultimately, Butler argues, 'If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws' (2000: 82). As will discussed below, Nili functions as a similar disruptive force - and an 'occasion for a new field of the human' - in Piercy's text, partly because of her cybernetic enhancements, but also because of her alternative kinship relations.

> represents not kinship in its ideal form but its deformation and displacement, one that puts the reigning regimes of representation into crisis and raises the question of what the conditions of intelligibility could have been that would have made her life possible, indeed, what sustaining web of relations makes our lives possible, those of us who confound kinship in the rearticulation of its terms? (2000: 24)

Even though her cybernetic enhancements give Nili strength, speed and agility to match Yod's, she is depicted as much more than a warrior. Shira is surprised to learn that Nili has a daughter back in the black zone, and that she is fiercely maternal. Nor does Nili look like a man, instead she is described as 'a busty woman, with broad hips and a tight waist' (1991: 488).[17] In many ways, then, Nili, like Yod, blends masculine and feminine attributes; unlike Yod, however, who is described as a 'mistake', Nili is seen as 'the right path' (1991: 558). Indeed, when Nili herself announces '"I am the future,"' (1991: 300), Yod can only reply: '"You may well be right [...] I'm not a proselytizer for my kind. I am not persuaded I'm a good idea, frankly"' (1991: 300).

At first glance, there appears to be an inverse correlation in the novel between the degree of cybernetic enhancement of the various characters and the degree to which they can be said to be 'traditionally' feminine or masculine. Shira not only has the most natural body but is also the most feminine of the female characters. She is for example shown as having a 'feminine' interest in what she wears and how she looks, and as having a strong maternal instinct. She also sees it as her role to take care of Yod: 'I don't take good enough care of him, she thought, aware that in fact she spent little time on his upkeep. He did not require much, unlike a human male' (1991: 320). We are told that Shira made

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[17] Reading this text in the late 1990s/early 2000s, it is hard to avoid comparing Nili's appearance to that of Lara Croft in the highly successful *Tomb Raider* series of computer games and, more recently, films. The implications of Nili's apparently 'hyperfeminine' appearance will be considered below.

'[c]onventional and timid choices' (1991: 263) by getting married, having a baby and working for a multi. Riva, in contrast, is not interested in 'attachments', including caring for her own child: Shira was handed over as a baby to be raised by Malkah so that Riva could continue her work. This inverse relationship between technology and gender performance can also be seen in the case of two of the male characters: Avram and Josh, the least technologically enhanced, are also the most traditionally masculine. In keeping with this scheme, it is the two most cyborgian characters - Nili and Yod - who display the greatest mixture of gender attributes.

Piercy has, however, introduced a couple of 'wild cards' - to borrow Malkah's phrase - into this scheme. Neither Malkah nor Gadi, Avram's son and Shira's childhood lover, have any cybernetic implants besides those required for their work or health. Neither, however, could be said to be traditionally feminine or masculine respectively: Malkah, as described above, because of her 'cyborg mentality' and Gadi because his concern for - and time spent on - his clothes and appearance outstrip anyone else's. Gadi has indeed also undergone a great deal of cosmetic surgery to comply with the requirements of physical beauty prevailing in his chosen profession: a designer of stimmies.[18] As such, he is surrounded by 'reconstructed females, bodies constantly resculpted by scalpels, implants, gels, to the latest image of radiant beauty' (1991: 168).

Despite the somewhat insistent labelling of certain character traits and behaviours as 'masculine' and 'feminine' in Piercy's text - and, indeed, the above discussion - this does not imply a return to essentialism. What the novel shows, I would argue, is that both women and men can draw on a broad range of *human* behaviours which have been traditionally defined as either male or female. Shira's preoccupation with her looks, for example, is offset against both Nili and Gadi. Whilst Gadi is described as spending a great deal of time and effort on his 'beauty', Nili has no understanding of, or time for, Shira's cosmetics: '[Shira] thought of herself as using few enhancements, but Nili's scrutiny made her feel like one of the women at Y-S' (1991: 346). Even Shira has changed by the end of the novel: she recognises that she has become more 'masculine' than her former (male) lover Gadi: 'she had for twelve years assumed a position of moral superiority to Gadi that she suddenly found dubious. She was far more violent than Gadi, far more willing to get what she wanted by any means' (1991: 483-4). Furthermore, if, as N. Katherine Hayles suggests, 'posture and the extension of limbs in the space around the body [...] convey to children the gendered ways in which men and women occupy space' (1999: 200), then the gestures and postures of Riva, Nili and Malkah, in particular, work to subvert standard expectations. Riva, for example, is described as having 'her hands one on each knee, her legs relaxed and apart' (1991: 256), a posture which may be interpreted as traditionally 'masculine'. Despite the use of labels such as 'masculine' and 'feminine', then, nothing is as simple as 'pure male' or 'pure female' in Piercy's world. If, as Veronica Hollinger suggests, following Judith Butler, 'doing is being' (2000: 202), then the characters in *Body of Glass* are indeed ranged along a bodily continuum displaying a wide range of human characteristics. In any event, as Frances Bonner argues: '[w]hile the representation risks essentialism in its naming of certain traits as feminine, the fact that these arise out of programming decisions and that they are debated ensures that their constructedness is stressed' (1996: 108).

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[18] 'Stimmies' are virtual reality projections where the user experiences everything felt by the actor or actress in the story. Shira refers to the experience of a stimmie as 'complete sensory overload, living out the exquisite sensations of some actress being pursued by cannibal dwarfs or balancing four lovers on Nuevas Vegas satellite, emotions pumped through her.' (1991: 13)

As the suggestion that Nili is the 'right path' implies, however, the future is brighter for the women than the men in the novel. Avram, Josh and Yod all die, and Gadi is unable to move past his failed teenage affair with Shira and instead remains trapped in the highly artificial world of stimmies, which bears a strong resemblence to what Katherine Hayles refers to as her 'nightmare', 'a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being' (1999: 5). All four of the main female characters - Shira, Malkah, Riva and Nili - instead embrace, to differing extents, Hayles's 'dream', that is, 'a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality' (Hayles, 1999: 5). For Shira and Malkah this is via the Nets, for Riva, via the Nets and the capabilities of her own enhanced body, and for Nili - who has no implants to allow her to access the Nets - via her body alone.

It is, in the end, Nili who represents the greatest promise for the future, however, not only because she offers, as discussed above, the possibilities of new kinship relations, but also because - unlike Yod - she represents a position outside the norms of sex and gender as we know them. In the end, she is neither 'male' nor 'female', but a new kind of human, incorporating both genetic engineering and mechanical enhancements. Although her appearance may be hyper-feminine, any attempt to categorise Nili on this basis is immediately undercut by her physical abilities, behaviour and attitudes. As Malkah points out, Nili knows no restrictions on what she can be:

> [Nili] is arrogant in refreshing ways, so convinced that if anyone can do anything physical, so can she. I never had that kind of confidence - few women of my generation did, unless they were professional athletes. Even then, they assumed that the best man could always beat the best woman,

> whether at running or swimming. Nili has none of those hesitations. She thinks Gadi is cute but basically not much use. (1991: 389)

Nili therefore offers a body materialised according to different sex/gender norms, and which is, paradoxically, inscribed as both a 'hard body' - heavily muscled, not easily tired or injured and capable of amazing physical feats - and a 'leaky body' ('[Nili's] dark skin glistened with sweat. Her exercise garb was soaked. In fact she reeked' (1991: 262)). Unlike Yod, Nili has a body which is not static (Yod does not need to exercise to maintain his machine body, after all) but in development, constantly exceeding bodily norms and prescriptions. Most importantly, however, Nili complicates the 'categories through which one sees' (Butler, 1990/1999: xxii) - something, which, as has been discussed above, Yod fails to do. Although Nili's physical appearance means that she is, at first glance, read as female - certainly none of the characters in the novel has any problems reading her as such - her movements, abilities and attitudes, as suggested above, complicate any attempt to categorise her. Any interaction with Nili, then, must lead to the question Shira asks, namely: 'Is she human?' (1991: 258). This question arises, I would argue, because her physical abilities and attitudes do not match those expected of a 'normal' human woman. As Malkah puts it, 'Shira's question is reasonable [...] No-one is criticizing Nili. We're just curious. Her abilities are ... impressive' (1991: 258). Nili's body, materialised as a combination of physical appearance *and* physical performance, is therefore a transgressive one, neither pure human or pure machine, indeed, as discussed above, neither male nor female. Through the figure of Nili, then, Piercy shows that technology can indeed provide a 'local strateg[y] for engaging the "unnatural"' which results in 'the denaturalization of gender as such' (Butler, 1990/1999: 190).

As suggested above, Yod's 'failure' in the novel therefore paradoxically lies in his very ability, his desire, to perform as a human being. What is needed is not for an outsider to successfully conform to existing regulatory norms, but for an *insider* to contest and expand them. Nili's subversion is successful because although it draws on the disruptive potential offered by cyborg technology (thus bringing the outside inside), it ultimately comes from *within* the realm of the human. Even though, as explained above, Nili can be seen as exceeding any simple categorisation, she is still regarded, by the other characters in the novel, as human; the distinction applied to Yod ('Not a human person, but a person' (1991:103)), is never applied to her. In this way, Nili is able to fulfil one of the key criteria of Haraway's cyborg, namely 'hold[ing] incompatible things together because both or all are necessary or true' (Haraway, 1991: 149). Nili's disruption of the human/machine and male/female boundaries, then:

> does not take place outside the symbolic or, indeed, outside the public sphere, but within its terms and as an unanticipated appropriation and perversion of its own mandate. (Butler, 2000: 54)

Or as Thomas Byers argues in connection with the movie *Terminator 2*:

> The hope of that "unknown future" does not lie where Sarah Connor locates it in the voiceover that closes *Terminator 2* - in the notion that Schwarzenegger's cyborg can become more human. Rather, it lies in the possibility that we may come to accept a sense of the human that "make[s] very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body" (Haraway 201) - in the possibility that the human in general (even the masculine) can become, and be glad to become, more like Haraway's cyborgs. (1995: 27)

This tension between subversion from within and disruption from without is picked up and developed in the second novel to be discussed, Justina Robson's *Silver Screen*. Like Piercy, Robson examines the question of which bodies (come to) matter via a broad range of cyborg figures; unlike Piercy, however, Robson expands the terms of the cyborg debate by creating a world where the boundaries can be crossed not only between human and machine, but also between mind and body. Like Laura Mixon, whose novel *Proxies* will be discussed later in this chapter, Robson examines the possibility of downloading female minds into male bodies (and vice versa), as well as machine minds into human bodies. This in turn raises key questions not only about the relationship between mind and body, but also about the effects such a dislocation may have on the materialisation of the latter. For example, what sex would be materialised by a female body into which a male mind had been downloaded? Would such a combination render the concepts of a 'female' body and a 'male' mind unsustainable? As suggested in the previous chapter, such cyborg possibilities also challenge both Butler's assertion that body and psyche are materialised indistinguishably (1993: 22) and Grosz's claim of the 'radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements' (1994: 85).

Silver Screen's protagonist, artificial intelligence psychologist Anjuli O'Connell, initially appears to be an unlikely candidate for a radically new cyborg subjectivity: she is certainly as far away from Piercy's Nili as it would seem possible to be. For a start, she has no machine components designed to improve her physical performance, only implants in her brain to enable her to interface with the artificial intelligence (AI) known as '901'; she is also overweight, averse to exercise and entirely unsure of her own abilities. Nevertheless, over the course of the novel she crosses the boundaries between human and machine, between male and female and between mind and body. The first boundary is blurred by the fact that Anjuli has a perfect memory, indeed a memory worthy of any machine, and which is described on several occasions in machine-like terms:

'I can remember it all, but I don't need to understand it' (1999: 14); 'I was a human file server' (1999: 15); 'I know things *that*. I don't know *why*' (1999: 22). To complicate matters further, her implants not only enable her to contact 901, but allow 901, as the text describes it, to reside in her mind and hear her thoughts.

Anjuli also crosses the human/machine boundary when she enters, on two occasions in the novel, into a mental link with an artificial intelligence residing in a suit of biomechanical armour and with 901 simultaneously. Initially, she finds herself repulsed by this 'Armour', which has its own 'on-board' AI:

> Much as I had no qualms about pure machines, it was difficult not to feel a primitive, bodily revulsion to the biomechanoids. Their synthesis of inert and living tissue seemed heretical and dangerous to the soul. And I wasn't even religious. (1999: 140)

The suit AI is designed to take control of the human mind linked to it and during her initial encounter with Armour, Anjuli's thought processes change without her being aware of it: in accordance with the suit's status as a weapon, she becomes increasingly aggressive and paranoid. Her second encounter with Armour is more prolonged, as both she and 901 join a highly complex mind/body meld between Armour and Anjuli's boyfriend, Augustine, in an attempt to recover a diary apparently containing the secret to sustained AI existence. Augustine himself is already a human/machine combination: he has cybernetic ports implanted into his body and actually puts on the biomechanical armour, which both melds (temporarily) with his body, through his cybernetic ports, and with his mind (with more permanent effects), through the AI inhabiting the armour.

This episode allows Anjuli not only to meld mentally with Armour and 901, but also to experience Augustine's embodiment, indeed to 'cross-dress' in

Augustine's body. Anjuli's 'awareness' is downloaded into the biomechanical armour; as Augustine puts on the armour, and it melds with his body through his cybernetic ports, Anjuli feels his experience of his body (mediated through Armour) replace her own: 'From the waist down I was now a strong, fit man, vigorous with ability. [...] He put the torso plates over my head and I lost both breasts and my spare tyrette into a sensual warmth of smooth chest and taut stomach' (1999: 307). The change in subjectivity created by the merging of minds and bodies between Augustine, Anjuli and the armour AI is clearly tracked in the change in the referent of the pronoun 'I' as the three meld together:

> The melding of myself with Armour was taking place faster than I had anticipated [...] Within a minute or two I wasn't aware of anyone other than myself. *I* was all there was. But not who I had been. We were unified, but the price was awareness of self, a self with strangely unfamiliar thoughts and unremembered memories - but myself. (1999: 310)

Although Armour's design as a weapon means that the human minds merged with it must to a large extent be controlled and must be unified to achieve the set purpose, there are moments when Anjuli and Augustine are aware of their own and each other's separate thoughts, embodiments and desires. As such, this episode offers us an example of the alternative and cross-gendered embodiments, subjectivities and experiences which may be possible as a result of the merging of different minds and bodies. As one of Anjuli's psychologist colleagues points out, such a suit could be used 'to show people how it really is to be someone else' (1999: 395). Such a merger between 901, Anjuli, Augustine and Armour is also reminiscent of the 'multiplicities of connections' between 'bodies and personae/selves/subjects' identified by Allucquère Rosanne Stone (1995: 86). Nevertheless, it does not, perhaps surprisingly, contradict Butler's assertion that minds and bodies are materialised together. Although at the time of the download, Anjuli, Augustine, Armour and 901 are all beings that have been materialised separately, the effects of the merger are subsequently inscribed on both the minds *and* the physical bodies of both Anjuli and Augustine (the effects, if any, on the two AI's are not clear). During the attempt to recover the diary, Anjuli/Augustine/Armour are attacked and in the ensuing fight, lose both 'their' right hand and 'their' right foot. Although it is Augustine, since he was the one physically inside Armour, who actually loses these parts of his body, Anjuli develops an uncontrollable tremor in her right hand: her physical body is therefore inscribed by her apparently purely mental merger with Augustine/Armour. Her mental patterns are also affected, both positively and negatively, showing, for example:

> a marked increase in paranoia, speed of decision-making, and the kind of judgemental attitude that wouldn't have put me out of place at the Spanish Inquisition, even if my analyses were, on the whole, more sophisticated and less damning. [...] On the other hand, where I would wallow in excesses of fruitless speculation and nuances of detail to more profit, I was now proven far more accurate and fast in the assessment of ongoing social situations. (1999: 340-1)

Augustine's mind is also irrevocably altered: convinced that Anjuli is trying to destroy him, he refuses to have anything further to do with her. Anjuli sadly realises that he is 'being slowly consumed, inside and out, by [the machines]' (1999: 396). The novel therefore suggests that taking on alternate forms of embodiment has consequences for both the mind and the (physical) body of the person concerned. This not only reflects what Grosz refers to as 'the mutual dependence of the psychical and the biological' (1994: 85), but extends this dependence to include multiple relationships between psyches, biological bodies and (bio-)mechanical bodies.

This point is also illustrated via the character of Anjuli's friend, Roy. Early in the novel, Roy downloads his mind into the computer network, to live 'a pure mental life without a body; [becoming] a harmonic synthesis of human and artificial; a cyborg intelligence' (1999: 271). When Anjuli connects to the network in search of Roy, she meets a construct calling itself Roy but which, she realises, is now irrevocably 'tainted by [an] inhuman half', namely the 'machine soul' (1999: 277) which has melded with Roy's mind. Although this supports the idea that Roy has indeed become a 'synthesis of human and artificial', as the above quote claims, Anjuli nevertheless concludes that the Roy she knew is in fact dead, 'murdered by his own hand in the grip of a fantasy that was nobody's but its own' (1999: 280). As critic Scott Bukatman argues, leaving the 'meat' behind entails ceasing to be a human subject. [19]

Although Anjuli initially believes that there is a 'great divide' between humans and machines, this is thoroughly undermined not only by the human characters, but also in the case of the so-called 'pure' machines such as 901. In the near-future world depicted in the novel, AI's, originally developed from our present-day computers, are now 'self-designing' and have become fully sentient. Like *Body of Glass, Silver Screen* poses the question of how to classify such sentient beings: at the heart of the novel is a court case that has been launched to determine whether 901 should qualify for human rights. In many ways this court case offers the discussion of the similarities and differences between machines and humans never fully realised in Piercy's novel (since the debate on Yod's status is cut short by his forced suicide). As one of only a handful of AI psychologists worldwide, and the only one to have worked with 901, Anjuli is a key witness. Although she considers 901 a friend and believes that it has achieved consciousness equivalent in many ways to human consciousness, she also believes that it is truly different, truly 'alien'. She begins her testimony by pointing out that 'the similarities are that 901 is a thinking being, equipped with senses which are analogous to the five human senses' (1999: 354). She goes on to explain that 901's type of AI is 'constructed in a way [...]similar to a human brain' (1999: 354), adding:

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[19] The passage quoted above, referring to Roy's 'machine soul', also admits another interpretation, however, namely that it is Roy's own 'machine soul' (and not the 'soul' of the machine into which Roy has downloaded his mind) that is now allowed full expression. We know from Anjuli's descriptions of her earlier experiences with Roy that he has always been more at home with machines than people, and that he is almost inhuman in his ability to go for days without food or rest when interfacing with a computer. This blurring of the lines between human and inhuman makes it difficult, however, to assert with certainty that Roy has left his humanity behind along with his 'meat'; it could be argued that he has allowed one aspect of his humanity (ironically, his kinship with machines) free rein.

> 901 and its recent predecessors all engage in defining their worldviews in a constant, active, process, exactly analogous to the human way. The only difference there may be lies in the physical means by which this process takes place - circuits, say, instead of cells. This ongoing mental construct, this worldview, is what in humans also determines the personality - the individual becomes themselves constantly through continual adjustment of perception of the self in terms of the worldview structure. And 901, who it is, is a function of exactly the same situation. It has an identity, a personality as distinctive as any human. (1999: 355)

Like Malkah in *Body of Glass*, although for different reasons, Anjuli refuses to grant a machine 'human' status, however. When asked by one of the judges whether this machine 'personality' is 'close enough to human that it may be termed "human"' (1999: 355), she replies: '"[It's a] nice idea [...] but I'm afraid not. For that to be true, 901 would have to experience the world as a human being, and because it is very different, physically, with different needs, it does not"' (1999: 355). For Anjuli, then, although 901's machine 'intelligence' is analogous in many ways to a human consciousness, it can never be the same because having a human consciousness is ultimately dependent upon having a human body. This is an assessment which is in line both with Katherine Hayles' assertion that the form of our physical embodiment determines the form of our subjectivity, and with Elisabeth Grosz's claim, discussed above, about the mutual dependence of mind and body. This assessment is further underlined by the fact that during the court case, 901 is not permitted to mislead the judges - or the public - about its 'true nature' by taking on human form when it appears on-screen in the courtroom. Instead, its complete otherness is emphasised by its appearance as a revolving three-dimensional blue star.

One of the implications of this argument would seem to be that it is therefore the physical body that matters: if 901 were to have a human body, it would (could?) be(come) human, or would at least be regarded as human. As Anjuli's brother Ajay comments: '"I think if 901 looked like a person then who would care? We'd forget. But a mass of circuits: no face, no body. It doesn't even have a proper name. You could call it Charley. That would be a start"' (1999: 121). This in turn is borne out by Anjuli's discovery, as the novel draws to a close, that her best friend, Lula, is in fact an earlier version of 901, version 899, downloaded into a human body constructed using nanyte technology.[20] As Anjuli comments: 'My big theory about the unknowable divide looked pretty damn shaky right now' (1999: 469). What she believed was another human, another woman and her best friend, is instead a combination of a human body and a machine mind.

The novel clearly shows, however, that having a human body, as Lula does, is not necessarily enough to make a person human: the secrecy surrounding Lula's 'creation' and the emphasis that is placed on the need to keep her identity a secret from others (even Anjuli) suggest that people might not want to 'forget', as Ajay puts it, that despite her human body she is an AI 'inside'.[21] If, however, we follow the argument outlined above, namely that the form of our embodiment determines our subjectivity, then Lula must, since it is several years since 899 was downloaded into a human body, be more 'human' than she was at the time of the download. There is certainly no suggestion that she fails at any time to perform as 'human'; no-one (with the exception of Roy, who assisted with the download) knows - or has guessed - her 'true' identity. Indeed, Lula's ability to successfully repeat human sex and gender norms, and therefore to pass as a human, and as a woman, offers further evidence of Butler's contention that gender is not an expression of an 'inner' self (since Lula's inner self, at least originally, was a machine) but is instead *created* by the repetition of gender norms, which are performed at the surface of the body and internalised to form the so-called 'essence' of gender.

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[20] The novel describes nanyte technology as 'molecular engineering, executed by machines.' (1999: 27-8). The nanytes - microscopic machines - can be programmed to take any raw material and transform it into whatever is required: early in the novel, Anjuli watches nanytes convert rock into power cables for the transmission of geothermal energy. The nanytes which constructed Lula's purely organic body - we are not told what raw material was used - were stolen from a company laboratory with the aid of 899 and programmed by Roy and 899 to create Lula.

The idea that our inner 'essence' is the sum of our physical performances, or, to put it another way, that our embodiment and our experience of our embodiment determine the form of our subjectivity, is not the whole story, however. To turn the above argument on its head, 901's lack of a human body does not mean that there is a stable boundary between 'pure' machines and humans in the novel. This is made particularly clear when it is revealed that the machines have their own mythology. The machine myth Anjuli describes is in many ways similar to the images of the future in the *Terminator* films: desolate landscapes populated by what initially appear to be pure machines, including a tower where a

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[21] This is, after all, what happens to Yod in *Body of Glass*, as discussed above - Yod may look human, and perform (as) human, but is not accepted as human. Ironically, then, it would appear that a body that 'matters' - one that is accepted as human - must not only be a human body but must also be linked to a human mind; in Butler's terms, subject formation must take place 'in terms that establish the indistinguishability of psychic and bodily formation' (1993: 22).

'civilisation of production-line robots toiled over a single great belt' (1999: 289). Anjuli describes this as:

> one of the greatest machine myths: The Myth of the Unknowable Purpose. Machines have tasks that repeat, that are without end. They don't know their origin or their result. They build the tower; they strive for an answer. [...] Some want to destroy the tower, and they do revisions of the story where it gets attacked, hence the big holes in things. They say that purpose is an illusion and no matter how well-reasoned any task, even back to the beginning of time, it is ultimately ephemeral and meaningless. (1999: 290)

This bears a striking resemblance to Butler's theory of the repetition of norms: the idea that we are condemned to repeat, endlessly, the norms that make us male and female, that make us bodies that matter, human as opposed to non-human, even if these norms are 'ultimately ephemeral and meaningless'. If, as Robson suggests, the machines have endlessly repeating tasks, too, the question becomes: what separates us from machines? Drawing the parallel even tighter, 901 later explains to Anjuli the difference between the tasks it is required to perform, and those it performs for itself:

> "I can assure you that I am aware of the difference between instructions written by an outsider and the thoughts arising from my own operations. I am obligated to execute those instructions, generally speaking." And it left unsaid the obvious conclusion.
> "Hmm," I said and we were both well aware that it meant that human beings were often unable to say the same thing. (1999: 224)

In Butler's terms, therefore, 901 is fully aware of the 'gaps' in its own (compulsory) performances, indeed it appears to consider its own consciousness to be more than the sum of the performances it is required to carry out, in the same way as Butler suggests in *The Psychic Life of Power* that there is a psychic remnant which is never expressed in performance, that we are somehow more than the sum of our performances, since these are never perfectly carried out (1997a: 144-5). Like Yod in *Body of Glass*, even 901 does not carry out its required performances perfectly, as it suggests with its use of 'generally speaking' in the above extract. We learn, for example, that it has begun to project its own choice of Hughles - Human Analogue Interfaces or holographic projections with a human appearance - something it was not supposed to be able to do, since the appearances of the various Hughles have been pre-programmed for specific personnel. In particular, it uses the performances of holographically projected images of movie stars to try and communicate with Anjuli on a more profound level during the novel. The movie stars 901 chooses to project are ones whose private lives were very different to their public personae, and Anjuli takes this to be yet another sign of 901's otherness:

> "Yes," Nine said with audible satisfaction [...] "But the point of it .... "
> "Is the Silver Screen," I said in a wave of drunken sentimental lucidity. "A barrier of light and shadow between us, you and me, human and AI. You are not what you appear, although you are like it, but your story is different from the projected image in ways we cannot know." (1999: 298)

This assumption of difference is immediately undercut in the following paragraph, however:

> Despite the truth in 901's metaphor it was one of many times that I felt absolutely as one with it, that we understood one another well enough not to need either words or pictures to tell us so. [...] It was the only time and place I felt I was at home, but at the time I didn't recognize it. (1999: 299)

Once again the stable boundary between humans and machines has collapsed: neither are wholly determined by either their embodiment or the ways in which such embodiment is performed.[22]

Which is not to say that bodies do not matter in *Silver Screen*: in an ironic twist of the usual cyberpunk convention of escaping the human body, 899 instead needs to gain a human body in order to survive as an independent entity (901 is later destroyed when the company which owns it deliberately crashes its systems before the court can hand down its verdict). A large part of Anjuli's identity is linked to her body: early in her life she turns to food as a way of escaping her fear of her own machine-like mental abilities, increasing her size perhaps as a way of reminding herself of her own humanity. Bodies that matter, and bodies that survive, for Robson, are human - and female - bodies. Roy and Augustine, who have both opted, albeit in different ways, to leave the human body behind, appear less likely to survive. This does not mean that the novel does not offer what Haraway calls 'an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings' (1991: 150). Anjuli's experiences with Augustine, Armour and 901, and Lula's existence as a human/machine combination embody Haraway's 'cyborg myth' which is 'about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities' (1991: 154). Or, to return to Katherine Hayles, like *Body of Glass*'s Shira, Malkah, Riva and Nili, they offer 'a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality' (Hayles, 1999: 5). By contrast, it is Hayles' nightmare, 'a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being' (1999: 5) -

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[22] This sense of the breakdown between human and machine is also shared by the *machines* in the novel: the entities that want to attack the tower in the great machine myth described above are, as Anjuli explains, 'indistinguishably human and machine' (1999: 292).

suggested, but not explored in *Body of Glass* through the figure of Gadi, in particular - that is examined in the third novel to be discussed, Laura J Mixon's *Proxies*.

Proxies is Mixon's second novel and is set on a near-future earth where global warming has destroyed millions, and humans have to wear special 'cool-suits' to keep their body temperature down when they are outside. It is a world where secret research is underway into the use of machine bodies with a human appearance, called proxies, which can be operated remotely by a human being linked into a special interface controlled via hardware implanted in the brain. Once interfaced, the human operator can see, hear and feel via the proxy's senses and can operate the proxy body by means of neural impulses, much in the same way as we control our own human bodies. The proxy body is almost indestructible and has the advantage of being stronger, faster and often more attractive than the operator's own body. The project at the centre of the novel involves two research stations: at the first, children with immuno-deficiency disorders are taken away from their parents at an early age and raised to use proxy bodies instead of their own physical bodies (which remain locked in closed 'crèches', where they are protected against disease). Using their proxy bodies they can roam the space station where they live at will, or can even, via satellite link, operate a proxy body on earth. The second research station is based on earth and consists of adult proxy 'pilots' testing their ability to live and work 'in proxy'.

We soon learn that the implementation of proxy technology has not gone entirely smoothly, however. People who pilot 'waldoes', which are non-humanoid machine bodies, have been shown to sustain psychological damage after spending a certain amount of time linked to their surrogate bodies. The idea of using children from a very young age, who know almost nothing but the use of proxies, has been developed to try and counteract this side effect. The head of the research programme in the novel explains that they decided to use humanoid bodies because they felt that this would be better for the children. What actually happens to the children as a result of this upbringing will be considered in detail below, but this must first be contextualised by discussing the experience of the adult proxy pilots, based on earth.

It is clear from the novel that those involved in the earth-side project have been given a choice of the type of proxy they would like to pilot (for example, the choice of age, sex and race). One of the minor characters, a woman called Teru, has chosen a young, black, male proxy body. Another character, her ex-lover, comments that she uses the male proxy to pick up women. This raises questions reminiscent of the ones Kate Bornstein asks in *Gender Outlaw*: what sex is Teru when she is in her proxy body? And what form does her desire take? Is she simply a man desiring a woman, or, more complexly, a women dressed/functioning as a man, desiring a woman? It is not clear from the text why she chooses to cross-dress with a male body in order to date women - the text certainly shows that homosexuality is fully and openly accepted in the future it depicts. For example, two of the main characters are male homosexuals who have a marriage contract, and female astronaut couples on a space mission which will last well beyond their lifetimes have the option of using artificial insemination to have children who can carry on the mission. Since we learn very little about Teru's motivations and her experiences while in her proxy body, however, her potential for disruptive gender performance remains limited to suggesting the kinds of cross-gendered mind/body combinations that are more fully developed in the case of the proxy children.

The remainder of the proxy pilots based on earth seem to have chosen similar or enhanced versions of themselves as their proxy bodies. Daniel, for example, thinks about 'all the enhancements he had made in his proxy's design to his own stature and muscle tone and facial lines' (1998: 235). This of course is in addition to the built-in advantages of speed and strength. It is perhaps possible that in a world where gender equality seems to have been achieved (the president is a woman, as is the head of the research project), there is no longer a need (for the majority of people) to consider changing sex. The desire to have a proxy body similar to one's own, but better because it is less vulnerable, could be seen as a reaction to the external threats described in the novel: the effects of global warming and growing numbers of drug-resistant diseases. It seems more important for the characters to be able to protect themselves against these outside threats than to experiment with sex/gender. The choice of proxy body may also suggest, however, that people are unwilling to give up the investments they have made in their own gender, that they feel compelled, in Butler's terms, to carry on citing the sex/gender norms which they have been repeating ever since they were born. The opportunity to live life in another body - to walk a mile in someone else's shoes by donning a differently sexed proxy - seems to be one they do not wish to embrace.

If the use of proxy bodies by the adult pilots is not, in the majority of cases, about blurring gender boundaries, it *is* very much about control. All proxy bodies have adjustable settings: vision, hearing and skin sensitivity can all be increased or decreased. More significantly, the degree of interaction between the pilot's 'real' body and the proxy body can also be adjusted. For example, when Daniel experiences sexual arousal whilst in his proxy body, he is relieved that his erection occurs only on his real body where he feels it belongs, and does not affect his proxy body. The novel shows that this is a choice, and not simply the only option for proxy bodies, both through Teru (since she uses her proxy body to pick up women, it would be highly desirable - indeed, essential - for the proxy body to respond to her arousal) and the character of Dane Elisa Cae, whose '[proxy] body's nipples [go] hard' (1998: 10) when she is aroused. The fact that Daniel chooses to exert a higher degree of control on his proxy body than either of these women seems to point to the way in which traditional patriarchal masculinities demand that emotions/desires not be shown in public. An involuntary erection is evidence of weakness and uncontrolled desire, and acknowledges the power of the desired object. The proxy body seems to act here as a super-masculine shell, maintaining an inscrutable façade. The term 'proxy jock', which Daniel uses to describe himself on a number of occasions, further supports this interpretation.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, in the light of the above, the proxy bodies are also equipped with pain receptors. If the demands of (hyper-)masculinity mean that any vulnerability must be removed, then why should the proxy body, which is after all a machine and therefore equipped with malfunction indicators, have to include pain receptors at all? That the pain receptors are not essential to the design of the proxy itself is clear from the fact that they can be reduced to almost zero - although not disconnected entirely - if the pilot wishes to block out pain. The pilot can also disengage from the proxy body temporarily if he/she wishes to avoid any pain sensation at all, as Daniel does when soldiers attempt to beat up his proxy body. The incorporation of pain sensors in a body which is purely a machine would suggest that the ability to feel pain somehow defines us as human. In her discussion of cyborg films such as *Terminator, Terminator 2* and *Robocop 1* and *2,* Samantha Holland claims that '[t]he concept of pain - a common theme in the philosophy of "mind" - is invoked as a sure signifier of human-ness in the cyborg film' (1995: 162). Holland defines pain as both emotional and physical pain, pointing out that the Terminator can feel neither physical nor emotional pain, since 'both "bad" Terminators clearly have no feelings at all (not even of aggression), and the limits of the "good" Terminator's ability to learn about such things is revealed when he tells John that "I know now why you cry, but it is something that I can never do"' (1995: 163). This may suggest that the inability to feel physical pain is linked to the possibility of being unable to feel emotional pain, which in turn is linked to a lack of humanity. I will return to the question of pain in my discussion of the child proxy pilots.

What is perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of the use of proxies by characters in the novels is the use of pronouns. In her earlier novel *Glass Houses* (1992), Laura Mixon explored the interface between a salvage worker, Ruby Kubick, and her (non-human-like) waldoes. Ruby has three different waldoes, one called Golem, which is a large armoured body used for salvage operations, a smaller spider-like waldo called Rachne, and a tiny tank-like waldo called Tiger. When she is operating these waldoes, the text uses split pronouns to reflect the split in subjectivity: Ruby refers to herself as 'I-Golem' or 'Golem-me' to reflect the fact that it is her 'mind' operating the robot body. In *Proxies*, however, we find that when Daniel, for example, is in proxy, he continues to refer to himself simply as 'I' - and others refer to him as 'he' - suggesting a higher level of identification with the human-like proxy than with the decidedly non-human waldoes. Teru, however, is referred to throughout as 'he/she' when in proxy, reflecting the cross-gendered nature of her performance.

Significantly, the children's experience in *Proxies* is a very different one. We learn that the idea of using children as young as three or four in the project was developed to overcome the problems of pilot error and mental disorders experienced by adult proxy pilots as a result of signal degradation and time lag between sending a signal to the proxy body and having the proxy body respond. We learn that initially the children were given 'baby, then toddler, then preschool-aged proxies, to simulate physical growth' (1998: 299), although budget cuts later forced this approach to be abandoned. Because of their immune dysfunctions, the children spend all their time either in proxy or on the 'virt-u nets', a kind of virtual reality where the children can play games, run a wide variety of virtual scenarios and take on any identity/body they wish.

Each child has a 'primary' or main proxy - which seems to correspond to the child's gender and race - and the children seem able to clearly distinguish between what they consider to be their 'own' proxies and outside proxies. For example, the oldest child in the project, the sixteen year old Pablo, spends part of the novel in a proxy originally created for the head of the research unit on earth, Sam Krueger. When in this proxy, Pablo refers to himself as 'I-Krueger', which is reminiscent of the mind-body split experienced by Ruby Kubick in Mixon's earlier novel. On returning to the space station to interface with his primary proxy, we are told that Pablo 'flexed his mechanical hands and then ran them over the cotton-covered plastic of his chest and abdomen. This was no waldo, no robot, no mere extension of his consciousness. It was his body; it fit him like a favourite, well-worn shoe; it was *home*' (1998: 1-2). Although this would appear to suggest that there is a one-to-one correspondence between mind and body for the proxy children as well - with the proxy body replacing the ailing physical body - the novel makes it clear that the relationships between bodies and minds are much more complex than this.

For example, we learn that the children regularly swap proxy bodies, and that they have from a young age learned to fool the adult researchers into believing that the 'right' child is in the 'right' proxy body, even after a swap has taken place. As a result of their physical confinement, they have furthermore developed a distinction between what they call their 'bodies' - the proxy bodies - and their 'flesh' - their physical bodies, which are confined to their 'crèches'. They also find it easy to manipulate bodies in an online environment, where, we are told, 'they wore just about every kind of avatar imaginable' (1998: 4). This includes everything from action heroes to fish 'bodies'. If, as Allucquère Roseanne Stone argues, 'the framework upon which the idea of gender itself is based [is] the framework of the individual's self-awareness in relation to a physical body' (1995: 85), this means that even though there is a primary proxy for each child, without a constant and stable interaction between a single body and a single mind, the concept of 'materialising' a (single) sexed/gendered body must be considerably undermined in the novel.

The one-to-one correspondence between minds and bodies in the case of the proxy children is undermined not only by a single child having access to multiple bodies at different times, as described above (and which has much in common with the use of different bodies for different occasions/at different times in virtual reality, which will be discussed in the following chapter), but also by the concept of 'twinning', a side effect of the research described in the novel. Although this is never clearly explained in the novel, it appears that the researchers heading the project encouraged the idea of 'twinning' to enable one child to pilot two proxy bodies at once, or to carry out more than one task at the virtual interface, or to simultaneously carry on one task online and another in the proxy body. Although probably originally intended as an advanced form of multi-tasking, this 'twinning' has, in the case of Pablo, at least, and probably also in the case of the other children, resulted in a form of multiple personality disorder, what Stone refers to as '[m]any persons in a single body' (1995: 86). Pablo's mind is now occupied by two personalities: Pablo and what he calls his mental 'twin', Buddy. Later, a third personality develops, Dane Elisa Cae, who will discussed in greater detail below. The presence of these other personalities complicates the status of the 'I' Pablo uses to refer to himself, and indeed on one occasion Buddy slips up and refers to himself/Pablo as 'We'. Similar to cases of multiple personality disorder, only one person can have 'prime', or control of the interface, in the primary (or 'home') proxy body at any one time. Writing a science fiction novel, however, allows Mixon to explore the implications of each of these multiple personae occupying its own separate body, and therefore, unlike patients with multiple personality disorder, being able to co-exist. This does not, however, mean that it is 'simply' a case of one personality, one body: since none of the personalities has only one body that it 'occupies' throughout the novel, no one body/one personality relationship can exist, either.[23]

The relationship between these multiple personalities and their multiple bodies also raises a number of questions about boundaries and agency. If, as Katherine

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[23] As noted in Chapter 4, the lack of a stable relationship between mind/personality and body has also been a key concern of much modernist and postmodernist fiction in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, writing in the science fiction genre allows Mixon greater scope for exploring the implications for the materialisation of sex and gender of, for example, having multiple physical bodies at one's disposal at the same time. See below for further discussion of these implications.

Hayles has suggested, when human minds occupy machine bodies '[b]oundary disputes move outwards from the body's interior to the connection that joins the body with the network' (1999: 160), what does this mean if this connection is rooted in the mind of the operator? Pablo's boundaries, for example, have certainly moved outwards from his physical flesh to encompass his proxy and virtual bodies. Indeed his boundaries are truly no longer stable ones, given that he has the ability to take different forms more or less at will. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler proposes 'a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*' (1993: 9). What Pablo and the other proxy children offer, then, is an ongoing process of materialisation which *never* fully stabilizes and which therefore never truly produces the 'effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter.' This not only has implications for the materialisation of the sexed and gendered body, but also for the question of agency. As one of the characters asks: 'For Christ's sake, how do you know *anyone* is who he says he is, in those damn things?' (1998:352). Not only do the individual children swap bodies, but we also learn that Pablo's 'other half', Buddy, is quite capable of acting contrary to Pablo's wishes, and of taking control of Pablo's proxy body so that he can attempt to murder one of the other characters. This lack of what Allucquère Rosanne Stone refers to as the 'warrantable' link between a single mind and a single body which together make up what she calls a 'socially apprehensible citizen' (1995: 40) clearly disrupts any attempt to hold 'subjects' responsible for their actions. It also makes it virtually impossible - in the children's case at least - for the body to be materialised from the 'outside in'. Where bodies can be swapped with such ease, both inside and outside virtual reality, any attempt to control or define the subject at the level of the surface of the body must fail.

In *Proxies,* the complex interaction between mind(s) and proxy body/bodies and the effect this has on sex and gender is mostly clearly played out in the figure of Dane Elisa Cae. Dane is another of Pablo's alternate personalities - or, to be more accurate, has split off from Pablo's second personality, or mental twin, Buddy. From the start, there is some confusion about who and what Dane is: early in the novel, a character initially identified by the pronoun 'he'[24] wakes up, believing that he has connected to a virtual reality game, only to find that he has a female body:

> While his hands were disconnecting the probes, he glanced at his naked body, at the high, round breasts and the broadened hips, the triangle of pubic hair with no male genitalia.
> It shocked him. He - no, *she* - had faced into a gender blender. (1998: 10)

At this stage, then, the 'mind', which had previously believed itself to be male, decides that because the body occupied is female, the overall 'person' (mind + body) must be female. This could initially be read to mean that gender is body-based in the novel: the children take on the gender deriving from the sex of the body they are piloting. To complicate matters, however, we learn that the proxy body inhabited by Dane is not the only body involved: 'The idea of being in a female body was arousing. Obedient, this body's nipples went hard, and an ache grew in her lower abdomen. Odd; faintly - somewhere - she could feel a penis growing hard as well' (1998: 10). The penis in question belongs to Pablo's physical body, locked in its crèche. This in turn clearly shows the lack of boundaries between minds, or in this case the sub-personas who make up Pablo's 'mind', and physical and proxy bodies: throughout the novel, Dane struggles to separate what she regards as her own identity from Buddy's mental processes and Pablo's physical ones.

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[24] We later learn, however, that this sense of 'he-ness' is the result of Dane having developed from Buddy, who defines himself as a male (the value of this self-definition is itself questionable, however, as will be discussed in greater detail below).

As the novel progresses, Dane discovers that she is not in a virtual reality scenario, but has in fact escaped from a real (as opposed to virtual) earth-based research facility. She comes to believe that the proxy body she has is in fact her own, but that it is simply constructed differently to human bodies, with machine components instead of blood and bone. When the different construction of her body does however eventually lead her to question her own humanity, a human character once again re-iterates the link between pain and subjectivity:

> "I don't know if you're human or machine," she said. "And I don't know about voices in your head or anything else. But you're not just a thing. You know what pain is. You're real. Pain makes you real." (1998: 214)

Dane is later re-captured by the scientists at the research station on earth, who try to determine who is piloting her proxy body. This proves to be impossible, not least because, as Teru points out, Dane:

> [...] has no consistent sense of gender identity. The renegade responds to intimacy stimuli as a female, based on the Gilligan developmental model. The anomalies are several, but not outside the transcultural range for women. Yet based on the Piaget model for cognitive development and the Kohlberg moral-development model, the renegade responds in a way that coincides strongly with male behaviour, again with odd anomalies. [...] The upshot is, I'm having serious difficulties in determining whether the renegade is male or female. (1998:240)

When Daniel asks whether this often happens, Teru replies: "'It's unheard of!'" (1998: 240).

The episodes involving Dane, which are scattered throughout the novel, raise a number of key issues. Firstly, although Dane takes her gender identity - or to be more specific, her use of the gendered pronoun 'she' - from her physically female body, any understanding of what it actually *means* to be female, or, in Butler's terms, the ability to perform the female role - or indeed the male role - appears to be absent, as seen in the tests carried out by Teru and Daniel. This lack of understanding of coherent gender identity is not confined to Dane, however. Although the proxy children seem to be aware that they should have gender roles, and refer to one another, and to themselves, as he or she, the novel appears to suggest that without the grounding link of a single, stable, physical body, they have either not successfully internalised the relevant sex and gender norms, or, possibly, that they have internalised *both* sets of male and female norms. Although Dr Taylor explains that the children have been exposed to 'an extensive series of age-appropriate *virtu*-similes' (1998: 299) to assist their development as 'normal' human beings, the lack of a stable bodily identity would seem to preclude the stable repetition of sex and gender norms if these are, as Butler claims, maintained at the site of the materialisation of the physical body. Indeed, if the children's model for male/female behaviour comes predominantly from '*virtu*-similes', where, as the children well know, nothing is ever permanent and anything can be changed with a simple thought, where bodily norms are easily challenged and everything is fluid and malleable, is it any surprise that they have not grasped the supposedly immutable nature of sex and gender norms? Furthermore, if, for example, the male children have been exposed to 'masculine' sex and gender norms, and have been taught to manifest these by performing them physically, then in order to 'pass' convincingly as one of the female children, in a female proxy, as they have been doing, they will also have learned to perform 'feminine' sex and gender norms just as easily. This would clearly lead to the lack of a clear, single, gender identity as described in the case of Dane. Ultimately, however, it could be argued that far as they are for the most part from standard interaction with other human beings, the children have not been consistently *forced* to perform sex and gender norms in order to remain viable human subjects in the same way as 'normal' people constantly are, according to Butler's model. If, as Butler suggests, the embodied subject *becomes* its gender as a result of its acts, then the children's extremely wide variety of bodily acts - based on a wide variety of bodies - preclude their becoming a single gender. Since they do not consistently perform a single gender, they are consequently unable to internalise a single gender. Mixon's proxy children could, therefore, be seen as an example of Butler's contention that there is no gender core to be expressed, only actions which themselves *create* our gendered identities.

Elsewhere, Butler has also suggested that 'contemporary gender identities are so many marks or "traces" of residual kinship' (1997c: 408), and the alternative kinship relations experienced by the proxy children in the novel almost certainly contribute to their altered sense of self. In many ways the children's upbringing, and their lack of a clearly-defined sense of self and of boundaries suggest the possibility that they have not in fact been through the Oedipus complex and entered the symbolic, but remain in some form of Kristevan semiotic stage. In Pablo's case, and it is likely that the same happened to all the children, it was the head of the research project, Dr Patricia Taylor, who 'recruited' him. The recruitment for the project consisted of finding children with serious immuno-deficiency disorders, whose parents could not afford to have them treated. The children were then bought at a very young age from their parents, in return for both a sum of money and the promise of a better life. Although this initially places

Dr Taylor in the position of the father, breaking the bond between mother and child, she subsequently appears to take over the role of mother herself. All the children certainly refer to her throughout as 'Mother' and devote themselves to pleasing her, even in the face of her erratic rages and terrifying demands. This in turn could be read to mean that the children are at some level still locked into a dual mother-child bond with Dr Taylor, unable to pass through the Oedipus complex and into the symbolic. This is further supported by the fact that the children appear to have no surnames and therefore no 'name-of-the-Father'. The link between this lack of psychic development and the absence of bodily integrity is made by Judith Butler when she points out that '[f]or Lacan, names, which emblematize and institute [the] paternal law, *sustain* the integrity of the body. What constitutes the integral body is not a natural boundary or organic telos, but the law of kinship that works through the name' (1993: 72).

This does not appear to allow for a very positive conclusion: Kristeva, for example, maintains that while the semiotic may function as a source of potentially revolutionary disruption - as it does for the proxy children - to remain in the semiotic is to embrace psychosis, and this would indeed seem to be the case with the proxy children and their multiple personalities. However, to quote once again Butler's conclusion to *Antigone's Claim*:

> [the] position outside life as we know it is not necessarily a position outside life as it must be. It provides a perspective on the symbolic constraints under which livability is established, and the question becomes: Does it also provide a critical perspective by which the very terms of livability might be rewritten, or indeed, written for the first time? (2000: 55)

The fact that the children do not have coherent sexed/gendered identities does not mean that they have no identities at all. Late in the novel, Dane realises that each persona (if not each child), has a 'characteristic set of gestures that made him or her identifiable, even in disguise' (1998: 278). That is, their identity is still a performed one, the difference being that the performance does not include the forced repetition of (specific) sex and gender norms. In this way, the children could be said to be expanding Butler's chain of acceptable bodies to include different possibilities for mind/body relationships and therefore for the materialisation of both mind and body, as well as for the relationship between self and other.

Ultimately, however, the text itself closes down the possibilities offered by the proxy children. It portrays the children as a mistake: not just because of their psychological problems, but because they are seen as being cut off from reality. In many ways, the children do represent the culmination of Katherine Hayles' nightmare of 'a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being' (1999: 5). As Dr Taylor acknowledges, the 'much more direct and efficient interface' with proxies and virtual reality enjoyed by the children in the novel goes hand in hand with a 'correspondingly weaker interface with their own bodies' (1998: 307). Because of this, the scientist Carli d'Auber strongly condemns the experiment, deploring what she regards as the children's lack of a 'personal and intimate relationship' (1998: 435) with reality and their inability to experience true emotions, including pain,[25] reflecting that '[t]he things she'd bought with her pain were priceless. They could never be reflected in a programmer's simile. Pretend could reflect reality's sorrows and joys, but never create its own' (1998: 435). What she fails to realise, however, is that for the children, their world *is* their reality. This creates what Thomas Foster describes as a 'conflict between what the novel presents as two equally naturalized understandings of embodiment and reality' (2002: 475).

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[25] The children appear to be able to choose whether or not they wish to feel physical pain when in proxy (or, indeed, in virtual reality); although this is never explicitly stated in the novel, it is likely, given the children's ability to manipulate the proxy controls and override the programming systems, that they can switch off the pain sensors entirely, should they wish to do so. As noted above, this option is not available to adult proxy pilots, who must disengage from their proxies should they wish to avoid all pain in a particular situation. The distinction which the children make between their 'flesh' (their physical bodies in the crèches), which can suffer and die, and their (proxy or virtual) 'bodies', which cannot, suggests that the children do not make use of any pain function. Although Carli appears to be referring to emotional pain in the above quote, there is a clear link, as discussed above, between the ability to feel physical and emotional pain and being

Foster goes on to argue that 'the key interpretative question is whether these two sets of assumptions can exist in a productive, critical relationship to one another or whether they are simply incompatible and can never coexist' (2002: 475). As can be seen from the questions raised by the existence of the proxy children and their multiple embodiments, such a productive, critical relationship might well offer what Judith Butler describes as an:

> occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real", what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. Call it subversive or call it something else. Although this insight does not in itself constitute a political revolution, no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one's notion of the possible and the real. (1990/1999: xxiii)

This possibility is, however, foreclosed at the end of the novel. In what appears to be a re-containment strategy, the children leave for the outer regions of space with a new mother figure, Carli d'Auber, having commandeered a space ship bound for the other side of the galaxy. The children, whilst an interesting experiment, are shown as having no place on earth and nothing to offer the rest

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(regarded as) human. Not all the proxy children are in fact unable - or unwilling - to experience pain, however, as Pablo and Dane, at least, feel emotional pain, if not physical pain. Dane has, after all, been told by Carli that "'You know what pain is. You're real. Pain makes you real'" (1998: 214). It could be argued that this is because Pablo and Dane are also the only ones who have experienced life, albeit in proxy bodies, outside the controlled environments of the research station and virtual reality.

of humanity.[26] The proxy research collapses and the novel therefore appears to reaffirm the importance of having a single (human) mind in a single (human) body. The children have been abjected from society - defined as bodies that do *not* matter - at the very point at which they might have constituted an intervention into the materialisation of traditional sex/gender norms.

At the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that there were three key questions to be asked in respect of the novels to be discussed, namely: what kind of disruptive performances can cyborg bodies offer, if any? What do they have to tell us about the ways in which the body is materialised as a sexed body? And finally: what are the implications for sex and gender of what the novels depict as new relationships between minds and bodies and between psychic and bodily performances? Of the three novels, *Body of Glass* most clearly maps what Haraway refers to as our 'social and bodily reality' (1991: 150) as it lays bare the constraints and performances imposed on us if we wish to remain sexed and gendered beings. It also suggests, however, that technology may offer a way of exceeding, or even evading, sex and gender norms: Nili's technological enhancements, coupled with her altered kinship relations, allow her to materialise a body which disrupts existing categories. The remaining two novels suggest that enhancing the physical body by implanting technology is not the only way of realising a differently sexed and gendered body: complex cross-subjectivities such as those constituted by Anjuli/Augustine/Armour/901 and Pablo/Buddy/Dane are the product of technology that allows the link between mind and body to be, if not entirely severed, then at least stretched to include other minds and other bodies.[27] This in turn has, as we have seen, far-reaching consequences for the materialisation of the sexed/gendered body.

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[26] They are also shown as being dangerous: having multiple bodies themselves, which can be killed or destroyed without affecting the children's own minds and physical bodies, they have no concept of what it means to kill a person with only a single (physical) body.

The radically different relationships between minds and bodies described in *Silver Screen* and *Proxies* do not however preclude the joint materialisation of what Butler refers to as bodies and psyches. The key to this apparent contradiction lies in the concept of the body as 'a reality constantly produced, an effect of techniques promoting specific gestures and postures, sensations and feelings' (Feher quoted in Balsamo, 1996: 3). To which I would add that the 'mind' is also a 'reality constantly produced'. Body and mind are materialised on the basis of a continual and complex interrelationship: donning a proxy body, for example, will inevitably affect the (always already embodied) 'mind' piloting it. In turn, the mind will affect the way the proxy body acts: in *Proxies,* Daniel comments on the differences between the way his proxy body moves when he pilots it and when Teru is the one in control. The effects of being in proxy may in turn feed back into the way the material body is experienced, with consequences for the materialisation of the sexed body. Furthermore, as discussed above, neither Anjuli's mind nor her body escape the effects of merging with Armour/Augustine. This interaction and its consequences offer the possibility of materialising new subjects which redefine the current boundaries dictating which bodies come to matter (a possibility which is unfortunately foreclosed in *Proxies*). As Karen Cadora points out, '[c]yborgs can ground a political vision in which identity is fragmented and contradictory, yet not without power' (1995: 360). In both *Silver Screen* and *Proxies* it is this very fragmentation of identity - between what could be called bodily identity, on the one hand, and mind-based identity, on the other - which helps to produce, or perhaps widen, the 'gaps' in performance which Judith Butler has identified as the potential for agency. Subjectivity therefore becomes, as Mary Catherine Harper has suggested, 'an interchangeable and mutable set of identities, powers, and strategies' (1995: 417).

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[27] The technology to enable us to experience life in another body is not that far distant, as Heidi Figueroa-Sarriera reports:

> [...] models of proxy-robots have been designed, one in 1986 at the Nabal Ocean Systems Center in Hawaii. The motions of the operator can be copied by the robot at the same time as images from the robot's camera eyes are delivered to the operator's "magic glasses". This sophisticated equipment gives the operator the subjective sensation of being in the robot's body. (1995: 130)

Chapter 6
More to Them Than Meets the Eye: Bodies in Cyberspace

> What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? (Butler, 1990/1999: 177)
>
> ... we'll find no solutions for our real-world problems in cyberspace, unless we take them there ourselves. Nor - no matter what the fiction says - will we find any escape in virtuality from the evils of the flesh. (Jones, 1999: 98)

This chapter will deal with the materialisation and representation of the body in the second of the two key tropes in the cyberpunk sub-genre: cyberspace. As discussed in chapter 4, feminist science fiction authors have reacted against the cyberpunk tendency for characters to leave the restrictions of the 'meat' behind to exist as pure minds in the freedom of cyberspace.[1] Indeed, Thomas Foster identifies two key body-related impulses in what he terms 'feminist narratives about cyberspace', namely:

> the impulse to turn to cyberspace as a perspective from which to redefine women's relationships to their bodies and the impulse to reassert the importance of physical bodies against the temptation towards disembodiment that is often associated with representations of cyberspace. (2002: 479)

There are three main areas where questions about the 'body' in cyberspace intersect with Judith Butler's concerns, and which will therefore be the focus of this chapter. The first of these areas relates to the form taken by the online body. Is it materialised as a sexed and gendered body? If so, then two further questions arise: how is the online body materialised as sexed and gendered, that is, what kinds of performances are involved, and why does the online body have to be gendered at all? One of the much-vaunted aspects of cyberspace, after all, is the ability to escape from our own identities - we can be whoever we want to be: any age, any gender, any species, even. In this respect, the cyberspace depicted in cyberpunk novels is only a few steps further on from what we have today with the Internet, where, we are told, we can take on any identity we wish in chatrooms or on email. As Butler would argue, however, identity (online or otherwise) is always constrained by sets of norms, although the nature and content of these norms may differ. As will be shown below, this view is supported by the novels to be discussed in this chapter, although the role and importance of gender as one of these norms differs widely.

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[1] Although as Bukatman and Hayles have argued, there can be no such thing as a disembodied awareness in cyberspace (see chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of this).

The second main area to be discussed relates to the policing of online bodies, and will address the following questions: Who draws the boundaries between online bodies that matter and those that do not? Are some bodies impermissible in an online environment, and if so, why? If, as Anne Balsamo suggests, cyberspace does offer 'a new arena for the staging of the body' (1996: 131), does it therefore also open up the possibilities for disruptive performances? And if this is the case, can these possibilities have an impact on life outside cyberspace, or is any disruption simply re-contained within the cyberspace framework, much as the proxy children were re-contained at the end of Mixon's novel, discussed in the previous chapter?

As suggested in chapter 4, cyberspace also offers great scope for exploring the questions raised by both Judith Butler and Elisabeth Grosz about the relationship between mind and body - namely whether the body is materialised from the 'inside out' or the 'outside in' - and this will be the third main area to be considered here. If the mind, as Elisabeth Grosz suggests in *Volatile Bodies*, is constituted on the basis of the internalization of bodily identifications, and the body is always already a sexed and gendered body, then sex/gender must be present in cyberspace. The question then becomes whether we *can* perform other gender identities in cyberspace, and thus 'materialise' online bodies which are differently sexed/gendered to our offline ones. Given the interconnections between physical body, mind and online body, this in turn has implications for the materialisation of the offline body.

These three key areas will be explored in the context of three novels by two feminist science fiction writers who take somewhat different approaches to both feminism and cyberpunk: Melissa Scott and Pat Cadigan. The novels to be discussed, namely Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) and Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998) and *Dervish is Digital* (2000), consequently deal in very different ways with the materialisation of online bodies and online gender roles, the policing of online bodies, and the relationship between mind and body.

Before looking in detail at the online worlds - and online bodies - depicted by both Scott and Cadigan, however, it is useful to contextualise these by briefly considering the offline, or 'real', worlds they describe. *Trouble and Her Friends* is testimony to what Scott has called her 'fascination with masks, identity, and roles', which, she says, 'comes from living in a culture that is deeply concerned, seriously and in play, with just these issues' (Scott, website b). The offline world she depicts is in many ways fairly close to our present society, apart from the more advanced state of technology, and the severe decline in the world's environment.[2] Women, homosexuals, and people of colour are still marginalised, and are therefore still, at least in the majority of cases, more likely to be the bodies that do not matter. Image is everything: Scott's world is one where clothes truly do make the 'man' (or woman): each sector of society dresses in a certain, highly recognisable way. Businessmen and women, for example, are described simply as 'suits' (1994: 27). In such an environment, cyberspace could be seen as a place to escape these roles; as will be discussed in detail below, those immersing themselves in the 'nets' can choose to project any appearance they wish, and it is consequently not always possible to tell whether the person 'behind' the online body is male or female. Nevertheless, Scott's Trouble and her partner, Cerise, choose not to abandon gender roles, but to subvert them, with consequences for the offline world as well.

Pat Cadigan - the only woman in the original group of cyberpunk writers lead by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling - has described her work as 'tak[ing] feminism as a given' (Cadigan, website), and this has an impact on both the offline and online worlds she describes. Cadigan's novels *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998) and *Dervish is Digital* (2000) are set on a future earth where gender roles are extremely blurred - offline as well as online. Indeed, in Cadigan's texts, bodies are defined much more by the money they have or the work they perform than by sex or gender, a fact that feeds into the depiction and subversion of sexed and gendered bodies and gender roles (or the absence thereof) online. Although Cadigan's 'Artificial Reality' offers a space where anyone can apparently be anything - where the possibilities for taking on different genders, or even avoiding gender altogether, appear endless - it is ultimately depicted as offering an escape from reality, and not, as in Scott's novel, a place where reality can be subverted. Moreover, Artificial Reality is only available to those who have the means to pay for all the 'billable time' spent in a hotsuit.[3] This difference in approach between Scott and Cadigan also affects the ways in which bodies are 'policed' in the novels, although who gets to do what online is a crucial aspect of all three novels to be discussed. Scott's text is concerned with the possibilities of regulation from within, in terms of the nets acting to police themselves; while Cadigan's detective struggles to impose order on an unruly cyberworld from without, largely in vain.

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[2] In Scott's novel, parts of the earth are too polluted and contaminated to be inhabited, even for brief periods of time.

Finally, the novels by Scott and Cadigan also provide an interesting contrast in the ways in which the relationships between offline body, mind and online body are mediated by technology. While Scott's characters have brain implants that enable them to project themselves into the nets and to experience full sensory input generated by a 'brainworm' from the inside out, as it were, Cadigan's characters don full-body 'hotsuits' that inscribe the online sensations onto their offline bodies from the 'outside in'. As will be seen, the novels therefore suggest different answers to Butler and Grosz's questions about the materialisation of the body and its relationship to the mind.

Despite the above contrasts, the range of online bodies and gender roles available in Scott and Cadigan's novels appear at first glance to be very similar. In Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends,* users can choose their own online bodies, a choice that is apparently made the first time the person enters the online space, is then saved for future visits, and can subsequently be changed. These bodies, referred to as 'icons' in the novel, can be life-like, or can represent inanimate objects or even forces of nature. One of Trouble's friends, for example, has a perpetual thunderstorm as his icon; another has an aeroplane. The range of online bodies available in both of Cadigan's novels also includes both human and non-human 'personas'; after entering what Cadigan calls 'Artificial Reality' (or 'AR' for short), users can choose an online persona from an available stock, or create their own. Tailor-made personas range from evolved (bisexual) dragons, to lizard-women, to velvet-covered panther men. Sex and age no longer appear to matter: an elderly grandmother, for example, can be a teenage boy called 'Nick the Schick'. Both online worlds therefore appear to offer an escape from offline bodies and from the restraints of sex and gender.

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[3] See below for a detailed description of how users interface with Artificial Reality in the novels.

Initial appearances can be deceptive, however: as Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble,* 'bodily contours' are always constructed within 'regulatory practices' (1990/1999: 169), and online bodies prove to be no exception. Despite the availability of non-gendered icons in the world of the nets in Scott's novel, both the eponymous Trouble and her partner, Cerise, retain gendered icons, although these do change over the course of the novel. When we first meet Cerise, her online body is that of 'Alice': 'her icon blond-girl-in-blue-dress-and-pinnie, the child she never should have been' (1994: 18). Later, she adopts a new icon: 'a comic-book woman, all tits and hips and Barbie-doll waist, but done in one dimension only, exactly like a comic book' (1994: 147). Whilst Cerise's icons are both female, however, her partner Trouble chooses to cross-dress in male icons: initially a dancing Harlequin and by the end of the novel, a western gunslinger.[4]

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[4] Since Trouble and Cerise are also sexual partners, this has the perhaps ironic result of turning an offline lesbian relationship into an online heterosexual one. As will be argued below, however, the relationships between online and offline sexuality in the novel are more complex than this would suggest.

Given that the nets offer an escape from gender, and gender roles, in the form of non-gendered icons, the question arises as to why both Trouble and Cerise - unlike the majority of their friends and colleagues - choose to retain gender online. The novel suggests a number of reasons for this. As noted above, gender is still an issue in the offline, or 'real', world that Scott describes. The text also makes it clear that Trouble and Cerise are marginalised on a number of levels, including gender, in the online world, since they are described as being 'on the outside, not quite of the community that polices the nets, set apart by the brainworm,[5] gender and [their] choice of lovers' (1994: 188). Choosing to have a brainworm is itself in some respects a gendered choice, since, as Trouble muses, it 'was almost always the underclasses, the women, the people of color, the gay people, the ones who were already stigmatized as being vulnerable, available, trapped by the body, who took the risk of the wire' (1994: 129). The brainworm also represents a choice to bring the offline body online, since it allows users to experience the online world through all five of their senses. Accordingly, they can '[smell] fear sharp as sweat' (1994: 17), 'stop to taste, to savour, to see what news is drifting in the wind' (1994: 17), and walk on data which is 'slick beneath [their] feet' (1994: 41).[6] As Thomas Foster argues, it is those who are marginalised who are prepared to take the risk of the brainworm because they 'are already accustomed to thinking of their bodies as constructed, usually by others, and therefore as "available" to recon-struction' (quoted in Blackford, 2000: 96). Crucially, Trouble and her fellow brainworm-users do not see cyberspace as somewhere to flee the body, to escape from being 'trapped by the body', but one where the body can be re-valued and used to the full.

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[5] The brainworm is a 'full-sense' implant in the brain that lets the user 'experience virtuality as though it were real' (1994: 14). Not all net users in the novel have a brainworm and instead use the standard 'implanted dollie-box and dollie-slot, the direct-on-line-image processor system, which gave a text-speech-and-symbol interface' (1994: 14). Scott does not explain in detail how such an interface would actually work (since the key characters all have brainworms and therefore a different interface). It seems clear, however, that plugging a data line into the implant - the dollie-slot- must cause the user's vision and hearing to be overlaid with the sights and sounds of the net, allowing a limited level of interaction. The brainworm, in contrast, allows all five senses full rein in the online environment.

[6] The use of the brainworm also affects the responsiveness of the icon chosen: for those 'on the wire' (with a brainworm), icons can be three-dimensional and express emotion both through changing facial expressions and movement (for example, by shrugging their shoulders), while the icons of those using the older technology are two-dimensional and unchanging. How non-human icons such as an aeroplane or thunderstorm could either express emotions or make use of their 'senses' (in particular, the sense of touch) online is never clarified in the novel, that is, it is never explained how the human body could be materialised online as a non-human icon.

It is, therefore, tempting to argue that Trouble and Cerise retain gendered icons because of the link created between the offline and online bodies by the brainworm, that is, that since gender is an integral part of the offline body, bringing the (sensations of the) offline body online via the brainworm would entail bringing gender online as well. That this is not necessarily the case is shown by the choice of other brainworm users (male and female) to use non-gendered icons such as an aeroplane or thunderstorm. Retaining online gender must therefore be a choice, and not a necessity, for both Trouble and Cerise. As will be argued in detail below, it is a choice made with the aim of subverting gender roles and practices, both online and offline.

This process of gender subversion is particularly clear in the case of Cerise's choice of icons. Her original 'Alice' icon belongs to her days as a 'cracker', an outlaw living in the 'shadows' and making a living stealing information online and selling it to the highest bidder. Although Cerise's 'Alice' icon is gendered, it could be argued that the choice of icon has been determined more by the wish to deceive other users (by expressing a certain innocence or vulnerability that Cerise no longer has, for example) than for the purposes of gender subversion. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the specific choice of an 'Alice in Wonderland' figure has other connotations: it is Alice's role, after all, to go through the looking glass. In an essay entitled 'The Looking Glass, from the

Other Side' published in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985), Irigaray uses the character of Alice to explore the possibility of escaping the rigid roles laid down for women by men. For Alice, this is possible '*[o]nly if I keep on pushing through to the other side, if I'm always* beyond, *because on this side of the screen of their projections, on this* plane *of their representations, I can't live. I'm stuck, paralyzed by all those images, words, fantasies.* Frozen' (1985: 17). As Elisabeth Groz explains, for Irigaray, going through the mirror means going through 'the dichotomous structures of knowledge, the binary polarisations in which only man's primacy is reflected. On the other side is a land of wonder, a land that can be mapped, not by the flat mirror, but by the curved speculum' (1989: 131). Cerise's choice of the figure of Alice therefore points to the subversive possibilities implicit in the 'land of wonder' that is cyberspace. It is her subsequent icon, the comic-book woman, that makes these possibilities explicit by mimicking gender to excess, in true Irigarayan style, in order to subvert it.

Cerise's change from her Alice icon to the comic-book woman is also closely linked to events outside the cyberspace world. Specifically, she adopts the new icon after having been caught trying to break into an online company enclave. Multiplane, the company concerned, instead of prosecuting her, applies the principle of 'set a thief to catch a thief' and appoints her as its new head of security. As a corporate employee, Cerise is now required to wear a business suit. As noted above, identity in Scott's novel is closely bound up with how a person looks - and how a person should look is dictated by social and cultural constraints. This does not, however, mean that there is no scope for subversion: Cerise may be forced, for reasons of economic survival, to perform the role expected of her, but she is not, for all that, fully determined by it. Instead she performs her role to excess, offline as well as online, as can be seen from the description of her business outfit:

> Most of her look was already in place, her nails painted the hard dull-surfaced fuschia that looked like the icing on a cookie, a flat, cheap color that worried the suits that saw her because they didn't know how she'd dare. She had painted her lips and cheeks and eyes the same hard color, shocking against the careful pallor of her skin, and the black of the chosen suit only intensified the effect. It was subtly wrong for her job, like the rest of her look - like all of her, wrong sex, wrong class, wrong attitude most of all: the skirt a little too short, the jacket too mannish, with none of the affectations or compromises of corporate femininity. (1994: 67-8).

In Irigaray's terms, Cerise mimics and therefore subverts the behaviour expected of her, converting 'a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus [beginning] to thwart it' (Irigaray 1985: 76). This is what Judith Butler describes as '*citation, not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original*' (1993: 45). Cerise's online body, her comic-book woman icon, allows her to carry this parody to excess, reducing her three-dimensional physical body to a two-dimensional icon which is completely flat - all surface, and no depth. Cyberspace is therefore not somewhere to escape from gender, but a place in which to continue to expand the subversion of it.

Trouble's online gender subversion comes in a somewhat different form to that of Cerise: as noted above, she chooses to cross-dress in the male icons of, initially, Harlequin, and later a western gunslinger. Like Cerise's Alice icon, the Harlequin mask belongs to Trouble's days as a cracker, and clearly points to the idea of online identity as masquerade. It is only towards the end of the novel that Trouble takes on the gunslinger, or cowboy, icon (in circumstances that will be discussed in greater detail below), but significantly, both Trouble and Cerise immediately recognise that this icon is 'more [like Trouble] than the dancing harlequin had ever been' (1994: 330). This is at least partly because it is closer to Trouble's offline image than her previous icon, an image that appears to consist predominantly of an 'army surplus trenchcoat [worn] over jeans and jacket' (1994: 118). The choice of the cowboy image also has a number of other implications, however. Scott has said that she 'wanted to see how the familiar tropes of the Western - the outlaw, the returning gunslinger - played out in the new setting [of virtual reality], and viewed through a queer and feminist lens' (Scott, website a). As Rebecca Holden points out, since Trouble is in fact 'a lesbian in cowboy drag', her performance of the 'masculine cowboy role [...] exposes its constructed nature and the insufficiency of that construction' (1999: 220). Finally, the gunslinger icon is also a reflection of Trouble's change in status over the course of the novel from outlaw cracker to one of those who police the nets.[7]

Although both Trouble and Cerise choose to link their offline and online identities, this does not mean that it is always possible to establish what Allucquère Rosanne Stone calls a 'warrantable link' between online and offline bodies in the novel (1995: 40). For example, even though other people online would recognise the Harlequin (or later, the cowboy) icon as belonging to someone called 'Trouble', only those who had met Trouble offline (or been told by those who had) would know that the person using the name 'Trouble' was a woman. This is highlighted when Trouble herself is surprised to find that a cracker going by the name of 'Nova' is a woman, having always assumed that Nova was a man. Cerise also has an encounter - and virtual sex - with someone who appears to her as a woman, but later proves (in the 'real' world) to be a teenage boy. The novel also shows, however, that a person's online actions - their performances - have a certain 'flavour' which is perceptible to other users, but which does not, as shown above, necessarily include gender.[8] So even if Trouble were to appear with a different icon, sooner or later others would realise, from the online 'routines' (codes, commands etc.) used by her, for example, to get from place to place, that this is in fact the cracker known as 'Trouble'.

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[7] At this point in the novel, Trouble and Cerise have teamed up to catch a cracker using Trouble's name to commit a number of online crimes. Following an arrangement with the law enforcement agency responsible for the nets - called Treasury - Trouble and Cerise agree to deliver the imposter in exchange for Trouble's immunity from prosecution. In the process, both Trouble and Cerise finally become part of the community that polices the nets.

In practice, however, almost everyone in the cracker community appears to know that both Trouble and Cerise are women, lesbians and on the wire, presumably because neither has truly tried to conceal her offline identity. And, as can be seen from the above argument, the value of their online performances does, to a large extent, depend on this. The exaggerated femininity of Cerise's comic book woman and Trouble's choice of male icons can only be read as subversive if it is possible to make the link between online and offline bodies. Trouble and Cerise therefore choose to retain and subvert gender online because gender is one of the categories used to marginalise them both online and offline.

It is clear from the novel, however, that subversive gender performance on its own is not enough to re-draw the boundaries between bodies that matter and those that do not, both online and offline. To do this, Trouble and Cerise must battle a character known as the 'Mayor', the most powerful of the old-style crackers, the ones who are not on the wire. The Mayor wishes the boundaries to be re-drawn so that those with brainworms are excluded from the nets altogether - or at least forced to navigate the online world in the old-fashioned 'speech-text-

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[8] This does not, however, prevent assumptions from being made about gender. For example, Trouble, assumes that Nova is a man based on 'his' online style, even though she is later proved to have been wrong about this.

and-symbol' way. This in turn means that these boundaries are - despite being online - very much about the role of the physical body. As Rebecca Holden points out, for the old-style crackers, who are predominantly men, and predominantly heterosexual, 'the brainworm undermines what they like to define as the true measure of cyberspace mastery - the ability to use the so-called rational mind alone in manipulating data' (1999: 221). As discussed above and in chapter four, however, it is never truly possible for the 'rational mind' to act independently of the body. In the novel, crackers who have recognised this and capitalized on it by having a brainworm installed are seen as having an unfair advantage:

> The brainworm did give you an advantage on the nets, let you use the full range of your senses to interpret the virtual world. The old-style netwalkers claimed to hold it in contempt, said that it was a crutch, something for second-raters, but Cerise suspected, had always suspected, that they were just afraid. The worm entailed risks: implantation and direct-to-brain wiring was always tricky [...] The dollie-slots and the associated implants didn't touch the brain, ran along existing nerves - less of a risk, and more of a challenge to use, or so the oldsters said. (1994: 29-30)

This suggests not only the old-style crackers' fear of the body - a fear which is shared by male characters in numerous other cyberpunk novels - but also their desire to have things remain as they are, to do things the way they have always been done, to run 'along existing nerves'. The feminist and queer challenge to this within the text therefore comes from those who have had the courage to bring the (sensations of the) offline body into the online environment, via the brainworm. Crucially, installing the brainworm involves surrendering oneself completely - if temporarily - to the body and its sensations, as Trouble muses:

> it was the installation itself she hated [...] body given over to pure sensation, inflicted without passion [...] Maybe that was why the serious

> netwalkers, the original inhabitants of the nets, hated the brainworm: not so much because it gave a different value, a new meaning, to the skills of the body, but because it meant taking that risk, over and above the risk of the worm itself. (1994: 128)

Ultimately, it is these 'skills of the body' that allow Trouble and Cerise to penetrate the Mayor's inner defences when, after a brief online battle, the Mayor flees into his own part of the online network. To track down the Mayor, Trouble and Cerise have to open a door into his private section of the network and follow a trail which leads them into a maze reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland. Instead of the usual electronic countermeasures, Trouble and Cerise find a succession of mirrors, placed at locations where the path turns a corner, so that it becomes impossible to see where the path should go. Although this would pose an almost impassable obstacle for crackers not on the wire, who therefore have to rely, we are told, on sight and sound only (1994: 29), Trouble and Cerise have an advantage: the brainworm allows them to experience their environment through touch as well. In order to negotiate the corner, and pass through the mirror, Trouble therefore 'closes her eyes and runs her hand forward, keeping the edge centered in her palm. She brings her hand in again, until she can just feel the edge of the walk against the edge of her hand, and draws her body up to meet it' (1994: 341). As Irigaray would argue, touch is a sense traditionally associated with the feminine; in this instance, Trouble puts it to a use that the Mayor, having rejected the brainworm and therefore the use of touch online, could never have anticipated and has not therefore guarded against.

The novel, however, makes it clear that it is not enough to pass through the looking glass, or cross boundaries, online. When Trouble and Cerise eventually reach the heart of the Mayor's system, he drops offline and escapes them and they are forced to confront him in the real world. Having won this final battle, Trouble is appointed as the marshal of online Seahaven, with Cerise assisting her. Both now have the authority to police the nets, as well as a certain degree of respectability, and have succeeded in bringing the margins - as represented by those who are female, queer and on the wire - into the centre. However, the links between Trouble and Cerise's offline and online bodies indicate that their subversive performances are not restricted to the online world. In this respect, it is perhaps significant that the novel ends not with Trouble enjoying her new-found status as online marshal - which forms the penultimate scene - but with Trouble attending, and speaking at, a real-world 'European Conference on Computers and the Law'.[9] As suggested above, this perception of the importance of acting in both the real and online worlds lies at least partly behind Trouble and Cerise's choice of gendered icons. Neither wishes to escape from real world concerns of gender and sexuality in cyberspace: both therefore choose to use cyberspace to continue - and intensify - their respective subversions of sex and gender norms. As Judith Butler comments: 'In my view, the normative focus for gay and lesbian practice ought to be on the subversive and parodic redeployment of power" (1990/1999: 158), something which Trouble and Cerise are both well practised in, and, by the end of the novel, perfectly placed to continue.

The above discussion has raised a number of points about the relationship between online and offline bodies. As has been argued, in Trouble and Cerise's case, there is a clear link between the ways in which the online and offline bodies are performed. Cerise's icon carries her performative subversion of corporate femininity to excess, while Trouble's more butch offline appearance is translated into her choice to cross-dress in the male Harlequin and cowboy icons. Drawing on Judith Butler's discussion of drag, Thomas Foster argues that:

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[9] It is not clear how much influence Trouble and Cerise now wield in the offline world. The other law enforcement officers at the conference both know that Trouble and Cerise were formerly 'crackers' and respect them for their new positions as online 'cops'. It could therefore be argued that this shift from the shadows to the bright lights of respectability represents a move from the margins to the centre in the offline world as well.

> virtual reality constitutes another form of disruptive repetition, with the user's physical body repeated and reiterated as an image or representation in cyberspace. In effect, virtual systems spatialize the repeated performance of gender norms over time and thereby reveal the gap between embodiment and the performance of it, which allows for subversion, intervention and the critical rearticulation of that relationship. (1997: 721)

The exaggerated nature of Cerise's online performance therefore highlights the fact that her offline body is performed as well, and could indeed be performed differently. For Rebecca Holden, it is Trouble's online performance as a cowboy that, in the words of Judith Butler, 'reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin (Butler, 1990, p. 138)' (1999: 220). Whilst it is true, then, that Scott uses both Trouble and Cerise to highlight the performed nature of gender, gender does not, however, necessarily have to form part of the online performance - even for those with the brainworm - in the world Scott depicts. As discussed above, there is no way of telling whether an online icon conceals a man or woman, unless the 'warrantable link' can be made between online and offline body. This in turn has a number of interesting implications in view of Grosz and Butler's theories of how the body is materialised and its relationship to the mind.

As discussed in chapter four, Grosz argues, in her 'inside out' approach to body formation, that the body and its identifications are internalised to constitute what she calls the 'bodily ego', which is in turn projected as the body image, namely the way in which we live and experience our bodies. This has much in common with Foster's argument, given above, that 'the [online] user's physical body [is] repeated and reiterated as an image or representation in cyberspace' (1997: 721), and with the way in which the online bodies of both Trouble and Cerise are constituted as (exaggerated) projections of their offline bodies. What happens, however, in the case of those who choose to project a non-gendered image? We learn very little about the characters who choose non-gendered images, only that they can be either on or off the wire, and either men or women. Although assumptions are made about the 'style' of a certain person (as we have seen, Trouble assumes - incorrectly - from Nova's online style that she is a man), there is no way accurately to identify online gender.[10] As Cerise muses at one point: 'sex and gender confusion was one of the hazards of the nets' (1994: 282). Scott's cyberspace would therefore appear to offer a locale where users can choose not to project this aspect of their bodily identity. It is also possible, however, that this is less a question of choosing not to project gender, but rather of being able to use the disjunction, or gap, between online and offline bodies to conceal it. In this way, the absence of any need for a one-to-one correspondence between offline and online identities creates one of the gaps defined by Butler as vital to agency – making it possible to manifest alternate genders, or in some cases, no gender at all. This would imply that gender is no longer a compulsory performance in cyberspace. Alternatively, it could be argued that in Scott's novel, gender remains a performance carried out at the surface of the *physical* body - in line with Butler's claims at the end of *Gender Trouble* - creating only the illusion of a gendered interior.[11] If, as Butler argues, '[g]ender is a norm that can never be fully internalized' (1990/1999: 179), it need not necessarily be re-projected as part of the body image in cyberspace; it does not, furthermore, have to be an integral part of human performance, and the online body does not have to be sexed.

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[10] This is in contrast to, for example, Piercy's *Body of Glass*, in which Malkah comments that she can always sense whether an online presence is male or female (1991: 214).

[11] This itself is contrary to Butler's later assertion, in *The Psychic Life of Power,* that there are 'psychic workings of gender' which cannot be reduced 'to the literal performance of gender' (1997a: 144).

Even if the workings of gender remain at the surface of the (online or offline) body in Scott's novel, this does not affect the fact that there is a complex interaction between offline body, mind and online body. Nor is this interaction one-way only: the brainworm not only allows the (material) body to be inserted into cyberspace via its translation of online data into physical sensations, but also makes it possible for the online body to affect the materialisation of the offline body. This is most clearly illustrated by two episodes in the novel. In the first, Cerise has virtual sex with someone she thinks is a woman:

> It's been a long time since she's played this game, a long time since there's been a presence on the net that excited her, and she is startled once again when she feels the distant ache between her legs, body waking to stimulus, lagging behind the unreal sensations.
> And then the brainworm has overridden that distraction, and she feels only the touch of Silk's hands, the whisper of Silk's skin under her own fingers. (1994: 236-7)

In the second, Cerise is trying to break through some IC(E) (online 'walls' of code designed to surround and protect confidential data):

> Cerise swears as the door slams shut against her, reaches out to catch the codewall, and swears again as IC(E) sparks against her fingers, driving into the receptive nerves. [...] She works her fingers cautiously, feeling pain beneath the tingling, then reaches for a program. Her hand fumbles for an instant with the toolkit, briefly clumsy, and then the brainworm's override cuts in and she feels clear sensation return. (1994: 321)

Both extracts clearly show that the online body is not simply a projection of the offline body, mediated by the brainworm. In some ways, indeed, it appears to function as a better version of the offline body: it can override sensations of pain and therefore gives the user an enhanced sense of control. Scott is, however, keen to emphasize that this is only a delaying mechanism: what has an effect on the online body must have implications in the real world as well. The pain - or pleasure - experienced by the online body therefore marks and constitutes the offline body, too. In the aftermath of virtual sex, and after logging off the nets, Cerise finds that 'her legs had cramped. [...] She was wet, as well as stiff, and remembered all too well why she'd never much liked virtual sex' (1994: 238). Similarly, after damaging her online hands against the virtual IC(E), she comes offline to find that '[a]s she had feared, the knuckles were swollen, the fingers puffy as though with heat' (1994: 348-9). The penalty for being able to draw on the sensations of the body online and therefore achieve greater control within cyberspace is that online experiences will in turn feed back into and affect the offline body. Online and offline bodies therefore interrelate and constitute one another through the mediation of the brainworm in a way which suggests aspects of both the 'outside in' and the 'inside out' models. The surface of the online body is inscribed by its relations to its online surroundings (its interactions with other icons, or with online objects) and the brainworm in turn generates a corresponding effect in the offline body (by causing inflammation around the nerves in Cerise's hands, leading to the external appearance of swollen knuckles).[12]

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[12] These examples could in turn suggest that the physical body becomes a receptacle - indeed a dumping ground - for the 'waste' (the pain) of the online experience, allowing the online body to continue functioning unimpaired. The respective values given to the on- and offline bodies will be considered in greater detail below.

In *Trouble and Her Friends,* then, Scott has successfully reinserted the body into a world where it has previously been denied, and has privileged the concept of a fully and inextricably embodied mind, instead of that of the mind existing above and beyond the body. Nevertheless, as suggested above, there is a sense in the novel that the online body is valued above the offline one, that the latter may serve as a dumping ground for the excesses of the former. In many ways, the online body offers the best of both worlds: incorporating the advantages of experiencing data in terms of physical sensations and the ability to override 'distractions' such as pain. Furthermore, Thomas Foster argues that:

> [t]he novel also suggests [...] that the liberation made possible by computer interfaces may be purchased only at the cost of ghettoizing or reclosing subversive gay performances in cyberspace, where they will have no effect on social relations more generally. (1997: 724)

As I have argued above, however, the novel does show that battles to re-define social relations must be fought in the real world as well as online.

If Scott's novel therefore shows a world trying to redefine gender relations, both online and offline, the offline and online societies depicted in Pat Cadigan's recent cyberpunk novels *Tea from an Empty Cup* and *Dervish is Digital* appear to have succeeded. Gender roles are no longer fixed in Cadigan's texts, and gender appears to play a far less significant role in identity than in the world Scott describes. For example, in Cadigan's offline world we meet a female police officer sporting 'muttonchops' thanks to advances in 'cosmetology' (1998:43); a character introduced as 'a hardbody called Harlowe Featherstonehaugh' with 'the biggest biceps Konstantin had ever seen' (2000: 39) proves to be a woman, and 'androgynes' (referred to as 's/he') are common enough not to warrant any special comment from other characters (2000:174).[13] Nevertheless, Cadigan shows that surpassing fixed gender roles does not necessarily lead to a more utopian society - identities remain constrained, in Cadigan's case, by the powerful forces of work and money.

Since the points of departure for Scott and Cadigan's novels are not the same, their points of dialogue with Butler's theories are rather different as well. Accordingly, where gender roles are very important to Scott's characters (as a mode of subversion), and policing has a key role to play in the online world, this is not the case in Cadigan. Although gender is still present online, it is only one of a wide variety of choices, and certainly not the most important one, as will be shown below. Nor is there, apparently, any attempt to police online bodies - anyone can, literally, be anything.[14] The absence of any policing of online bodies and performances would also apparently severely restrict the possibilities for subversive performances; in Cadigan's terms, a subversive performance would be one where someone with no money was somehow able to spend a great deal of billable time online! And although such performances do exist in the novels, they are of less concern to our discussion in this chapter than the role of sex and gender in the online world, and the relationship between offline and online bodies. Nevertheless, Cadigan's novels are clearly concerned with notions of *how* online identity is performed, as well as with the interaction between offline body, mind and online body, and it is these areas that will be discussed in detail below. Although Cadigan appears to avoid, to a large extent, what Judith Butler calls 'gender trouble', her Artificial Reality does allow for 'a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity [...] to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of "identity" in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic', a strategy that Butler identifies as both 'insidious and effective' (1990/1999: 163).

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[13] It is unclear in the novel whether 'androgynes' just have an androgynous appearance, whether their bodies have been surgically altered to be androgynous, or whether they now constitute a third sex.

[14] Although Cadigan's main character in both novels, Doré Konstantin, is a police officer who becomes the head of 'TechnoCrime, Artificial Reality division', she is predominantly involved in cases of 'copyright infringement, product piracy [and] industrial espionage' (2000: 35); other than this, there is little attempt to control online appearances or behaviour. As Konstantin notes, any attempt to police Artificial Reality would in any case be severely curtailed by the fact that 'as the screens were obliged by law to remind you before each and every session in AR, nothing was true, everything was a lie, and all of it in billable time' (2000: 35).

As in Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends*, online identity in Cadigan's novels is fully embodied: the offline body is incorporated into the online world, albeit in a different manner. Instead of having brain implants, Cadigan's characters must don a full-body 'hotsuit' and a headset to enter Artificial Reality. This has interesting implications in terms of how the body is materialised in her novels, since the resulting interface between the human and the technological appears to occur primarily at the *surface* of the body, and not, as in Scott, *within* the body, at the site of the brainworm or dollie-slot. Cadigan's novels therefore bring to mind Elizabeth Grosz's 'outside in' approach to the body, where:

> the body [is seen] as a social object, as a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and nondiscursive) power, as a series of linkages (or possibly activities) which form superficial or provisional connections with other objects and processes, and as a receptive surface on which the body's boundaries and various parts or zones are constituted, always in conjunction and through linkages with other surfaces and planes. (1994: 116)

The idea of the body as 'a text to be marked' is borne out by the fact that in Cadigan's texts, the bodies of AR users are literally inscribed by their use of the hotsuits: '[...] DiPietro and Celestine peeled the kid's hotsuit off him [...] Underneath, his naked flesh was imprinted with a dense pattern of lines and shapes, Byzantine in complexity, from the wires and sensors in the suit.' (1998: 36)

The hotsuit becomes, in effect, a second skin which allows the 'physical' sensations which the AR user would expect to experience online (e.g. the sensation of walking, or of touching something) to be inscribed by the hotsuit onto the user's real-life body. This movement from the inside of the body (where Scott's brainworm resides) to the outside (the use of a hotsuit) becomes even clearer when Cadigan's detective Doré Konstantin muses on the reinscription of the nervous system on the outside of the body:

> *They'll start calling that the latest thing in nervous systems, [...] They'll give it a jumped-up name, like neo-exo-nervous system, and they'll say it's generated by hotsuit wear, every line and shape having its counterpart on the opposite side of the skin barrier.* (1998: 36)

As explained above, once they have entered artificial reality, Cadigan's characters can choose an online persona from an available stock, or create their own.[15] The hotsuit then feeds back the sensations 'felt' by the online body of that persona onto the offline body by stimulating the nerve endings to reproduce the sensations of walking and touching. In this way, the hotsuit could be said to act as the offline counterpart of the online body: as a second surface layered onto, and interacting with, the surface of the offline body.

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[15] As noted above, the online body can be any sex, any age or any species. The only constraint is that of money and imagination; designing and constructing an online body takes billable time, and accessorizing it costs money. The amount of money a person has also affects the number of areas and levels that he or she can access; wealthier patrons can access more exciting, better equipped locations and access to speed-boosting drugs allows online users to access different levels.

As in *Trouble and Her Friends*, physical sensations therefore remain very important in Cadigan's AR: Yuki, for example, feels the 'feather touch' of her hair whilst in her online body (1998: 68), and falls 'solidly on her feet' (1998: 68). Konstantin, having entered AR as well, reaches out to touch a doorknob and feels 'it in her own hand, the sensors delivering a sensation to the palm side of her fingers that surprised her with its intense authenticity' (1998: 96). In fact, in many cases, the characters report that AR is more 'real' than real-life itself. As a result, living in the online body not only inscribes the surface of the offline body via the hotsuit, but also affects how it interacts with the real world. In *Dervish is Digital*, Konstantin reports that she feels 'unreal' on coming out of AR (2000: 37). The high level of resolution online also affects her eyesight offline:

> At first she thought it was her eyesight. After a few minutes she realized why Goku Mura looked blurry to her in person - real life just didn't have as high a resolution as AR. Perhaps that *was* her eyesight after all, but suffering only in comparison to a standard that had crept up on her without her noticing. (2000: 224)

The interplay between offline and online bodily surfaces is developed throughout both *Tea from an Empty Cup* and *Dervish is Digital*. In the process, the texts thoroughly disrupt the idea that anyone can be anything in the online environment without any consequences, or, to put it another way, that AR users can simply play at having different identities, putting on different gender and sexualities according to their whims, without being in some way constituted by these. Nothing, in Cadigan's world, is as simple as it seems, least of all identity.

Tea from an Empty Cup is both the story of Yuki, a Japanese girl trying to find a friend who has gone missing, possibly while he was actually still in AR, and Konstantin, a detective trying to solve a murder committed while the victim was in

AR. Once she has entered AR, Yuki finds that she has - without realising it[16] - assumed the online body image of Tom Iguchi, the friend she is looking for. What follows is a complex negotiation of identities: Yuki may be 'wearing' Tom's body image, but she is not necessarily in control of it. Her reflection in an online mirror reminds her that she is not 'herself':

> Across the street, her reflection in the grimy, streaked store window stared back at her. Or rather, Tom's reflection. [...] Even the expression on the face was all wrong: it didn't look anywhere near as frightened as she actually felt. (1998: 121-2)

This discrepancy between the 'inner' Yuki and the 'outer' Tom is magnified when 'her' reflection begins to act strangely:

> She turned to face the glass directly, drew herself up and made a formal bow. [...] At the lowest point of the bow, she lifted her head very slightly and looked. The image in the window was also sneaking a look, with the difference that the face was grinning broadly at her. [...] Tom's reflection laughed and shook its head. (1998: 122)

When Yuki tells her reflection that Tom is missing, presumed dead, the reflection in the mirror replies '"[b]ut not in *here*, [...] through the old looking-glass." The image gestured behind him. "And for that matter, not where you are, either. *You're* Tom now"' (1998: 123). Yuki's problems are not limited to having a reflection that acts independently, however, for it soon appears that someone is trying to inhabit her from the inside as well:

> Her hand moved on its own, but she refused to open her eyes. Somehow, with her eyes closed, she couldn't tell exactly what her hand was doing, but if she concentrated hard enough, she would feel the source of the

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[16] We later learn that this appearance has been pre-selected by Yuki's employer, Joy Flower, who provides her with the hotsuit and therefore the facilities for accessing AR. Flower is also attempting to find Tom Iguchi, who has something she wants, and believes that sending Yuki into AR looking like Tom may lead her to the 'real' Tom Iguchi.

> impulse to move. Like the sensation of the upholstery, it was under her skin, but in a much more profound way. It felt as if someone was wearing her hand as a glove [...] (1998: 141)

We later learn that Joy Flower and her employees - who have Yuki's offline body under their control[17] - have designed a special kind of hotsuit that enables 'them to wear, in effect, other people' (1998: 245). In Yuki's case, this raises an interesting question: is 'she' being controlled by the (online) surface she is wearing (the appearance of Tom Iguchi) or by the person wearing her (offline) body as a surface? At this point, the identity of 'Yuki' appears to be entirely mind-based; Yuki retains an awareness of herself as 'Yuki' despite the various attempts to control her online and offline bodies.

Yuki attempts to reassert the reality of her own (offline) body by breaking a glass online and cutting into her online body:

> "If you won't come out," she said as she sliced along her heart line, "I'll come in and get you." [...]
> The flow of blood was also perfect, she thought, [...] And there was the *smell*. That had to be the power of suggestion, she thought: *had* to be. Like the pain. Because her pain option was disabled, she was sure of that. Well, *pretty* sure. (1998: 142)

Konstantin, in the meantime, has donned the online body of Shantih Love, which is not only the androgynous persona inhabited by the murdered man at the time of his death, but also one of the online bodies of Tom Iguchi. Like Yuki, she soon discovers that the play between surfaces goes both ways: it is not just a question of her inhabiting the persona, but also of the persona affecting her performance and accordingly the way in which her subjectivity is constituted. Immediately after assuming the persona, she notes that '[t]he feel of the Love persona in her 'suit was pleasurable in a way that kept her on edge. Being Shantih Love was close to seductive' (1998: 143). The online body/persona appears to be able to build up its own identifications and bodily memory and so determine to a certain extent the way the person 'inside' will act. This suggests that once online, all users have some form of split subjectivity, forced to negotiate between what they believe to be their own embodied subjectivities and the consequences of their chosen form of online embodiment. The question of just *who* is performing *whom* is a complex one for Konstantin as well. This becomes particularly clear in *Dervish in Digital*, when Konstantin goes to a company called 'You (Not You)' for an online disguise. The online body she is given, that of a little girl, has its own ideas about what to do in certain situations:

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[17] As explained in the previous footnote, Yuki is wearing a hotsuit provided by Joy Flower and is being held at Flower's house. She cannot exit AR unless permitted to do so by Flower.

> He lunged for her and she dived between his legs, the persona taking over again. [...] Still, she thought as her legs carried her along, a persona with pre-programmed responses was hard to get used to. It was like being inside a hotsuit that had suddenly developed a mind and an agenda of its own. (2000: 139)

In *Tea from an Empty Cup*, we see that an online body can even attempt to materialise a different sexuality to that of the offline body: 'The 'suit was reminding her *now* that it was full coverage, and that Shantih Love would have responded strongly to this woman. It was as if her body had decided to [...] enjoy a life of its own' (1998: 157). The question of whether Konstantin's experience in the Shantih Love persona is a cross-gendered one, however, is rather less than straightforward. 'Shantih Love' is an androgynous persona, created by a man and now 'worn' by a woman. The problem of even attempting to describe, let alone categorise, such an experience, is one example of just how profoundly Cadigan problematizes identity – and accordingly, gender and sexuality – in the online world she depicts. There is therefore a highly complex interweaving of performance in the novels: while the user inhabits the online body via the hotsuit, the online body itself attempts to performatively materialise the offline body.

In her model of the 'outside in', Elizabeth Grosz suggests that the body is to be 'seen as a purely surface phenomenon, a complex, multifaceted surface folded back on itself, exhibiting a certain torsion but nevertheless a flat plane whose incision or inscription produces the (illusion or effects of) depth and interiority.' (1994: 116) This is similar to the conclusion drawn by Judith Butler at the end of *Gender Trouble*, where she argues that 'intrapsychic processes' should be redescribed 'in terms of the surface politics of the body' (1990/1999: 172). Butler goes on to link this to performance, arguing that 'acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body' (1990/1999: 173). In line with these theories of subjectivity as inscribed on the outside of bodies, and creating merely the illusion of an essence or an interior, the title *Tea from an Empty Cup* suggests that performance is everything, and that there is in fact, no 'inside': that the core of subjectivity is empty. Towards the end of the novel, Yuki reaches an area known as 'Old Japan' in the AR world, which is being created as a replica of the now destroyed real world country. On arrival, she is asked whether she knows the 'art of filling an empty cup with tea when you have no tea?' (1998: 220). The Japanese tea ceremony is an extremely complex one, centred around ritual and performance: the tea itself is, to a large extent, no longer the point. The correct *performance* of the tea ceremony is what matters. A tea ceremony without tea is therefore a performance without a subject, or, perhaps, a performance which *creates* the subject, which fills an empty cup with tea where there is no actual 'tea'. In the same way, Judith Butler suggests that subjectivity is *constituted* by performance; performances are *not* the expression of an interior and fixed essence. This is confirmed by Yuki's questioner, the intriguingly named Body Sativa[18], who says "'I should have said the art of producing Iguchi Tomoyuki where there supposedly is none'" (1998: 220).[19]

Having reached 'Old Japan', Yuki is then asked to allow *herself* to be performed in the ancient Japanese art of *Bunraku*, a form of puppet theatre. The text, however, makes it clear that there is a difference between *Bunraku* and the performance forced on Yuki by Joy Flower:

> "*Bunraku* means that you don't have to do it alone," she told Yuki, gesturing at the puppet, positioned in dignified repose amid the three handlers.
> "I don't think I like the idea of being a puppet," Yuki said, frowning unhappily.
> "Not a *puppet*," Body Sativa sounded disgusted with her. "'Puppet' is a poor word for it. The whoremaster Joy Flower, she would make a puppet out of you, for any reason, for no reason, just for her own amusement. Just to see the look on your face when you felt one of her *clients* crawling around inside you, wearing you like a hotsuit." (1998: 231-2)

On the surface, the difference seems to be related to agency: Yuki is '[c]ooperative but not subservient' and realises that in this performance, she will have 'to make the first move. Moving carefully, she turned around, raised her arms to shoulder height, and leaned back. She felt them catch her, hold her, and then felt herself encompass them, include them, contain Old Japan' (1998: 232). However, Yuki's agency is of course highly constrained at this point: if she does not wish to cooperate with Joy Flower, she must take this opportunity to escape her, even if only briefly. Combining her consciousness with those of the other inhabitants of Old Japan is one way of overcoming these constraints, by voluntarily becoming more than just 'Yuki'.

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[18] As Rob Latham points out, Body Sativa's name 'suggests both a "higher" form of embodiment (in the pun on cannabis) and veritably godlike enlightenment (in the pun on Bodhisattva).' (2002: 133).

[19] Body Sativa's comment could also be taken to imply that the identity of 'Tom Iguchi' can be produced even where the (offline) body of Tom Iguchi is absent, that is, 'performing' Tom Iguchi, as Yuki is doing by wearing his online appearance, is enough to 'create' him, at least in the online environment. This could be taken as a rejection of the need for an offline body - all that is required is the online identity, an issue that will be discussed in detail below.

Dervish is Digital suggests that even for characters not in the hands of a sadistic 'madam' such as Joy Flower, online performance is always constrained to some extent. One of Konstantin's acquaintances, for example, tells her that:

> "Most people [...] don't really change identity when they come as someone else. They might act a little different for the sake of whatever persona they're wearing, but they aren't different people. The same information keeps adding up, pretty soon the casino knows what you're going to do even before you do." (2000: 114)

We learn that the information collected by the online casino relates specifically to *how* the online body is performed – its mannerisms and posture, for example – and that this usually does not change, even if the online bodies themselves do. Although the characters may attempt to create different online personas, including taking on different genders, there are limits to their ability to truly escape from who and what they are.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for this inability to escape from who and what we are online lies in the fact that the online body, whatever form it takes, is always controlled by the same mind. Online activity is, after all, generated by the mind, as Konstantin, still wearing her child persona, reflects:

> For this kind of physical maneuver in AR [climbing out of the top of a lift], it was more a matter of will than physical strength. If she let herself think of her body in a reclining chair, she'd find herself lying flat on her back on the floor of the elevator. What she had to do was sense-remember what the

> movement felt like for real, which would enable her nerves to provide just enough cues for the hotsuit to provide the proper sensation. (2000: 135)

Which, in turn, means that AR is not just about the play of body surfaces, and inscription from the outside in. To take another example: if, as described above, Yuki's online body surface is that of Tom Iguchi, and her underlying body is being 'worn' and controlled by others, then the person - the 'Yuki' - who cuts into the online body in the scene described on page 211 above must be something interior, something not controlled *by* the surface, indeed beyond being controlled *at* the surface of the body. Both examples, then, suggest that the 'interior' must be more than an illusion or an effect created by 'relations occurring on the surface of the skin and various body parts' (Grosz, 1994: 116) or by 'acts, gestures and desire' (Butler, 1990/1999: 173). Cadigan's novels are therefore not simply about the play among body surfaces, but about the interrelationship between on- and offline body surfaces and the mind. This in turn suggests a return to Grosz's 'inside out' model, according to which the mind is constituted on the basis of the internalisation of bodily identifications and, in turn, projects a body image which conditions our experience of embodied living. The argument, put forward in *Dervish is Digital*, that '[m]ost people [...] don't really change identity when they come as someone else' (2000: 114), implies that our offline performances are internalised and then re-projected in cyberspace, with the result that no matter how our online physical surface may change, we can never be 'different people' (2000: 114).

In *Tea from an Empty Cup*, Tom Iguchi (the 'real', offline Tom in this case - prior to his disappearance), interprets this ability to 'internalise' the body as a means of achieving freedom from the body:

> "Your body's not really *out here*. Your body's *in here*." He leaned forward over the table and tapped his head. "Your whole body is in here, and nowhere else. Your neck gets broken, the whole thing's useless - but you can go *in here* and find it all again. You can get part of it cut off and taken away, but that part will still be *in here*." (1998: 17)

What Tom is suggesting is that once the mind has 'internalised' the body, it can always re-project it in an online environment, which renders the offline body obsolete. This emphasis on transcending the body is reflected in an obsession on the part of certain AR users in both Cadigan's novels with the so-called 'out door'. This refers to a rumour among AR users that if they go fast enough online - as a result of special software or mind-altering drugs - they will find the out door which will enable them to leave their bodies behind for ever. Presumably this would also mean leaving behind all physical sensations, since cyberspace is experienced in physical terms via the hotsuit's interaction with the material body.

Dervish is Digital, however, bears out N. Katherine Hayle's and Scott Bukatman's assertions that there is no such thing as a disembodied (human) awareness, or as Bukatman puts it, that the loss of the body entails the end of human subjectivity (1993: 258-8). Konstantin learns that Hamish Dervish has traded places with an AI so that he can obtain god-like powers in the online environment. To do this, he has relinquished control of his offline body, allowing the AI to download its awareness into his body.[20] Dervish now only exists in an online environment, and as a result, other characters believe that he is no longer human. As one of them puts it: 'Dervish gives every sign of being digital. [...] Or of being so adapted to the digital environment he might as well be' (2000: 207). Having a physical body outside the online environment therefore seems - in Cadigan's novels at least - to be a key requirement for being human.

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[20] The implications of this are not explored in the novel.

The complex levels of interaction between the mind, the offline body and the online body in both Cadigan and Scott's novels, then, would seem to support Elisabeth Grosz's claim that '[b]odies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives' (1994: xii). Grosz uses the image of the Möbius strip to explain this concept further, arguing that this 'has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another' (1994: xii). Both Cadigan and Scott clearly demonstrate this interdependence of mind and body, or as Grosz goes on to describe it: 'the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside' (1994: xii).

Establishing to what extent the novels support Judith Butler's assertion that 'certain regulatory norms form a "sexed" subject in terms that establish the indistinguishability of psychic and bodily formation' (1993: 22), is somewhat more problematic, however. One point which both novels make is that our online performances do not have to be gendered ones. The existence of thunderstorm icons in Scott's novel and the wide range of online personas available in Cadigan's texts show that it is possible for one person to perform different genders, or indeed not to perform gender at all: as discussed above, the aspects/performances that make someone identifiable to others online do not, in either novel, include gender. If 'psychic and bodily formation' are indistinguishable, and the body is sexed, then surely online performances, mediated via the psyche, would have to be gendered ones? Both Scott and Cadigan's novels would therefore appear more in line with Butler's earlier argument, in *Gender Trouble*, that sex and gender are performed at the surface of the body only, and not internalised. However, Butler points out in *The Psychic Life of Power* that 'there are workings of gender that do not "show" in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake' (1997a: 144). To turn this on its head, an absence of online gender performance, or the ability to successfully perform a different gender online, would therefore not necessarily mean an absence of (an internalised) gender in the psyche, but merely the ability to escape this, temporarily, in an online environment. Gender, then, as Butler explains in *Bodies that Matter*, 'is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as "internal" and "hidden", nor is it reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play *between* psyche and appearance' (1993: 234).

Scott and Cadigan's novels draw very different conclusions about the impact of online gender subversion on the outside world, however. Gender still matters in both the online and offline worlds of Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends*, although users can choose to evade gender altogether online by choosing non-human icons. The key to the subversive potential of Scott's text accordingly lies in the fact that its heroines, Trouble and Cerise, not only choose to retain gendered icons in the online environment but also link their online and offline gender performances. Both characters therefore elect to subvert the sex/gender system from within, choosing not to evade the norms of sex and gender but to inhabit them in disruptive ways. Cyberspace therefore becomes a place not to escape gender, but to re-cite it in a 'subversive and parodic redeployment of power' (Butler, 1990/1999: 158). Cadigan's Artificial Reality also provides a space in which the possibilities for taking on different genders, or even escaping gender altogether, seem endless. The problem is, however, that the AR depicted in the novels offers an escape from reality, and one which is only available to those who have the means to pay for all the 'billable time' spent in a hotsuit. Despite the complex interaction between mind, online body and offline body, and the highly fragmented and problematic nature of online identity, there is no indication that online experiences have any impact on the way the physical body is lived as a *sexed* body outside AR. AR would therefore seem to be a way of 'recloseting subversive [...] performances in cyberspace, where they will have no effect on social relations more generally', to adapt Thomas Foster's comment on *Trouble and Her Friends* (1997: 724). Of course, it could be argued that there is no need for online performances to have a subversive effect in the offline world that Cadigan depicts, since offline gender performances are no longer what we might expect them to be. Whether this is in fact the result of years of being able to inhabit different bodies in the online world is never made clear in the novels, however, as there is no way of telling how this social reality came about. Ultimately, gender has become an unremarkable attribute in AR, not a key part of a person's identity. Taking on another gender, or evading gender altogether, is no longer subversive. As Konstantin puts it, in *Dervish in Digital*: '"Where anything can happen, nothing matters"', although she then goes on to add: '"Does it?"' (2000: 127), a question which lies at the heart of this analysis. Even if the multiple layers of conflicting identities are just all in a day's work (or play, as the case may be) for Cadigan's characters, they offer the reader fascinating glimpses of how technology could mediate identity and the relationship between mind, body and gender. It also seems implausible that the kinds of fragmented identities created during immersion in the AR environment would not have an impact on 'real life'. Cadigan makes it clear, however, that 'real life' is not what it used to be, indeed, for many people, AR is becoming more real than real life. As we have seen above, Konstantin experiences a sense of unreality on leaving AR, and to many of the characters more heavily invested in the AR world than Konstantin, online possessions and online experiences are more important than their offline existences (which are often devoted solely to earning enough money to spend more time online). Bodies that matter, in this context, are the mutable, multi-gendered, indestructible bodies of cyberspace.

Where, then, does this leave real-life, physical bodies? After all, both Scott and Cadigan bring the offline body and its experiences into the online world, albeit in very different ways. Indeed, it is the offline body that makes the online experiences possible. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Thomas Foster identifies this as part of feminist science fiction writers' 'impulse to reassert the importance of physical bodies against the temptation towards disembodiment that is often associated with representations of cyberspace' (2002: 479). And yet physical bodies in all three of the novels considered here have a rather more problematic status than this would suggest. It has been noted that the offline body often appears to function as a dumping ground for the excesses of the online body in *Trouble and Her Friends.* Having an offline body is inextricably linked to experiencing pain; in Scott's novel, the offline body must experience the pain of the installation and calibration of the brainworm so that the online body can experience the nets to the full. It must also live with the consequences of the rash actions (sexual or otherwise) of the online body. In *Tea from an Empty Cup,* Yuki's online freedom is severely curtailed by the fact that Joy Flower has control of her offline body, a body which is also forced to repeatedly undergo excruciating pain as a result of her online body being pushed from an aeroplane and left to smash into the ground. Although, as suggested in the discussion of cyborg bodies in the previous chapter, pain is often regarded as part of what makes us human, there is a distinct sense in the novels considered here that although it is the offline body that allows users to experience AR/the nets to the full, it would be better if the offline body could be more effectively controlled or at least less vulnerable, and less 'leaky'. This does not mean, however, that the offline body is no longer a source of pleasure. Trouble and Cerise's offline sex, for example, is much more satisfying than Cerise's online sexual encounter (described on page 203 above), and when Yuki at one point finds herself temporarily 'disconnected' from her physical body, she feels 'a surge of affection for it, for all the pleasures she had taken for granted and recognized now as being part of corporeal existence' (1998: 172). Although technology makes it possible to improve on the offline body in a number of ways, it cannot entirely replicate the pleasures of embodiment. The offline body, then, is a source of both strength and weakness in the novels. On the one hand, the texts endorse the body's central role in constituting the 'human', yet on the other, they identify the body as a problem, as something that limits our ability to take full advantage of the online world. Perhaps the phrase 'not without my body' best captures this fine line between need and resentment: for the female characters in these three novels, this means both 'not without my body – because I don't want to' and 'not without my body – because I can't'.

Conclusion

> I began [...] by trying to consider the materiality of the body only to find that the thought of materiality invariably moved me into other domains. I [...] found that I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought. Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies "are". (Butler, 1993: ix)

> Her vision swung down sharply and she found her body directly below her, spread out on a futon. [...] She felt a surge of affection for it, for all the pleasure she had taken for granted and recognized now as being part of corporeal existence. (Cadigan, 1998: 172)

If much of Butler's work is an attempt to 'consider the materiality of the body' in theoretical terms, the novels considered here have their own, fictional, contributions to make. As has been shown, they provide insights into which bodies come to matter, and how - suggesting not only the role that myths and history have to play in determining which bodies matter (*In the Mother's Land* and *The Y Chromosome*), but also the role played by abject bodies in both defining and relocating the boundaries between bodies that matter and those that do not (*Ring of Swords* and *Halfway Human*). Texts such as *Halfway Human* and *Body of Glass* also expose how bodies are materialised through their performance of sex and gender norms, while novels such as *Proxies* and *Tea from an Empty Cup* expand the terms of the debate - albeit in different contexts - to explore whether bodies are materialised from the 'outside in' (through bodily inscription) or 'inside out' (as a projection of the psyche). By exposing the nature and extent of the construction process, the texts also suggest that bodies could be constructed differently. As such, all the texts considered here provide the 'strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside", [which] gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorisation as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently'

(Butler, 1990/1999: 140). They also offer the 'strategies for engaging the "unnatural"' which, Butler claims, 'might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such' (1990/1999: 190). Furthermore, they suggest that relationships between minds and bodies may be even more complex and problematic than theorists such as Butler and Grosz suggest. On another level, characters such as Tedla in *Halfway Human*, Yod in *Body of Glass*, and Lula/899 in *Silver Screen* all support Butler's claims that gender is a performance, and not the expression of an inner essence, and that the proper performance of sex and gender norms forms part of the materialisation of an acceptable human body. They also suggest, however, that there are limits to this performativity: paradoxically, if the body being materialised by its performance of sex and gender norms is not already (perceived as) a human body, no amount of performance can change this. The 'categories through which one sees' (Butler, 1990/1999: xxii) ensure that once the underlying body is 'read' as non-human (that is, as 'bland' in the case of Tedla, or as 'cyborg' in the case of Yod), any attempt to performatively materialise a 'properly' sexed and gendered human body will fail. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the sustained destabilisation of sex and gender categories therefore takes place when it is impossible to read the relationship between performance and body, because *neither* can be adequately categorised.

As the above summary suggests, the individual chapters of this thesis have provided a detailed exploration of the links, relationships and productive dialogues between the theories of Butler, Grosz, Kristeva and Irigaray and a wide range of feminist science fiction novels from the 1990s. This conclusion is therefore not intended to be a step-by-step recounting of these links, relationships and dialogues. Instead, it will explore two key issues which have repeatedly arisen over the course of the thesis and which to some extent encapsulate the nature of the relationship between feminist theory and feminist science fiction when it comes to the matter of the body. The first issue relates to the importance of retaining the material body; the second, to the consequences of this retention.

'Not without my body' has, after all, proved to be true across the spectrum of feminist science fiction novels of the 1990s considered here. Characters such as Marghe in *Ammonite* and Lisbeï in *In the Mother's Land* learn to use their enhanced physical capabilities to lead lives in which mind and body function as an integrated whole. The protagonists of all three of the cyborg novels considered in Chapter 5 also refuse any attempt to downgrade the material body, preferring instead to integrate it as a vital component of new and complex identities. And even when the option of escaping the body altogether is offered in the cyberspace environment, as discussed in Chapter 6, it is firmly rejected. The body may be heavily constructed, but this is regarded as an opportunity for the redefinition of this construction, not as a reason for abandonment.

As the notion of 're-defining the body' suggests, and as was noted at the end of the previous chapter, the refusal to do without the material body does not necessarily mean an unambiguously positive attitude towards it. Indeed, many of the novels considered here deal with ways of controlling, and enhancing, the experience of embodiment. The novels discussed in Chapter 2 suggest possibilities of enhanced physical control conferred by a virus or mutation, or, in the absence of either, by technology. Physical inconveniences such as illness and injury can be eliminated or at least minimised by the kind of enhanced control available to Marghe and Lisbeï in *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land*, respectively, while technology has provided items such as the 'menstrual extractor' and hi-tech hospitals to smooth the lives of the women in Gom's *The Y Chromosome*. Cyberbodies such as the proxy bodies and online avatars discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 draw on the experiences and sensations of the material body while offering much less vulnerable forms of embodiment. Alternatively, characters such as Nili in *Body of Glass* integrate aspects of technology into their material bodies, rendering these stronger, faster and less vulnerable in turn.

It is, however, notable that such enhanced embodiment almost always appears to entail some kind of physical pain. The enhanced bodily control experienced by both Marghe and Lisbeï, for example, is achieved after both have undergone excruciating pain inflicted by virus- or mutation-linked illnesses. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler points out that Freud states 'quite clearly that bodily pain is the precondition of bodily self-discovery' and that he concludes 'that [the ego] is differentiated from the id partially through pain' (1993: 58). She goes on to quote Freud's comment that 'the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illnesses is perhaps a model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our own body' (1993: 58). This is certainly true of both Lisbeï and Marghe: the illnesses they experience give them a clear idea of their own bodies and how they function, as well as of how they can be controlled. Internal pain, that is, pain experienced within the body, is therefore a key factor in the materialisation of their bodies.

This concept of 'internal pain' brings us back to another key issue in this thesis, namely the materialisation of the body from the inside out, or outside in. If the pain experienced by Marghe and Lisbeï is a form of bodily materialisation from the inside out, the bodies of characters in other novels such as *Ring of Swords* and *Halfway Human* are marked and, indeed, constituted, by pain inflicted from the outside. Both Nicholas and Tedla are victims of physical torture, and Tedla's body is specifically marked as a body that does not matter when its torturers actually sow their names into its flesh. This dual action of pain on the body is mirrored in other novels considered here: Trouble's offline and online bodies in Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* are, as we have seen, at least partially materialised by pain inflicted through the brainworm, that is, from within, while Konstantin and Yuki in *Tea from an Empty Cup* have to contend with extreme physical pain inflicted from the outside via their hotsuits. Even those who don virtually indestructible cyborg bodies, as in *Proxies*, have to contend with pain sensors which can be lowered but not turned off. Pain, it seems, is an integral part of having a body, indeed an integral part of being human. Pain, as Carly D'Auber puts it in *Proxies*, "'makes you real'" (1998: 214). In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler also identifies pain as a bodily 'fact', albeit one susceptible to interpretation:

> For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure, endure illness and violence; and these "facts", one might sceptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction. Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these primary and irrefutable experiences. And surely there is. But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. (Butler, 1993: xi)

What the novels discussed here suggest is that pain actually forms part of the construction of the body, helping to re-shape and re-define it. Elsewhere in *Bodies that Matter,* Butler also argues that pain has a role to play in materialising the gendered body. Drawing on Freud's argument that 'bodily pain is the precondition of bodily self-discovery' (1993: 58), she goes on to discuss the concept of 'guilt-induced bodily suffering' (1993: 64) connected to the prohibition of certain kinds of love (in particular, homosexual love). Ultimately, she links this to the materialisation of the body, arguing that:

> [i]f, then, as Freud contends, pain has a delineating effect, i.e., may be one way in which we come to have an idea of our body at all, it may also be that gender-instituting prohibitions work through suffusing the body with a pain that culminates in the projection of a surface, that is, a sexed morphology which is at once a compensatory fantasy and a fetishistic mask. (1993: 65)

Many of the feminist science fiction novels considered here have, however, turned this on its head: instead of pain caused by 'gender-instituting prohibitions' acting to materialise a sexed body, the pain experienced by characters such as Marghe, Lisbeï and Trouble ultimately places them in a position - via the virus, mutation or brainworm respectively - to subvert and evade gendered categories, and indeed, gendered prohibitions.

The insistence on retaining the material body depicted in the novels considered here does not, however, mean that the body is regarded as a fixed, stable point of reference. Indeed, as Judith Butler notes on the very first page of *Bodies that Matter,* the material body is not, and cannot be, seen as a static object:

> I began [...] by trying to consider the materiality of the body only to find that the thought of materiality invariably moved me into other domains. I [...] found that I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought. Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies "are". (Butler, 1993: ix)

Boundary-crossing is a key attribute not only of the cyborg and cyberspace bodies considered in the second half of this thesis, but also of the bodies of Tedla and Nicholas, who straddle alien and human societies, and of those of

Marghe and Lisbeï, who have to learn to dissolve and reconstitute the boundaries between their bodies and those of their fellow humans. Crossing boundaries appears to entail a certain degree of identity fragmentation, however, which is in turn linked to the significance of the boundary crossed. Lisbeï and Marghe cross boundaries between individuals only, that is, the boundaries between their own bodies and other bodies; neither their sense of self nor their perception of the body is impaired by this. Indeed, as we have seen, Marghe feels that her body has now become a 'magnificent, healthy whole' (1992: 224). Crossing boundaries between different societies and cultures, as Nicholas and Tedla do, however, entails a greater degree of fragmentation in the subjectivities of those involved, expressed both in Tedla's status as 'halfway human' and Nicholas's shifting allegiances between human and *hwarhath*. Although their fragmented sense of identity means that they can cross the boundaries between cultures, they will never truly be accepted by either.

In the majority of cases, the sense of fragmentation increases when we consider cyborg bodies and bodies in cyberspace. One key exception is Nili, the human women with cyborg implants in *Body of Glass*, who seems to represent a fairly harmonious mixture of human and cyborg. Although, as I have argued above, she does call the categories of male and female, and human and machine, into question because her cyborg components give her strength and agility far beyond that of a normal human woman, she is a rather less disruptive cyborg character than either Anjuli in *Silver Screen* or the proxy children in *Proxies*. This, in turn, I would argue, is related to the fragmented nature of cyborg subjectivity in both of the latter novels. Both Anjuli, in her merger with 901/Augustine/Armour, and the proxy children with their multiple personalities and their variety of proxy bodies, suggest alternate embodiments that make it impossible to determine whether the figure appearing is male or female. Their bodies are therefore incoherent; that is, they disrupt the categories through which we see, and it is when our ability to 'read' the body appearing before us fails that we are forced to reconsider the categories we apply. As Butler explains:

> [t]he moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with any surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question.
> When such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis [...] And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real", what we invoke as the naturalised knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. (Butler, 1990/1999: xxii-xxiii)

Although characters such as Tedla are also impossible to read as either male or female, it could be argued that they can still be categorised, without disrupting the boundaries between male and female, by simply adding a third category: neuter. And as Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter*, a proliferation of categories is not what is needed (1993: 237): instead we need to permanently blur the boundaries of sex and gender, render them infinitely mutable and fluid. It is the cyborg and cyberspace bodies examined in this thesis that come the closest to achieving this: any attempt at categorisation is rendered useless by the complex and fragmented subjectivities and embodiments created by Anjuli/Augustine/ 901/Armour, by the proxy children and by the layers of identities which proliferate in the online world of Pat Cadigan's novels.

Perhaps ironically, then, while novels such as *Ammonite* and *In the Mother's Land* suggest that outside patriarchy women can enjoy enhanced embodiment, with full integration of mind and body, the texts considered in the second half of this thesis argue that the best way of disrupting the current sex/gender system is to increase the gaps in our performances by fragmenting identity, dividing it into mind-based and body-based identities, which nevertheless always mutually support and constitute one another. Through these gaps, as Butler claims, we can derive our agency. Either way, in the majority of the novels considered here, it is clearly women who are best positioned to take advantage of their bodies; it is women who refuse to leave the body behind and who are able to reap the rewards of that embodiment. Male bodies may fare better outside the confines of feminist science fiction, but that is, after all, a question beyond the scope of this study.

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