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Speculative Feminisms

The Significance of Feminist Theory in the Science Fiction of Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr, and Octavia Butler

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ABSTRACT

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SPECULATIVE FEMINISMS
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMINIST THEORY IN THE SCIENCE FICTION OF JOANNA RUSS, JAMES TIPTREE JR, AND OCTAVIA BUTLER

by Amanda Boulter

This thesis addresses the feminist movement in science fiction from the late 1960s to the 1990s. It explores how SF's feminist futures have interpreted and challenged the politics of women's liberation. The thesis raises a number of critical questions about the confluence of feminist politics and the traditionally masculinist discourses of SF. It questions definitions of both gender and genre, and considers the history of feminist SF's publication, readership and criticism.

The thesis provides in-depth readings of key texts by three major authors of feminist SF: Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr, and Octavia Butler. Each chapter considers how their texts illustrate and develop pertinent issues for feminism. The study begins by analyzing the representation of female agency in early texts by Pamela Zoline and Russ. Later chapters develop this theme through readings of Russ's The Female Man which questions what it means to 'be' a woman (or a man); Tiptree's work which problematizes what it means to write as a man (or a woman); and Butler's Xenogenesis in which those feminist concerns have evolved into a questioning of what it means to 'be' human. The thesis concludes by examining contemporary science fiction by Pat Cadigan, Gwyneth Jones and Melissa Scott to ask whether the category of feminist SF remains relevant in the postmodern, if not post-feminist, 1990s.

The thesis proposes a dialogic relation between the theory and politics of feminism and feminist SF. It aims not only to chart the ways in which feminism has influenced women SF writers, or to highlight the ways in which feminist SF has interpreted feminist theory, but to argue that feminist SF actively contributes to the discourses of feminism. This study aims to elucidate the ways in which feminist SF may be truly considered as speculative feminism.

we walk the streets boldly hand in hand
currents of extra-terrestrial prescience
spilling out of our impassive bodies:
there are other spaces
of knowledge and desire concealed
behind our copper eyes. You
check your body - what do you see
in the bathroom glass? are those nipples
real? underneath the skin are we all
monsters timeless glistening and taut?

(from 'Breaking it in Two, the Way it Goes' by Wendy Mulford)

Contents

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Bibliographical Note

References are given in the form recommended by the Modern Humanties Research Association. In the notes, I have deviated from the MHRA conventions only when giving further references to a previously cited source. In this instance, for reasons of clarity, I have continued to reference a short title of the work as well as the author's name and page numbers.

In the bibliography, where there are a number of references to a particular author I have organized the texts according to the date of original publication. Where there are several texts from the same year I have ordered the references alphabetically. For texts which have been reprinted, I give the original date of publication in parentheses after the title.

1. The Historical, Political and Cultural Contexts of Feminist Science Fiction

> 'If the mind [is] to be the site of resistance, only the imagination [can] make it so. To imagine, then, [is] a way to begin the process of transforming reality. All that we cannot imagine will never come into being.' bell hooks[1]

> 'Science fiction is feminism-friendly.' Sarah Lefanu[2]

SF has been described as a genre 'born in oxymoron', a genre which 'depends on drastic combinations of incongruous categories'.[3] But feminist SF inflects yet again the uneasy coupling of 'science' and 'fiction' to suggest further incongruities; not the least of which is the assertion of a woman-centred politics in a traditionally male-centred genre. Such dangerous fusions threaten to marginalize this writing, both within science fiction fandom and within feminist literature. But they also make SF a particularly exciting genre for feminist writers, readers and critics. That SF is 'feminism-friendly' does not mean that the feminist movement in SF has not met with resistance and even hostility from more conservative writers and readers. It suggests the affinity between feminism's oppositional vision and SF's speculative form. SF has been termed 'What If?' literature, or as Ursula Le Guin has suggested, a form of 'thought experiment'.[4] As a mode of writing, SF enables writers to express possible feminist futures, to reinterpret dominant histories and to allegorize the contemporary world.[5]

SF extrapolates from the social or scientific practices of the writer's 'zero world' to present fantastic, improbable but stubbornly possible realities.[6] The genre's potential futures and alternative histories produce either escapist fantasies (for wherever the reader is she/he certainly is not there) or, as Darko Suvin argues, subversive commentaries on the 'author's collective context'.[7] For feminist writers and readers, SF's brave new worlds and alien others suggest provocative interactions between art and politics, imagination and theory. The estranging perspectives of the SF mode can highlight and challenge oppressive social hierarchies, to exaggerate dystopian gender relations (as in Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974)) or to envision utopian alternatives (as in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976)).

In 1971, Joanna Russ claimed that SF was 'the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about "innate" values and "natural" social arrangements, in short our ideas about Human Nature, Which Never Changes'. Russ's essay highlighted the potential of the SF genre, but it also testified to other writers' complacency. She argues that, 'speculation [...] about gender roles does not exist at all'.[8] Feminist SF writers, and especially Russ, confronted SF's complicity with gender oppression and presented new images of women in science fiction. These writers drew upon the emerging discourses of women's liberation to articulate and motivate the possibilities of a feminist future. Feminist SF of the late 1960s and early 1970s reflected the sense of discovery and empowerment, as well as anger, that was generated by the Women's Liberation Movement.

By the late 1960s feminist activists were already exploring the dominant assumptions about innate values and natural social arrangements within consciousness-raising sessions (and exploding them through protests and zap-actions). Kathie Sarachild argued in 1968 that consciousness-raising was a proto-political practice: 'our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions. Our feelings will lead us to our theory, our theory to our action, our feelings about that action to new theory and then to new action.'[9] Consciousness-raising, as Maria Lauret argues, was part of the process of 'theory-building' within the women's movement.[10] In this thesis, I want to suggest that feminist SF shared in, and is still contributing to, this process. Feminist SF does not just narrativize feminist fantasies (or feminist nightmares), it actively and critically engages the 'unnatural' possibilities of gender transformation and social reconfiguration. It offers answers to some feminist questions (what if biology became irrelevant?; what if women lived without men?), but it also raises some questions of its own (how does gender affect what it means to be human?; when is that identity transgressed?).

The feminist challenge to genre and gender stereotypes in SF invigorated and enlightened the field. Feminist narratives disrupted the conventional familiarity of SF's unfamiliar aliens and gadgets to assert the presence of those 'others' rather closer to home. Ursula Le Guin argued in 1975 that the issue that subtended much American SF was 'the question of the Other - the being who is different from yourself':

> [The alien] being can be different from you in its sex; or in its annual income; or in its way of speaking and dressing and doing things; or in the color of its skin, or the number of its legs and heads. In other words, there

> is the sexual Alien, and the social Alien, and the cultural Alien, and finally the racial Alien.[11]

Le Guin thus contextualized SF's intergalactic monsters within terrestrial society. She emphasized that aliens existed among the writers and readers, as well as in their imaginations.

Feminist reinterpretations of the conventions of SF suggest new possibilities for the genre, and they also challenge the reader in new ways. Brian Stableford suggests that the generic identification of 'science fiction' does not tell a reader what a book contains, 'it tells him something about *how it is to be read*'.[12] SF signals a context not only for certain writing practices and possibilities, but also for particular reading practices.[13] The feminist inflection of science fiction protocols, the unexpected discourses of sexual politics, disturbs these conventional (gendered) reading positions. Anne Cranny-Francis observes that the feminist 'de/re/construction' of SF reveals the 'ideological significances' of genre structures, and constitutes, 'a fundamental intervention in the relationship between reader and text, a disruption of the reader's conventionalized understanding of the contract, the literary institution of the particular genre'.[14]

Sheila Rowbotham has suggested that, 'even in its origins women's liberation shifted boundaries, crossed zones, made politics into something else.'[15] Through consciousness-raising, women attempted to redefine themselves and their world, striving for, in Karen Durbin's words, a 'truer definition not only of themselves but of politics as well'.[16] As feminism provoked SF, so the science fictional 'novum' inflected the possible expressions of feminism, generating new perspectives from which to question the politics of sexual politics.[17] The writers focused on in this study reveal the ways in which science fiction has enabled feminists to reconfigure the boundaries and zones of gender, just as feminism has enabled a reconfiguration of the boundaries and zones of genre. This critique has become more self-reflexive in the 1980s and 1990s, as writers such as Gwyneth Jones challenge both the feminist and masculinist conventions of SF. The political interrogation of gender that featured as the primary motif in feminist SF texts of the 1970s is re-contextualized in later texts within a more extensive feminist questioning of gender, race, sex and even species identities. In the postmodern, some might say postfeminist, age of the 1990s, the most urgent questioning in SF centres upon how to be human in an increasingly technologized cyborg culture. Feminist writers have both influenced and been influenced

by fictions, most notably cyberpunk, which explore the promise of the human-computer interface.

Feminist SF is not, and has never been, a homogenous category. Critical constructions of feminist SF as a sub-genre inevitably draw rather shaky and subjective boundaries. Sarah Lefanu, for instance, suggests a borderline category of 'feminised SF', which would include work which values women, but does not challenge the 'god-givenness' of sexual difference.[18] She argues that Vonda McIntyre, Doris Lessing, Ursula Le Guin, and Joan Slonczewski all write 'feminised SF'. Needless to say, all these writers have been defined as feminist by other critics. Lefanu's attempt to cushion the distinctions between feminist SF and non-feminist SF demonstrates the difficulties of such absolute categorization. Lefanu in fact distinguishes between different positions within feminism, and privileges radical or postmodern feminisms over liberal or cultural feminisms.

Feminist SF cannot be positioned as a sub-genre, but must be recognized as a movement in SF. Veronica Hollinger cautions critics of feminist SF to acknowledge that, 'while [SF feminisms] frequently overlap in their theoretical positions and textual strategies, [they] are by no means always compatible'.[19] By designating feminist SF as a movement with many fronts, we can connect Doris Lessing's egalitarian *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* (1980) and Joanna Russ's acerbic *The Female Man* (1975) without collapsing either text into a predefined idea of what feminist SF should be.

Feminist SF reflects the many feminisms that exist within and beyond the genre, including: socialist, radical, liberal, cultural, spiritual, lesbian, separatist and Third World, or as Alice Walker terms it, Womanism.[20] Individual texts have also addressed specific feminist issues such as: wages for housework/motherhood in Zoë Fairbairns's *Benefits* (1970); abortion in Raccoona Sheldon's 'Morality Meat' (1984); the media exploitation of women's bodies in Josephine Saxton's 'Big Operation on Altair Three' (1984); and a women's language in Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984). Feminist SF has also explored the interactions between feminism and other radical movements, for instance, feminist pacifism in Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* (1986) and feminist ecology in Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979).

The political histories of feminism are very different in Britain and the US, but, as Sarah Lefanu points out, the publishing, distribution and marketing of SF is notoriously

trans-Atlantic.[21] In this study I focus on American SF because American women writers have made such a significant impact on American SF, and American SF has made such a significant impact on the SF of the rest of the world.[22] Not only are most SF books available in Britain written in America (including the majority of The Women's Press series), but British writers, such as Tanith Lee and Josephine Saxton, were for years published only in America and in translation.[23] Nan Albinski argues that 'women writers of science fiction in the 1970s generally published in America, rather than with domestic [British] publishers'.[24] She suggests that this was because SF was neither as widely read nor as intellectually respected in Britain as it was in the United States. In the 1970s, academic interest in SF flourished in the United States in a way which it did not over here. Only in recent years has SF been awarded wider recognition in British universities.

Critical Contexts

In 1968, Anne McCaffrey was the first woman writer to win a Hugo (readers') award since its inception in 1953. In the 1970s, however, nine Hugos, almost one third of the total awards, were presented to five women writers: Ursula K. Le Guin (1970, 1973, 1974, 1975); James Tiptree Jr (1974, 1977); Kate Wilhelm (1977); Joan Vinge (1978); Vonda McIntyre (1979); and C.J.Cherryh (1979). Other than Tiptree, who was thought to be a man anyway, all these writers might be described, using Lefanu's term, as writing 'feminised', rather than feminist, SF. More aggressively feminist writers did not receive Hugos in the 1970s. Joanna Russ gained her first award in 1983, Suzy McKee Charnas not until 1990. Russ, however did receive a Nebula (writers') award in 1972 for her lesbian-feminist short story, 'When It Changed'.

These awards represent the dramatic rise in the visibility and status of women's SF writers during the 1970s. By the middle of the decade the issue of 'women in science fiction' (as writers, readers, fans and characters) was generating vigourous debate. In 1974, the year in which she also received her first of three Hugos for 'Best Fan Writer', Susan Wood organized the first convention panel to address women and science fiction. Such panels were repeated at other conventions and in fanzines, including the November 1975 edition of *Khatru*, which printed a writers' symposium on the subject. The

momentum of the feminist movement in SF also inspired two feminist fanzines, *Janus* (later *Aurora*) which ran from 1975-1990, and the Canadian based *The Witch and the Chameleon* which ran from 1974-1976.

Feminist writers and readers critiqued the genre from within, but in the 1970s, SF also received fresh critical attention from students and academics: as Joanna Russ warned in 1968, 'the academicians are after us'.[25] Student activism on and off campus in the 1960s had presented political challenges to university curricula, and in the 1970s literature courses were beginning to include popular genres. SF texts such as Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) and Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), which had achieved almost cult-status among students, now appeared on university courses. SF was argued to be a 'non-elitist', socially engaged literature, and by the mid-1970s there were an increasing number of college level SF courses in the US.[26]

SF was thus established as a legitimate, if marginalized, academic field. In 1970 the Science Fiction Research Association was founded in America, one year before the Science Fiction Foundation was formed in Britain. One critical SF journal, *Extrapolation*, was already in circulation, but this was now joined by the British *Foundation* and the American/Canadian *Science Fiction Studies*.[27] From the early 1970s these journals published feminist articles about the issue of women (and sexism) in science fiction and, in the 1980s and 1990s, dedicated specific editions to the subject (*Extrapolation* in 1982; *Science Fiction Studies* in 1980, and again in 1990).

Gary Wolfe's analogy between science fiction terminology and contemporary politics, in which he proclaims sci-fi to be the 'nigger' of the field and SF to be the 'Ms', indicates, however gauchely, the way in which the genre's greater respectability during the 1970s has become associated with feminism.[28] The generic flexibility of SF, which suggests alternative extensions such as speculative fiction, science fantasy (a hybrid genre often disparaged by science fiction aficionados), speculative fabulation, speculative futures, and speculative feminisms, as well as science fiction, has made it the preferred term in academic discourse.[29]

It was only in the 1980s, however, that feminist SF was recognized as a critical category. In the *Women's Studies International Forum* special issue on SF in 1984, Marleen Barr sought to 'finally, precisely and publically [...] name this fiction'. She

proposed that the 'critical double speak' of '"women in science fiction" [was] no longer a sufficient synonym for "feminist science fiction"'.[30] Barr had previously edited *Future Females* (1981), a collection of essays on feminist SF which identified the Women's Liberation Movement as a major influence on the science fiction field. The 1980s also saw the first book length studies of feminist SF. Natalie Rosinsky's *Feminist Futures* (1984) explored the concept of 'feminist androgyny' in feminist speculative texts of the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing from the theories of scientific indeterminacy, Rosinsky suggested that these texts deconstructed the either/or construction of gender to move beyond the 'fictive categories of human experience (wave or particle, male or female) to something potentially more than both'.[31]

Other studies include Thelma Shinn's *Worlds Within Women* (1986) which analyzed the structures of feminist myths and myth-making in SF; and Barr's own *Alien to Femininity* (1987) in which she staged a series of 'encounters' between the works of feminist theorists and feminist science fiction writers. The most influential study of the 1980s, however, was Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine* (1988) which both outlined the major thematic aspects of feminist science fiction and provided insightful readings of work by James Tiptree, Ursula Le Guin, Suzy McKee Charnas and Joanna Russ. Lefanu was also the editor of the Women's Press science fiction series which introduced many women readers, including myself, to science fiction for the first time. Other British studies include two edited collections, Lucie Armitt's *Where No Man has Gone Before* (1991) which contains articles by SF writers and critics, and Richard Ellis and Rhys Garnett's *Roots and Branches* (1990) which identifies 'contemporary feminist responses', as one of its two significant branches.[32]

More recently, critics have stressed the connections between feminism, science fiction and postmodernism. Jenny Wolmark, in *Aliens and Others* (1993), positions her exploration of feminist SF within the intersections between these theoretical approaches. Marleen Barr also observes the affinity between feminist, postmodernist, and feminist science fiction narratives, but suggests that feminist SF should abandon its generic roots to be absorbed by the postmodern canon.[33] She proposes a new critical category, 'a new super genre of women's writing' which she terms 'feminist fabulation'.[34] In a direct contradiction of Lefanu's claim (which prefaces this thesis), Barr asserts that, 'SF is not

feminist'. She continues, 'SF is divided into separate women's and men's worlds'.[35] In order to disentangle women's work from the rest of the genre, Barr reasserts a reductive definition of SF as formula fiction which reinforces the very gender/genre codings that feminist SF has challenged and transgressed.

My project draws from the work of these earlier studies to argue that feminist science fiction is engaged in a dialogue with feminist theory and politics. The work of SF writers not only articulates but also presents a provocative questioning of the women's movement, which, in some instances, anticipates the work of later feminist theorists and contributes to the deconstruction of boundaries between science fiction and theoretical discourses. The writers whom I have chosen to research in this thesis all raise (im)pertinent issues for feminism and have all influenced the feminist movement in the genre itself. Joanna Russ's texts construct and deconstruct female heroes to assert the need for coalitional politics; James Tiptree's narratives and male persona challenge feminist and anti-feminist assumptions about the differences between men and women; and Octavia Butler's texts inflect gender politics within traumatic reconfigurations of the relationship between the self and its others.

Russ, Tiptree and Butler each address feminist politics, but they also quite specifically position their work in relation to other science fiction texts. This intersection between sexual and textual politics is an aspect of feminist SF which Barr's 'feminist fabulation' potentially elides. Samuel Delany, in his definition of science fiction, asserts that the genre is 'a set of conventions, a reading protocol [which] must be learned by exposure and application'.[36] Following Delany, I would argue that feminist SF texts must be read as a part of the genre into which, and against which, they were written. Only such generic contextualization will reveal the ways in which these writers are influenced by, as well as challenge, the traditions of SF. Self-conscious reinterpretations of both individual SF works and conventional genre motifs are characteristic of many feminist SF texts. In the 1990s, feminist writers such as Gwyneth Jones, Pat Cadigan, and Melissa Scott address their work to previous SF movements, including feminism in the 1970s and cyberpunk in the 1980s. These interactions suggest that although generic identification may not be the defining context for feminist science fiction it remains significant and cannot, as Barr suggests, simply be erased.

The feminist movement in SF challenged, and sometimes appropriated, the 'boys-own adventure' image of the genre, and asserted women's investment in fictions that explored the implications of science and technology. Penny Florence argues that there are good reasons for considering feminist SF within the genre:

> The crucial matter is not necessarily definition per se - though it can be - it is how definition is used, both to reflect back on to and to change the social and the political framework/s within which texts are produced, as well as the cultural.[37]

The label 'feminist SF' needs to be contextualized both in the history of women's involvement in science fiction, as writers, editors and readers, and in the complex debates about the generic integrity of science fiction itself. By insisting that women writers are, and have always been, working in SF, feminist critics challenge the cultural, social and political frameworks which discourage women from addressing science and technology.[38] Feminist SF must also be positioned within the historical and cultural context of the Women's Liberation Movement, and the political and theoretical innovations of second wave feminism. The interactions between these various literary and social contexts resonate within feminist SF to generate entertaining and progressive fictions.

Women and the Golden Age of Science Fiction

SF critics have detected the 'origins' of the genre in various texts, from Lucien's *A True Story* (c.200) to Cyrano de Bergerac's *A Voyage to the Moon* (1659). Brian Aldiss, however, argues that the first SF text is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a novel which brought gothic horror out of the crumbling castle and into the scientific laboratory. Feminist critics also claim Shelley's text as SF's original narrative.[39] For feminists however this identification perhaps signals a founding irony for women's role in this male-orientated genre. SF begins with a woman's text, but Shelley's narrative represents a direct relation between the excesses of masculine science and the erasure of women.

Feminist SF is similarly rooted in the nineteenth-century gothic mode, but as Lefanu notes, it also attests to the legacy of nineteenth-century utopian writing by women.[40] In *Daring to Dream* (1984), Carol Farley Kessler lists over one hundred book-length utopias written by women in the United States between 1836-1919. Of these, she

describes almost one third as 'feminist Utopias' and demonstrates that only in the 1970s did feminist writers once again turn to the utopian form in such numbers.[41]

The connections between feminist science fiction and the female gothic and utopian traditions have been developed by recent critics.[42] What is too often ignored in these histories of feminist SF, however, is the influence of the early American pulps. To assert this heritage seems odd when the pulps are considered to have trivialized women and are usually held responsible for the genre's reputation as the most reductive of formula fictions. The 1960s anthology *Science Fiction for People who Hate Science Fiction* laments that the 'gaudy covers which usually featured half-naked girls chased by hideous alien monsters' and the 'ads for athlete's foot cures' embarrassed potential readers and ghettoized SF.[43]

The pulps have been disparaged by feminist and non-feminist critics alike for their portrayal of women. Peter Nicholls suggests that 'one of the most shameful facets of genre sf is the stereotyped and patronizing roles which are usually though not invariably assigned to women.'[44] Lisa Tuttle outlines these stereotypes, suggesting that women characters in the pulps were represented according to recognized models - where, that is, women appeared at all:

> The Timorous Virgin (good for being rescued, and for having things explained to her), the Amazon Queen (sexually desirable and terrifying at the same time, usually set up to be 'tamed' by the super-masculine hero), the Frustrated Spinster Scientist (an object lesson to girl readers that career success equals feminine failure), the Good Wife (keeps quietly in the background, loving her man and never making trouble) and the Tomboy Kid Sister (who has a semblance of autonomy only until male appreciation of her burgeoning sexuality transforms her into Virgin or Wife). But of course the vast majority of male characters in sf are stereotypes too.[45]

Although debate about the image of women in science fiction is important for feminist SF, such critiques tend to obscure the sometimes defiant contributions of women writers and the presence of women readers and editors before 1960. They also tend to underestimate the real influence the pulps have had on feminist science fiction. Joanna Russ is a fierce and wryly astute critic of the kind of science fiction she sees as 'misogynist power-tripping of a very absurd and adolescent kind'; but she has also asserted the value of SF's pulp heritage.[46] In a speech to the Science Fiction Research Association in 1968 she applauded the excitement of the pulps, even though she had reservations about their

politics: 'I would like to see science fiction keep the daring, the wildness, the extravagant imagination that we got from starting out in the pulps - but I would also like to see us shed the kind of oversimplified values and attitudes it got from the same place'.[47]

The oversimplified values and attitudes that Russ invokes, as well as the pace and excitement of the narratives, have come to characterize the SF pulps. However, when Hugo Gernsback established *Amazing Stories* in April 1926, he anticipated a far more interrogative and educational mode. Gernsback launched 'scientifiction' as a 'charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision'.[48] He encouraged technological extrapolation as a way to impart information to young people, but he also published speculative stories which envisioned new social and gender arrangements. Within six months of beginning *Amazing Stories* Gernsback declared, 'a totally unforeseen result [...] strange to say, [...] a great many women are already reading the magazine'.[49] In 1930 he suggested that 'if every man, woman, boy and girl, could be induced to read science fiction right along, there would certainly be a great resulting benefit to the community [...]. Science fiction would make people happier, give them a broader understanding of the world, make them more tolerant'. [50]

Gernsback's editorials suggest that these early SF magazines did not address or presume an exclusively male audience. But estimating the number of girl/women readers of these early pulps is an impossible task. Girls may well have read their brothers' magazines and so not have been recognized as a part of the general readership. Whether or not this was so, the editors who succeeded Gernsback in the early 1930s estimated their readership to be over ninety per cent boys and directed their stories to that audience. This editorial policy effectively excluded women writers from the science fiction magazines and directed them towards fantasy and horror publications such as *Weird Tales*, which, in the 1930s, also employed a female editor, Dorothy McIlwrith.[51]

In the 1920s and 1930s, however, women writers did publish in the SF pulps. Leslie F. Stone, for instance, published fifteen stories in Hugo Gernsback's magazines between 1929 and 1935. Jane L. Donawerth has identified several other women writers who published in the pulps between 1926-1930, including Clare Winger Harris (who received third prize in a short story contest in *Amazing Stories* in 1927), Sophie Wenzel Ellis, Minna Irving, L. Taylor Hansen, Lilith Lorraine, Kathleen Luduck and Louise Rice.[52]

Donawerth suggests that in the early pulps male and female writers similarly romanticized science and technology. However, she argues that, unlike the men, women writers explored the potential of technology to transform domestic and reproductive practices. She identifies the connections between these amazing stories and nineteenth-century utopian narratives, but also suggests that these first wave feminists prefigured ideas that are more usually associated with the Women's Liberation Movement. She argues that the 'radical reconfiguration of biologies', and 'the radical alteration or abolishment of birth and child-raising' means that these women writers 'look forward to the writers of feminist utopias in the 1970s, not back to the writing of the earlier utopias, which revolved around child care'.[53]

In the later 1930s and early 1940s women writers found it increasingly difficult to publish in SF magazines. Writers such as Leslie Perri, Margaret St Clair and Helen Weinbaum achieved some recognition, but only in 'the lowest of the pulps'.[54] In the 1940s, *Astounding Science Fiction*, edited by John W. Campbell, did print some women writers, including Judith Merril and Wilmar Shiras, who were both published for the first time in 1948. Alice Norton also began writing science fiction in the late 1940s - initially as Andrew North. As Andre Norton, her more famous pseudonym, she explained in interview in 1972 that, 'when I entered the field I was writing for boys, and since women were not welcomed, I chose a pen-name which could be either masculine or feminine'. Norton adds, perhaps in a direct denial of the claims of many feminist writers, 'this is not true today, of course'.[55] The pressure on women writers to adopt masculine or gender-neutral names, or to initialize their own names, has been satirized by Mary Kenny Badami. Her 1976 science fiction quiz, 'The Invisible Woman', stated:

> The following are sf authors. Which are women?
> a) Leigh Brackett;
> b) C.L.Moore;
> c) Kit Reed;
> d) Wilmar Shiras;
> e) Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

And the answer? 'All of the above'.[56]

The most successful women writers to appear before 1945 were undoubtedly C.L Moore and Leigh Brackett. Both their texts enacted Peter Nicholls's suggested formula for pulp fiction, having 'action, romance, heroism, success, exotic milieux, fantastic adventures

(often with a sprinkling of love interest) and almost invariably a cheerful ending'.[57] Of these two writers, only Moore has received critical recognition from feminist scholars; Brackett receives little acknowledgement. Moore's first published story, 'Shambleau', appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1933 and introduced her male hero Northwest Smith. Moore also wrote sword and sorcery tales which featured the fiercely independent Jirel of Joiry, whose fiery red hair suggested her implicit association with the female alien, Shambleau. These texts not only envisaged female heroism, but also explored a powerful and dangerous female sexuality.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that the early science fiction pulps allowed women writers to 'translate the comparatively subtle terms of sexual struggle into the more openly theatrical terms of species or racial struggle'.[58] This slippage between the 'sexual Alien' and the 'racial Alien', to recall Le Guin, suggests the ways in which the metaphoric rather than metonymic character of the genre enabled a covert dissidence. Moore's 'cheerful endings' do not diffuse or contain the disturbing aspects of her narratives. Northwest Smith, as Sarah Gamble observes, is frequently cast as the helpless victim of alien (often sexualized) malevolence, and escapes only through sheer good-fortune, female assistance or male rescue.[59]

In contrast to Moore, Leigh Brackett's stories are more robust, and her combination of heroic fantasy and planetary romance has been described as displaying a 'muscular panache'.[60] Her writing is more conventional than Moore's, in that it does not challenge the genre's taboos, and (perhaps as a consequence) Brackett was the first woman writer to become a 'bowl-em-over fan favourite'.[61] Like Moore, Brackett mainly featured male heroes, but she also created active and determined female characters, such as Lhara in 'Water Pirates' (1941) and Laura in 'The Halfling' (1943). Brackett insisted that 'when [she] put a woman in a story she's doing something not worrying about the price of eggs and who's in love with whom'.[62]

This implicit criticism of what was commonly termed the 'wet diaper' fiction of the 1940s and 1950s suggests the way in which Brackett's female characters challenged conventional gender stereotypes. Brackett has been criticised for her more conservative space operas, but she also wrote a powerful anti-racist story in the 1950s.[63] In 'All the Colors of the Rainbow' (1957) the violent racism unleashed upon Civil Rights activists is

transposed onto the relationship between humans and aliens. The alien articulates the white humans' worst fears, 'You can't hide from the universe. You're going to be trampled under with color - all the colors of the rainbow!'.[64]

Marion Zimmer Bradley, who was a dedicated SF fan in the 1940s, asserts the influence of these earlier writers, and especially C.L.Moore, on her own SF. She suggests that the Moore/Kuttner partnership transformed 'the whole face of science fiction'.[65] Although earlier and less well-known women writers disappeared into the obscurity of the pulps, and were rarely reprinted in later anthologies, C.L.Moore and Leigh Brackett continued to be anthologized throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Pamela Sargent also reprinted Moore's 'Jirel Meets Magic' (1935) and Brackett's 'The Lake of Gone Forever' (1949) in her feminist collection *More Women of Wonder* (1976).

The *Women of Wonder* anthologies (1974, 1976, 1978) reprinted work by women that featured female protagonists, and so introduced feminist readers to past and contemporary feminist science fiction. Sargent's texts also outlined the history of women's SF and thus asserted women's past and continuing presence in the genre, to give 'a picture of how the role of women in science fiction [had] developed'.[66] The first *Women of Wonder* included three writers who were publishing before 1960, Judith Merril, Katherine MacLean, and Marion Zimmer Bradley, all of whom were associated with the two new magazines of the 1950s - *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy*.

These two publications, and especially *F+SF*, aspired to the more literary heights of the 'slicks', so called because of their better quality paper. They also featured the 'softer' sciences of biology, psychology and sociology and so enabled women writers, who may not have had the technological expertise required by Campbell's magazine, to begin writing, and publishing SF. These magazines usually featured stories by at least one woman writer in every issue, a representation that not only reflected the magazines' different emphases, but was also encouraged by the active editorial policies of Horace Gold at *Galaxy*, and the team of Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas at *F+SF*.[67] Other women writers associated with these publications included Rosel George Brown, Evelyn E. Smith, Zenna Henderson and Joanna Russ, who published her first story in *F+SF* in 1959 and continued to contribute controversial reviews throughout the 1970s.

Susan Gubar argues that the history of women in SF constitutes a 'neglected tradition' whereby C.L.Moore is 'mid-way' between Shelley and Le Guin.[68] But Gubar's assertion of 'a [female] tradition of their own in SF' is problematic. Feminist science fiction does not originate exclusively from a literary tradition, and certainly not from an exclusively female literary tradition, within or beyond the genre of SF. Joanna Russ in fact critiqued the fiction of earlier women writers, especially Zenna Henderson's work, as 'ladies magazine fiction' which reinforced rather than questioned dominant constructions of social and gender relations.[69] Feminist SF does, however, have roots in the history of women in SF. Feminists challenged earlier work by female as well as male writers but they also developed many of the themes, ideas and potential first explored by women SF writers before the 1960s.

By the late 1960s, women writers had already broken considerable ground in a field in which they had to be 'not as good as a man but *better*'.[70] The earlier women writers thus contributed to the possibility of feminist science fiction, without necessarily constituting a specific 'tradition' of women's science fiction. Neither did they necessarily welcome the overt politicization of women's SF. Marion Zimmer Bradley reports that Leigh Brackett, Andre Norton and herself all felt the same way: 'We had made it against tremendous odds stacked against a woman's succeeding in this world, and none of us had a very high opinion of the women's movement in science fiction.'[71]

Feminist Science Fiction and the New Wave

Lester del Rey labelled the 1960s and early 1970s 'the Age of Rebellion' in science fiction.[72] Young writers, who became known as the 'New Wave', rejected the conventions and limitations of the pulps to produce more experimental and controversial fictions. Edward James notes that it was 'no accident' that the New Wave coincided with Beatlemania in Britain, and the hippie counter-culture in the US.[73] The New Wave was rooted in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and expressed alternative (mind-expanding) realities that explored the 'softer' sciences of anthropology, psychology and ecology. In Britain, the New Wave was associated with Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* magazine and writers such as J.G.Ballard, Brian Aldiss and Pamela Zoline. Aldiss rejected

the label, but argued that writing termed 'New Wave' suggested creative possibilities impossible within pulp formula writing. New Wave heroes 'did not swagger around in magnetized boots. They were generally anti-heroes, their destination more often bed than Mars'.[74] In the United States, Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthologies (1967, 1972) spearheaded the American New Wave, although Damon Knight's *Orbit* series (1966-1980) and Samuel Delany and Marilyn Hacker's more experimental *Quark* (1970-1971) also printed some equally controversial texts.

Joanna Russ describes the New Wave as a 'Decadent' fiction, the third stage in the process she identifies as 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials'.[75] The first stage is that of 'Innocence' in which the presentation of the unexpected (the alien, the gadget) provides the *raison d'etre* of the narrative. In the second stage, 'Plausibility', the narrative explores the implications of that motif. In the Decadent phase however, which mirrors the techniques of postmodern experimentation, the image has become 'petrified', part of a 'stylized convention', or has been transformed into 'a metaphorical or lyrical element in *something else*'.[76] J.G.Ballard articulated the petrification of pulp conventions in *New Worlds* in 1962 when he argued that:

> Science fiction should turn its back on space, on interstellar travel, extra-terrestrial life forms, galactic wars and the overlap of these ideas that spreads across the margins of nine-tenths of magazine s-f. [...] Similarly, I think, science fiction must jettison its present narrative forms and plots [...]. The biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth.[77]

The rejection of the 'hard' sciences of the earlier pulps signalled the increasing emphasis upon the genre's literary possibilities, rather than upon scientific extrapolation. It also corresponded to the changing profile of the readership. As SF became more fashionable in the 1960s, the audience for even the most technologically orientated magazines ceased to be dominated by science graduates. In 1958 almost thirty per cent of *Astounding*'s readership had studied engineering - by 1973 this figure was down to less than seven per cent.[78] Many new writers publishing in the field were also coming from arts rather than science backgrounds, including many women writers. In 1973 the female membership of Science Fiction Writers of America had reached almost twenty per cent.[79]

Several women writers in the 1960s and 1970s were engaged in the New Wave violation of SF taboos, especially taboos about sexuality. New Wave fictions also mediated the political and philosophical interests of the 1960s counter-culture, including a disaffection with the Vietnam war, and an exploration of Eastern mysticism, Jungian psychology and hallucinogenic drugs. Ellison's anthologies included Russ's 'When It Changed', which represented a lesbian utopia; Tiptree's 'Milk of Paradise', which represented homosexuality and alien desire; Le Guin's critique of the Vietnam war, 'The Word for World is Forest'; and Kate Wilhelm's 'The Funeral', a response to the backlash at Chicago in 1968.

But feminism was not a feature of the New Wave agenda. It was only women writers, such as Russ and Zoline, who employed New Wave experimentalism to explore specifically sexual politics. However, feminist writers were able to publish polemical stories in New Wave publications which, as Ellison says of *Dangerous Visions*, aimed to contain stories which 'could not be published in the traditional markets due to controversial content or approach'.[80] The New Wave exploration of unstable realities and subjectivities was also enormously influential upon feminist writers, including those who, like Ursula Le Guin, were less overtly avant-garde. Le Guin's claim that 'Outer Space and the Inner Lands are [her] country' echoes Ballard's innovative focus upon 'inner space' ten years earlier.[81] But not all feminist SF writers acknowledge such an influence. Suzy McKee Charnas, for instance, argues that, 'in the 1960s SF was a dying or at least a moribund genre (the New Wave was an effort, not very successful in my opinion, to remedy this by importing some technical stunts from the mainstream), and feminism came along in the 1970s and *rescued* it'.[82]

The greater number of women writers publishing science fiction in the late 1960s and 1970s corresponded to the increasing female audience of SF. Charles Brown, editor of *Locus*, estimated that the magazine's readership in 1977 was at least one third female, women readers having doubled their subscriptions between 1971 and 1977.[83] In 1978, Brian Stableford argued that:

> A significant change in the sex-structure of the audience for science fiction has taken place over the last ten years [...] this has presumably had a profound effect upon the actual gross size of that audience - or at least upon its potential size. The apparent connection between this upsurge of interest among female readers and writers and the feminist movement is interesting.[84]

As Stableford suggests, the increasing profile of women in science fiction was supported by the political prominence of the Women's Liberation Movement, but this was not the only factor. The popularity of fantasy during the 1970s may well, as Edward James suggests, have brought more women readers to science fiction.[85] Critics have also suggested that in a period in which science fiction magazines were being marginalized by paperback publishing, book distribution patterns had a significant impact on the readership. In the 1970s, bookstores relocated from the streets to the malls, where the majority of customers were women. The editors of the women's SF anthology, *New Eves*, suggest that this relocation caused 'a seismic upheaval' in the demographics of the SF readership.[86]

In 1982, Isaac Asimov argued in *Vogue* magazine that the 1970s had seen 'a gradual feminization of the audience for printed science fiction'. He concluded that, 'the readers of science fiction magazines and novels are women to an extent of 25 per cent at the very least. I suspect that the percentage is now nearer the 40 per cent mark'.[87] Asimov suggested that one of the major factors in popularizing science fiction among women had been the television series *Star Trek*. In 1975, Paramount Television Marketing Research surveyed viewers across several American cities. They found that women constituted almost fifty per cent of *Star Trek* viewers, and that in some cities, such as San Francisco and Indianapolis, they out-numbered men.[88] Gene Roddenberry (the creator, scriptwriter, director and producer of *Star Trek*) indicated that many of these women were active in feminist politics when he claimed in 1977 that, 'in my speeches, in my appearances around the country, I think that women's liberation is probably the question that comes up most often, and inquiries related to it are some of the most angry and critical questions I get'.[89]

In the 1970s, the political potential of the SF genre was explored in women's magazines such as *Ms* and *Mademoiselle*, and the feminist quarterly *Quest*, which all featured articles about feminist SF.[90] Women readers were also introduced to the genre by several feminist presses, such as Daughters Inc., Persephone and Naiad Press in America, and Onlywomen and The Women's Press in Britain, which published some feminist SF novels in the 1970s and 1980s. And as individual activists, feminist writers, including Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas, also marketed their own and other women's texts to the newly established feminist bookstores. Charnas argued that forming connections

between women science fiction writers and women's bookstores was 'probably the most rewarding aspect of being a science fiction author'.[91]

Feminist Politics and Science Fiction

In the 1975 *Khatru* symposium on 'Women in Science Fiction', Suzy McKee Charnas explained that she was first attracted to SF by 'the condition of the genre itself', which she believed had also attracted other women: 'those of us who loved sf in spite of the fact that we never found ourselves in it loved not the achievement of the field, but its potentiality.'[92] Charnas identified SF as a genre that had much to recommend it to feminist writers and readers:

> SF [is] a genre that is particularly suited to the transitional state of women today in our culture: actually, I think sf is suited to the needs of *any* group that feels itself to be oppressed. It offers a form unencumbered by the necessity to trot out the same old dreary details again in order to make one's points. The brainless boredom of life in the nursery, life in the laundromat, life in the dating-game, life in the typing-pool, is true, crushing, impossible. [...] It's too depressing and frankly it's very hard to write interestingly about boredom, or rewardingly about unrewarding lives. [...] Through science fiction, I can see the same drab realities illuminated with the brilliance of the strange; everything becomes transmuted, fresh, newly-meaningful, full of writing-possibilities.[93]

The 'brilliance of the strange' is variously represented in definitions of science fiction as a distinct writing and reading practice. In fandom it is the 'sense of wonder' from the Golden Age of the pulps. In more critically conventional terms it is Robert Scholes's 'representational discontinuity' or Darko Suvin's 'cognitive estrangement'.[94] For Charnas this defamiliarization is a pertinent political strategy for women's movement writers. The science-fictional transmutation of the ordinary into the 'newly meaningful' echoes the feminist practice of consciousness-raising, as a process of estrangement and redefinition. Like SF, CR defamiliarizes the humdrum aspects of women's lives to assert a discontinuity between those lived experiences and their ideological representation. Charnas outlines the correspondences between SF and CR (as both discourses which anticipate feminist futures) when she asserts that 'as the women's movement in all its forms touches more and more deeply the lives of women in all sorts of situations and states of minds, I think that more

and more of them will try to regain the habit of questioning, and will discover the uses and delights of sf in that process'.[95]

Science fiction, then, is figured as a writing practice through which women are able to develop and articulate an oppositional feminist politics. The didactic potential of the genre is foregrounded as the alternative worlds of SF reflect upon the limitations imposed on the lives of 'zero world' women. Natalie Rosinsky argues that for feminist activists in the 1970s:

> Reality was not a clear uncontested field - and hence realism was problematic [...]. SF and fantasy provided a new Unreal, potentially Real context that thus allowed a redefinition of what counted as experience, the truth of experience. A context that could be overlaid onto the present to show up the gaps.[96]

The literary reconfiguration of women's 'reality' was not however, as Rosinsky suggests, confined to fantastic fiction. Maria Lauret argues that in the 1970s feminist realism also represented a quest for new feminist subjectivities. Challenging the critical dismissal of feminist realism as, 'the true story of how I became my own person' (Rosalind Coward), or 'the literature of "what it's *really* like for women"' (Meaghan Morris), Lauret points out that the political impetus of this fiction lay precisely in the *discontinuity* between 'social change as envisioned' and 'reality as lived'.[97]

Realist texts, such as Rita Mae Brown's *Ruby Fruit Jungle* (1973) achieved a commercial success unavailable to feminist SF, as the 'Women's Lib' novel was marketed, in Lauret's words, as 'a heady mixture of sex and female rebellion'.[98] *Ruby Fruit Jungle* had already been published by a small feminist press, Daughters Inc., before it was re-launched by Bantam Books in 1977, and became a best-seller. Bantam's SF division had also published Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* in 1975, but Russ's text did not reach the same audience. From 1971, Russ submitted the manuscript to mainstream presses, but, she recalls, 'straight publishers wouldn't touch it'.[99] Angelika Bammer, however, has connected these texts to argue that *Ruby Fruit Jungle* is also an utopian narrative. She asserts that Brown's text presents an alternative world in which, like Russ's SF Whileaway, the 'generic subject is female'.[100]

If feminist SF had less success in appealing to the expanding feminist readership in the 1970s than its realist sister, it was also marginalized within SF presses. In 1975,

Samuel Delany reported a conversation he had had with a British editor working for a new paperback publisher:

> 'Do you know anything of Joanna Russ's? [...] when I was working for Panther, two years ago, I rejected two of her novels - I didn't even get a chance to read them. My boss told me women science fiction writers don't sell.'[...]
> 'Doesn't Panther publish Ursula Le Guin?'[...]
> 'Oh, yes. In fact it's the same editor who told me women sf writers didn't sell who bought her books.' [...]
> 'Well,' I said [...], 'maybe the situation has changed, Le Guin is selling well.'
> 'Oh, well, I haven't read Le Guin, but he's supposed to be very good.' [...]
> Congratulations, Ursula, you've become an honorary man by the sheer expedient of having sold![101]

The publishing industry's perception of women's SF as a non-seller was an object lesson in 'how to suppress women's writing'.[102] It also indicates the resistance to women's presence within the SF field.

Many writers and readers objected to the overt sexual politics of feminist SF. In 1972, for instance, James Blish argued that the writer has the 'negative obligation to avoid carrying placards and to stay off barricades'.[103] Although Blish did not identify which particular placards he was thinking of, the prominence of the Women's Liberation Movement during the early 1970s suggests that feminism may certainly have been in his mind. Brian Stableford reports that the SFWA's *Forum* (an internal publication for writers' eyes only) was the stage for fierce criticism of sexist writers by the newly vocal feminists.[104] The editors of the anthology *New Eves* suggest that within the self-reflexive community of SF, the Women's Liberation Movement generated a considerable stir:

> While feminism was just beginning to be discussed in the popular media, and became a subject of discussion only among enclaves of women in urban centers and the more progressive universities - feminism in just three years (between 1969 and 1972) became the main subject of discourse within the world of science fiction. Even women and men who did not embrace it in their fiction were at least forced to acknowledge or excoriate its existence.[105]

Although feminism has continued to be acknowledged and excoriated within SF, the assumption that SF is an inherently masculinist genre persists. In the 1980s the backlash against feminism had a two-fold, if contradictory, impact upon the feminist movement in SF. On the one hand, writers whose work was designated feminist SF were

considered to be persisting with a rather narrow and hackneyed field. On the other hand, however, as Gwyneth Jones has pointed out 'everybody was a feminist'. She wryly recollects that, 'you'd meet a male writer and he'd say, "well I'm a feminist, and so is my wife, who would be here tonight, except that she has made a choice, a reasoned choice, to stay at home and look after the kids - and I support her entirely in this revolutionary, radical feminist act"'.[106] In 1988, Jones described the responses she received when she was introduced as a writer of feminist SF. She parodied the gender stereotypes that surface in feminist discourses about SF (that 'soft' sciences are more womanly, or that women writers introduced characters to SF) as well as the male fear and loathing of this feminist intrusion into 'their' genre:

> When people say - isn't sf all about male-dominated areas, high tech and computers? [I] clasp my hands and say (clasp hands) - oh, no no no, science fiction doesn't have to be like that. It can also be about things which are true and beautiful and womanly like sociology and town planning. [...] There seems to be a story going about at the moment, to the effect that feminist sf isn't real science fiction at all - it is a *raid* on the genre. These ruthless female bandits, post-holocaust amazons no doubt (many of them without so much as a single degree in astrophysics). They've never written sf before and they come along, smash open the science fiction shop front, and run off with all the high tech gear. They chuck away most of it after they've tried to eat it, found you can't use circuit boards as sanitary towels and so on. They keep a few of the little bitty glass bead things to wear in their nipple rings.[107]

If attitudes about feminist SF have been slow to change, the movement of feminism in SF has continued to evolve in response to the developments in feminist theory.

In the 1980s questions about the differences between women were being pushed to the top of the feminist agenda from a number of directions, both philosophical and political. The demands of Black feminists that the women's movement recognize itself as self-defined in terms of a white, middle-class feminism influenced the theoretical discourses of both Black and white feminists. The subject of Women's Liberation was represented not as 'Woman' but as 'women', a pluralism that attempted to encompass the differences within women's identities. The articulations of global sisterhood and the assertion of the metaphorical figure of the Everywoman were seen as strategic but necessarily exclusionary practices. As Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller argue, however, 'multiplication is no

escape from reification [...] more useful is a shift in attention from the meanings of [...] "women" to the process of [...] "woman/women making"'.[108]

In feminist theory of the 1980s and 1990s, the differences between women are continually de/re/constructed as women's identities are seen to be constituted within a multiplicity of discursive and material practices. Donna Haraway articulates this 'process of becoming' by drawing upon the science-fictional metaphor of the cyborg, which she argues, represents 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.[109] Haraway's cyborg does not negate identity politics, but contextualizes those discourses within a recognition of identity as positionality. She asserts that, 'gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism'.[110]

The cyborg is one metaphor through which feminists can conceive of a non-essentialized, but historically specific, subject. Linda Alcoff suggests that such a hybridized politics would enable us to assert gender as a political cornerstone without prioritizing it as the only, or even the primary, focus of feminism: 'we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically.'[111]

Feminist SF writers have reconfigured female identities in ways that complement contemporary arguments within feminist theory. The science-fictional novum has generated the 'shift in attention' argued for by Keller and Hirsch, and has enabled feminist writers to envisage both new selves and new politics. The metaphors of feminist SF, such as Russ's 'female man', Butler's 'constructs', and Jones's ironic 'half-castes', express the promising, dangerous slippages between different positions and identities. They also suggest cogent metaphors for feminist futures.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis focuses on the relationship between feminist theory and feminist SF to ask how SF's feminist futures have interpreted and challenged the politics of women's liberation. How have women SF writers responded to the developing arguments of

feminism as a social movement and a theoretical enterprise? Can feminist SF be constructed as an oppositional cultural practice? And, if so, how have feminist writers drawn on the specific features of the SF genre to articulate and explore the possibilities of a new sexual politics? Through in-depth readings of particular texts, the following chapters trace the evolution of the feminist movement in SF from the late-1960s to the 1990s in which, according to writer Gwyneth Jones, the label 'feminist SF' is no longer relevant.

It is difficult to establish the beginnings of any literary movement, but, in Chapter 2, I propose Pamela Zoline's 'Heat Death of the Universe' (1967) and Joanna Russ's 'The Adventuress' (1967) as feminist SF's literary forerunners. These stories, which feature very different narrative techniques both address the proto-feminist discourses of the 1960s. Whereas Zoline's text exercises the New Wave experimentalism of the 1960s to demonstrate women's suburban suffocation in the domestic sphere, Russ's story draws on the pulp conventions of sword-and-sorcery to assert the potential of feminist agency. Russ's Alyx stories present a fierce and sexy female hero, a feminist fantasy which can be read against the construction of women's personal and political agency in the early Women's Liberation Movement.

The later Alyx tales, and Russ's novel *The Two of Them* (1978), develop the theme of women's agency much more critically to ask how women assert agency in a male-dominated culture. Does the heroine's agency signal a transcendence of gender politics, or is it in fact constituted by her manipulation and overt defiance of conventional femininity? And what is the relation between such individual heroism and the wider political context of feminism as a collective social movement?

The presentation of a woman as an active and effective agency constituted a necessary intervention in a masculinist field. It offered an inspirational role model for women readers and disrupted the gender conventions of 1960's SF. But it did not question the nature of Woman as a political, cultural or natural identity. Chapter 3 addresses these more problematic questions through a sustained reading of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975). Russ's experimental style breaks up the subject of its narrative (where the subject refers to both the protagonist and to feminism). Firstly, *The Female Man* represents four different women as a collective protagonist to evoke and simultaneously fragment the feminist figure of the Everywoman. Secondly, the novel equally breaks up any coherent

'voice' of feminism to ask who and what are the subjects of feminist politics. If the answer is women, then who are these women, and what are the terms of their collective sisterhood? More disturbingly, the text deconstructs the imperatives of gender to ask what it means to 'be' a woman or a man. Who can assume these identities and under what circumstances? *The Female Man* asserts the urgency of proclaiming women's experiences at the same time as it implicitly problematizes the bases of identity politics. This in-depth reading of *The Female Man* reveals the ways in which Russ's insistence upon contradictory (gendered and feminist) positions anticipates recent postmodern-feminist debates, as it also transcribed the anger and energy of the Women's Liberation Movement.

The metaphor of the female man provides the structuring motif for Chapter 4 which draws out the critical and theoretical challenges presented by the literary transvestitism of Alice Sheldon. For eight years, Sheldon wrote science fiction using a male pseudonym and was heralded as the most masculine of all SF writers. When 'James Tiptree Jr' was discovered to be a woman there was both delighted applause and hasty retraction. In recent feminist criticism the ambiguities of Sheldon/Tiptree's cross-identification have been suppressed in the celebration of Tiptree as a woman writer who duped a male-dominated audience. But the ambivalences of Sheldon's male disguise cannot be so easily resolved. We must ask how it affects feminist critical and reading practice to read Tiptree as a man or a woman. Can we simply claim Tiptree as a woman writer? And if we do, what are the implications of Tiptree's masculine style?

The critical questioning of the personal and political meanings of sex and gender which dominated feminist SF in the 1970s was less apparent in the SF of the 1980s. If feminism had been SF's provocateur in the 1970s, then cyberpunk took on that role in the 1980s. The critical interface was not so much between man and woman as between man and machine. Cyberpunk generated a questioning of what it meant to be human in a near-future, post-feminist, postmodern age. In the mid-to-late-1980s then, feminist SF's analyses of gender and sex were contextualized within science fiction's more urgent explorations of the permeable boundaries between humanity and its others.

This was not only a response to SF fashion. It also corresponded to a developing awareness in feminist theory that gender and sex were not isolated categories, but were located within a matrix of other differences (race, class, age, sexuality). Chapter 5 presents

an in-depth reading of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy to explore the ways in which the text reinterprets science-fiction's ambivalence about what it means to be human. Butler's alien-contact narrative is shadowed by the history of African-American slavery, which inflects the narrative exploration of the differences between the human and the alien, and questions the dominant (human) constructions of racial, gender and sexual difference.

In the 1990s feminist publishers, writers and critics are abandoning the classification 'feminist SF' as alienating, dated and restricting. But in an age in which technological proliferation impacts on all aspects of women's lives from reproduction to employment, sex to shopping, SF's feminist futures remain compelling. The concluding chapter of the thesis looks at the cyborg politics of contemporary women's SF to ask what has happened to feminist politics in SF. Gwyneth Jones's *White Queen* (1991) and *North Wind* (1994), Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991), and Melissa Scott's *Trouble and her Friends* (1994) all draw from the legacy of the feminist (and cyberpunk) movement in SF. Jones's texts in particular might be read as a critical interrogation of the co-option and dissipation of feminist discourses in and beyond SF. Cadigan and Scott reinterpret the cyberpunk motif of the body/machine interface to expose the ways in which that cyber-body is also socially marked by race, sex, age and gender.

These texts are feminist texts, even if, like Jones's, they evade the label 'feminist SF'. The chronological structure of this thesis demonstrates the relationship between these later texts and the earlier feminist movement in SF, without constructing them as necessarily contiguous. Feminist SF in the 1990s interprets the changing impulses of feminist theory, as it also engages in a dialogue with the fiction of Russ, Tiptree, Charnas, Le Guin, Butler and others. Beginning with questions about how women can assert their own political and personal agency, the thesis follows the feminist SF revisioning of that questioning. It analyses the interactions of feminism and science fiction to argue that SF's feminist futures present new configurations of sex, gender, race and even species identity. These close readings of feminist futures discover SF's anticipation of future feminisms.

1. bell hooks, 'Narratives of Struggle', in *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing*, ed. by Philomena Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp.53-61 (p.55).

2. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p.95.

3. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, 'Editorial Introduction: Postmodernism's SF/SF's Postmodernism', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (1991), 305-308 (p.306).

4. See Joanna Russ, '"What If...?" Literature', in *The Contemporary Scene, 1973*, ed. by Frank N. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1973), pp.197-201; and Ursula Le Guin, preface to 1969 edition of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, cited in Carl Malmgren, *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.8.

5. Sandi Hall demonstrates the intersection of these three different possibilities in *The Godmothers* (London: The Women's Press, 1982).

6. Darko Suvin defines the 'zero world' as the 'empirically verifiable properties around the author'. See 'On the Poetics of the SF Genre', *College English*, 34 (1972), 372-382.

7. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.84.

8. Joanna Russ, 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction', in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1972), pp.79-94 (p.80).

9. Kathie Sarachild, paper presented for Thanksgiving Conference, 1968, cited in Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p.131; and in Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p.214.

10. Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.94.

11. Ursula K. Le Guin, 'American SF and the Other', *Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 208-210 (p.208) .

12. Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press, 1987), p.69.

13. Mark Rose also suggests that SF is 'a context for reading and writing' in *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.4.

14. Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.18.

15. Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings* (London: Virago, 1983), p.4.

16. Karen Durbin, 'Alphabet Soup', in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. by Judith Clavir Albert and Stuart Edward Albert (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp.524-530 (p.525) (first publ. in *Win*, January, 1970).

17. Darko Suvin, 'SF and the Novum', in *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980), pp.141-158.

18. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.93.

19. Veronica Hollinger, 'Feminist Science Fiction: Breaking Up the Subject', *Extrapolation*, 31 (1990), 229-239 (p.237).

20. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), pp.xi-xii.

21. For histories of second wave British and American feminism see Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (London: Pan, 1982); and Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

22. See Edward James, 'The Victory of American SF', in *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.54-94.

23. See Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, pp.7-8; and Nan Bowman Albinski, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.132.

24. Nan Albinski, *Women's Utopias*, p.132.

25. Joanna Russ, 'Alien Monsters', in *Three Points: Essays on the Art of Science Fiction*, ed. by Damon Knight (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp.132-143 (p.133). Russ (ironically) warned SF writers that 'the days of [their] privacy [were] numbered'. She anticipated 'an invasion of outside people' into the SF field, who would bring 'outside standards (good or bad), outside experience, outside contexts, outside remarks' (p.133). In 'Alien Monsters', she aimed to pre-empt this 'literary California gold-rush' and 'get [her] own licks in before the crowd arrives' (p.133). She began by criticizing the SF stereotype of the He-Man.

26. Patrick Parrinder estimates that by 1976 there were around two-thousand college level courses, see 'The Science-Fiction Course', in *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp.131-143, p.131. However, other sources place the figure much lower. Peter Nicholls follows Jack Williamson's pamphlet *Teaching SF* (1975) in estimating that there were under two-hundred and fifty such courses in the mid-1970s, see *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. by John Clute and Peter Nicholls (London: Orbit, 1993), p.1065.

27. Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, p.188.

28. Gary Wolfe, *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.117.

29. See Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on the Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975) for a discussion of speculative fabulation. The term speculative feminisms was introduced by Diane Martin, editor of the feminist fanzine, *Aurora*.

30. Marleen Barr, 'Editorial', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7 (1984), 83-84 (p.83).

31. Natalie M. Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1984), p.107.

32. Richard Ellis and Rhys Garnett, *Science Fiction: Roots and Branches* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. i. To be concise I have focused only on texts which discuss feminist SF. For influential work on feminist utopias see Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1991); Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (London: University of Nebraska Press 1989); Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986); and Nan Bowman Albinski, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988). For work on women's genre fiction see *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Helen Carr (London: Pandora Press, 1989); and Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). For interviews and articles about feminist SF, see *Women Worldwalkers: New Dimensions in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Jane B. Weedman (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1985).

33. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1992); and *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

34. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation*, p.xiii.

35. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation*, p.4.

36. Samuel Delany, 'Generic Protocols: SF and Mundane', in *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward (1980), pp.175-193 (p.179).

37. Penny Florence, 'The Liberation of Utopia or Is Science Fiction the Ideal Contemporary Women's Form', in *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*, ed. by Linda Anderson, (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp.65-83 (p.66).

38. For feminist perspectives on women and science see Sandra Harding, 'Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critique', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.83-106; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*

(London, Yale University Press, 1984); and Hilary Rose, *Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

39. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1976; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1986), p.91.

40. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.3.

41. Carol Farley Kessler, *Daring to Dream: Utopian Stories by United States Women: 1836-1919* (London: Pandora Press, 1984), p.236.

42. See Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fictions*; and Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*.

43. Terry Carr, 'Introduction', in *Science Fiction for People Who Hate Science Fiction* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1966), pp.7-10 (p.7). Many of the covers on books by feminist and proto-feminist writers in the 1970s still feature semi-clad women: the publishers seem only to have deleted the alien monster.

44. Peter Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Granada, 1981), p.661.

45. Lisa Tuttle, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. by John Clute and Peter Nicholls (London: Orbit, 1993), p.1343.

46. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction: An Interview with Joanna Russ', in *Building Feminist Theory: Essays from 'Quest, a Feminist Quarterly'*, ed. by Charlotte Bunch (London: Longman, 1981), pp.243-250 (p.247) (first publ. in *Quest*, 2 (1975)).

47. Joanna Russ, 'Alien Monsters', p.141.

48. Cited in Gary Westphal, '"An Idea of Significant Import": Hugo Gernsback's Theory of Science Fiction', *Foundation*, 27 (1990), 26-50 (p.27).

49. Cited in Gary Westphal, 'Superladies in Waiting: How the Female Hero Almost Emerges in Science Fiction', *Foundation*, 58 (1993), 42-62 (p.43).

50. Cited in Gary Westphal, 'An Idea of Significant Import', p.37.

51. See Janrae Frank, Jean Stine and Forrest J. Ackerman, 'Introduction: New Eves and New Genesis: The Extraordinary Women Who Write Science Fiction and the Women They Write About', in *New Eves: Science Fiction about the Extraordinary Women of Today and Tomorrow*, ed. by Janrae Frank, Jean Stine and Forrest J. Ackerman (Stamford, Connecticut: Longmeadow Press, 1994), pp.viii-ix.

52. Jane L. Donawerth, 'Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps, 1926-1930', in *Utopian and Science Fiction By Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp.137-152.

53. Jane Donawerth, 'Science Fiction by Women', p.142.

54. Janrae Frank *et al*, 'About Leslie Perri and "Space Episode"', in *New Eves*, p.62.

55. Cited in Pamela Sargent, 'Introduction', in *More Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Novelettes by Women about Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp.11-41 (p.23).

56. Mary Kenny Badami, 'A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction', *Extrapolation*, 18 (1976), 6-19 (p.6).

57. Peter Nicholls, *Encyclopedia* (1993), p.980.

58. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.101.

59. Sarah Gamble, '"Shambleau...and Others": the Role of the Female in the Fiction of C.L. Moore', in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction*, ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.29-49.

60. John Clute, *Encyclopedia* (1993), p.151.

61. Janrae Frank *et al*, 'About Leigh Brackett and "Water Pirate"', in *New Eves*, p.70.

62. Cited in Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Responsibilities and Temptations of Women Science Fiction Writers', in *Women Worldwalkers*, pp.25-42 (p.29).

63. See Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.16; and Joanna Russ 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction', p.88.

64. Leigh Brackett, 'All the Colors of the Rainbow', in *The Halfling and Other Stories* (New York: Ace, 1973), pp.143-170 (p.161).

65. Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Temptations and Responsibilities', p.28. Throughout the 1940s, Moore wrote in collaboration with her husband Henry Kuttner under a variety of pseudonyms.

66. Pamela Sargent, 'Introduction', p.37.

67. See Janrae Frank *et al*, *New Eves*, p.xi; and Poul Anderson 'Reply to a Lady', *Vertex*, 2 (1974) pp.8 and 99 (p.99).

68. Susan Gubar, 'C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 7 (1980), 16-27 (p.17).

69. Joanna Russ, 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction', p.88.

70. Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Responsibilities and Temptations', p.31.

71. Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Responsibilities and Temptations', p.31.

72. Lester Del Rey, cited in Adrian Mellor, 'SF and the Crisis of the Educated Middle Class', in *Popular Fiction and Social Change*, ed. by Christopher Pawling (London: MacMillan, 1984), p.25.

73. Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, p.167.

74. Brian Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1988), p. 388.

75. Joanna Russ, 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials', *College English*, 34 (1972), 46-54.

76. Joanna Russ, 'Genre Materials', pp.49-50.

77. Cited in Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, pp.169-170.

78. Albert Berger, 'SF Fans in Socio-Economic Perspective: Factors in the Social Consciousness of a Genre', in *'Science Fiction Studies': Selected Articles on SF, 1976-1977*, ed. by R.D. Mullen and Darko Suvin (Boston: Gregg Press, 1978), pp.258-272 (p.264).

79. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections', p.249. In 1982, Marta Randall became the first woman president of the association and Pamela Sargent (with George Zebrowski) edited the SFWA Bulletin from 1983-1991.

80. Harlan Ellison, 'An Assault of New Dreamers', in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, ed. by Harlan Ellison, 2 vols (London: Pan, 1977), pp.ix-xxii (p.xi).

81. Ursula Le Guin, 'A Citizen of Mondath', in *The Profession of SF: Writers and Their Craft and Ideas*, ed. by Maxim Jakubowski and Edward James (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.73-77 (p.77) (first publ. in *Foundation*, 4 (1972), 20-24).

82. Cited by Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia* (1993), p.1344.

83. Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction*, p.65.

84. Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction*, p.65.

85. Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, p.183.

86. See Janrae Frank *et al*, *New Eves*, p.ix.

87. Cited in Betty King, *Women of the Future: The Female Main Character in Science Fiction* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), p.107.

88. *Letters to 'Star Trek'*, ed. by Susan Sackett (New York: Ballantine, 1977), pp.12-13.

89. Susan Sackett, *Letters to 'Star Trek'*, p.65.

90. See Anne Hudson Jones, 'Women in Science Fiction: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography', *Extrapolation*, 23 (1982), 83-90.

91. Suzy McKee Charnas, in 'Women in Science Fiction: A Symposium', ed. by Jeffrey Smith, *Khatru*, 3&4 (1975), p.78.

92. Suzy McKee Charnas, *Khatru,* 3&4, p.8.

93. Suzy McKee Charnas, *Khatru*, 3&4, p.9.

94. See Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, p.62; and Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p.4.

95. Suzy McKee Charnas, *Khatru*, 3&4, p.78.

96. Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures*, p.23.

97. Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature*, p.95.

98. Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature*, p.85.

99. Joanna Russ, personal correspondence, 16 June 1994.

100. Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions*, p.102.

101. Samuel Delany, *Khatru*, 3&4, pp.74-75.

102. See Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

103. James Blish, 'The Development of the Science Fiction Writer', in *The Profession of Science Fiction*, pp.124-130 (p.32).

104. Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction*, p.65.

105. Janrae Frank *et al*, *New Eves*, p.xiii.

106. Gwyneth Jones in interview with Amanda Boulter, 27 May 1995.

107. Gwyneth Jones, 'Riddles in the Dark', in *The Profession of Science Fiction*, pp.169-181 (pp.172-173).

108. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Introduction: January 4, 1990', in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. by Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.1-5 (p.2).

109. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.190-233 (p.196).

110. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', p.197.

111. Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs*, 13 (1988), p.433.

2. 'What Can A Heroine Do?': Joanna Russ's Alyx Series and *The Two of Them*

In the 1960s there was a marked increase in the number of female characters in science fiction.[1] As Nan Albinski argues, this was the decade in which 'the female hero was born' in SF.[2] Before the 1960s independent women protagonists had featured in a minority of SF texts, especially those by women writers, but most writers favoured male heroes. Marion Zimmer Bradley asserts that, before Anne McCaffrey won the Hugo in 1968, 'there was no way to write about women doing things. If you wanted to write about adventures, it had to be men who were having them'.[3] She suggests that there was a tacit assumption among SF writers and readers that, as Poul Anderson argued, female characters were simply 'not relevant'. In 1974, Anderson asked why women need appear at all in narratives that did not explicitly address the battle of the sexes, or involve 'a love interest'.[4]

This attitude was challenged in the 1960s when both male and female writers produced more texts which featured girls and women. Robert Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars* (1963), Samuel Delany's *Babel 17* (1966), Ursula Le Guin's *Planet of Exile* (1966), and Alexei Panshin's *Rite of Passage* (1968) all presented female protagonists. These texts were 'rite of passage' narratives in which the young heroine triumphed over intellectual trials and physical dangers on her journey toward womanhood. Although these novels, and especially those by Heinlein and Le Guin, re-iterate the How She Fell in Love story that Joanna Russ sees as standard fare for heroines, they also mark the coming of age of SF's female hero.[5]

The greater representation of female characters in SF during the 1960s can be read against the increasing political visibility of women during the decade. The 1961 President's Commission on the Status of Women (which produced its report in 1963), Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the creation of the National Organization for Women in 1966 all raised the popular and media profile of women's issues.[6] Similarly, within the counter-politics of the New Left (whose wider cultural impact was to influence SF in the late 1960s and 1970s[7]), some women were beginning to demand recognition. In 1964 an anonymous position paper entitled 'Women in the Movement' was presented to the SNCC conference. The following year Mary King and Casey Hayden circulated a 'kind of memo' that addressed sexual difference as a 'caste system'.[8] By 1967, women had presented a set of demands to the SDS national convention which called for men to 'deal with their own

problems of male chauvinism in their personal, social and political relationships', and for women to 'fight for their own independence'.[9] These gestures record the marginalization of activist women, and although they represent a minority voice, they express the dissatisfaction with the male Left which, in the late 1960s, precipitated the formation of a radical feminist movement.

The Emergence of Feminist SF: Joanna Russ's 'The Adventuress' and Pamela Zoline's 'Heat Death of the Universe'

1967 was also the year in which Joanna Russ and Pamela Zoline both published short-stories which were to become landmark texts for feminist SF. Joanna Russ's 'The Adventuress' was published in Damon Knight's *Orbit* series and introduced the character of Alyx, a swordswoman, picklock, outlaw and thief who lived in the ancient City of Ourdh. Russ's tale drew upon the conventions of heroic fantasy which derived from the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert Howard in the American pulp magazines such as *All-Story, Blue Book* and *Weird Tales*. Burroughs's Tarzan and Howard's Conan represented the Noble Savage as the archetypal hero of the genre. Russ's story subverted the role of these 'mighty thewed persons', as she termed them, to present her own sword-wielding heroine, 'a neat, level-browed governessy person called Alyx'.[10]

Pamela Zoline's 'Heat Death of the Universe' was published in Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* and was associated with the literary and generic experimentalism of the British New Wave. The story consists of fifty-four numbered paragraphs which represent the tedium and frustration of a day in the life of a suburban housewife in terms of the entropy of the universe. In contrast to Russ, who creates a proactive, autonomous female hero, Zoline represents the fragmentation of the female subject. Both these stories engage the contemporary political and media debates about women's roles in the 1960s. Zoline, especially, draws upon the newly articulated discontent of young, white, middle-class women which was expressed in magazines such as *Redbook*. In 1960, the magazine received twenty-four thousand replies to an article which explored 'Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped'.[11] Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), presented an exposition of the confinement and frustration of suburban housewives which analysed this 'personal' problem precisely as a common experience. Zoline's SF story echoes Friedan's critical

politicization of women's domestic despair. The protagonist of 'Heat Death', Sarah Boyle, re-presents Friedan's ironic 'Happy Housewife Heroine' as the alien(ated) subject of the tale. The narrative identifies Friedan's 'problem with no name' as an illustration (metonymical and metaphorical) of the heat death of the universe - a 'cosmic connectedness', as Scott Bukatman describes it, which disturbs the conventional parameters of SF.[12]

Russ's heroic fantasy and Zoline's postmodern montage present contrasting responses to women's oppression. The stories reflect both the different narrative (or anti-narrative) conventions of the literary contexts in which they were written, and the different impulses behind feminism's second wave. Whereas Zoline's heroine represents the distress that was being articulated in women's magazines, Russ's 'The Adventuress' can be read against the rhetoric of the Anti-War movement and the New Left. By 1967, women in the counter-culture were already asserting a proto-feminist agenda which challenged the marginalization and sexual objectification of women.[13] However, this political defiance may have had less direct impact upon Russ's text than the presentation of female Vietnamese resistance fighters as 'truly liberated women'.[14] South-East Asian revolutionary women were portrayed as inspiring role-models for women on the Left, but were often invoked to belittle, rather than support, women's domestic struggles. In the SF fanzine *Khatru*, Luise White recollected that during the Chicago conspiracy trial one of the defendants, 'a hero of 1960s proportions [...] pointed with awe at the poster of the VietCong lady on the wall (you all know the one: head high, battle dress, rifle) and said: "when you're like that, you can talk to me in *that* tone"'.[15]

Russ's 'The Adventuress' creates a swordswoman whose proficiency enables her to speak in any tone she chooses. In the story, Alyx is hired as a bodyguard by a rich young woman, Edarra, who needs to leave Ourdh to escape an arranged marriage. Initially, Edarra is hostile to Alyx's insistence that she must work and learn to fight, but, as the tale progresses the two women win each other's respect and friendship. Samuel Delany has argued that the bond between Edarra and Alyx prefigures similar relationships in the later stories, which, he suggests, 'organize our attention about a single problem: the problems a worldly woman has overseeing the maturation of a woman not so worldly'.[16]

This theme, which Russ has termed 'the rescue of the female child', might be considered a leitmotif, not only for the Alyx stories, but for the majority of Russ's fiction.[17]

Russ's work repeatedly features relationships between older and younger women to suggest both the processes of women's self-acceptance and the coming together of women in the feminist movement. These bonds are often expressed through learning the skills for physical self-defence, which evokes another important theme in Russ's writing: the uses of violence and anger. Alyx teaches Edarra to fence as she teaches other women, in later stories, to shoot and kill. All Russ's major fiction, including her non-science-fiction novel *On Strike Against God* (1982), represents the use of violence, or the ability to use violence, as explicitly liberating for women.

The genre of heroic fantasy enabled Russ to create a female hero who could battle with the 'mighty thewed' and win. She describes the real pleasure of heroic fantasy as its combination of sophisticated decadence and barbaric violence, a potentially witty juxtaposition that she sees most clearly in Fritz Leiber's work. Like Leiber, Russ parodies the serious heroes of the genre, whom she found to be 'too great a strain on the risibilities', but she also subverted the gendered assumptions that motivate their heroic deeds.[18] Russ's tale disrupts the pulp formula of heroic fantasy by challenging the gender stereotypes implicit within the genre's conventions.

Damon Knight, who published 'The Adventuress', reportedly argued that before Russ, 'nobody could get away with a series of heroic fantasies of prehistory in which the central character, the barbarian adventurer, is a woman.'[19] This is not altogether true, as it does not acknowledge C.L.Moore's Jirel of Joiry series, but it does indicate the ways in which Russ's protagonist signalled a radical departure from generic expectations. Russ recalls that it was extremely difficult for her to create a female hero within this male-dominated genre:

> Long before I became a feminist in any explicit way, I had turned from writing love stories about women in which the women were losers, and adventure stories about men in which the men were winners, to writing adventure stories about a woman in which the woman won. It was one of the hardest things I ever did in my life.[20]

In 1972, Ellen Morgan argued that, 'the single most absorbing and obsessive need of the Neo-Feminist woman is to envision what authentic self-hood would be [...], to break out and assert individual potency'.[21] Russ's Alyx stories used the heroic fantasy mode to create a utopian role model for women, an autonomous female protagonist who transcended the restrictions of enforced femininity.

Russ's text retained the generic identification of heroic fantasy, but appropriated this traditionally male preserve in the name of Woman. In contrast, Pamela Zoline's 'Heat Death' challenged the interactions of gender and genre in SF by introducing a socially-prescribed female role into a male-dominated genre. Zoline's story drew from the generic innovations of the New Wave to present a specifically feminist didactic. Christopher Priest suggests that New Wave writing questions the limits of SF to ask, 'why can science fiction not explore the inner world of emotion, of neurosis, of sexual desire, of boredom? Can it not describe [...] the art of writing itself?'[22] In 'Heat Death', Zoline married this generic experimentalism to a political analysis of women's domestic oppression.

Zoline's story can be read against the fictions of writers, such as Zenna Henderson, Margaret St Clair and Judith Merril, who asserted female perspectives in their SF texts throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These writers, whom James Blish once described as a 'gaggle of housewives', often located their texts within American suburbia.[23] Where 'Heat Death' differs from these earlier representations of women (as The Good Wife) is in its exposition of the stultifying impact of urban isolation. Zoline's story might thus be seen to prefigure Ellen Morgan's demand that feminist writers must not only celebrate the utopian 'creation of the free self', but must also 'document the effects of oppression'.[24]

Sarah Boyle experiences the dissolution of her world as an illustration of the heat death of the universe. The cosmetic chores of housework cannot stem decay, death and destruction: they constitute merely a superficial reorganization. Mark Rose has suggested that, at a formal level, the numbered paragraphs of the text resist the narrative pull toward entropy.[25] But he does not acknowledge that this overt structuring, which 'cuts up' the narrative in a way which is characteristic of New Wave writing, also reflects the arbitrary categorization in the story itself. Sarah Boyle counts all the moveable objects in the living room (there are 819); she labels objects with the wrong signifiers, 'the hair brush is labelled HAIR BRUSH, the cologne, COLOGNE, the hand cream, CAT'; and at the supermarket she fills three shopping carts buying every variety of cleaning product in every different size.[26] These erratic taxonomies mask entropy, but they do not divert its progress.

The connections suggested in Zoline's story between suburban despair and universal entropy have been questioned by some SF critics. Sarah Lefanu applauds Zoline's text as an expression of 'the vistas of emptiness behind the slogan "a woman's work is never done"';[27] but David Ketterer argues that:

> To relate the ennui of a suburban housewife to the entropy of the universe, as does P.A. Zoline in 'Heat Death of the Universe', is to use a science fictional conception only for its metaphorical appropriateness. Because the tale's reality is grounded in a housewife and her kitchen and because of the lack of a plausible scientific rationale connecting the end of the material universe with her state, Zoline's piece cannot legitimately be classified as science fiction.[28]

Ketterer's complaint (that Zoline's story is not SF) centres upon two issues: the metaphorization of SF motifs associated with the New Wave, and the representation of 'a housewife and her kitchen'. Zoline's feminist SF presents an alien perspective and an unexpected environment; but, for Ketterer, this view from the kitchen contravenes the impulses of science fiction.

Zoline's text suggests a radical reinterpretation, and implicit gendering, of the intersections between science and fiction, to explore, in Priest's terms, 'the art of writing itself'. 'Heat Death' self-consciously plunders the metaphors of scientific production to describe such details as, for instance, the colour of the heroine's eyes. The technology that Zoline draws upon is precisely implicated in the gendered economy of household labour. She describes the blue of Sarah Boyle's eyes as 'a fine, modern, acid, synthetic blue [...] the promising, fat, unnatural blue of the heavy tranquillizer capsule; the cool, mean blue of that fake kitchen sponge' (p.56). These descriptions suggest a science-fictional reconfiguration of the images of 'Woman as Nature' which the narrator sees as characterizing 'so much precedent literature' (p.56). They also suggest the ways in which the Happy Housewife Heroine is not a 'natural' figure, but a cultural myth reinforced by a specific medical and domestic technology.

The structuring metaphor of the story is drawn from the entropic heat death of the universe. Entropy had already featured in J.G. Ballard's 'The Voices of Time' (1960), but Zoline's manipulation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics was different from the earlier New Wave writers. In 'Heat Death' the metaphorization of entropy is inextricably linked to Zoline's feminist didacticism as the text presents an explicit questioning of gender as well as genre conventions.

The macrocosmic violence of the heat death of the universe is condensed in the text in the violence of a suburban woman's breakdown: 'She is about to begin to cry. Her mouth is opening. She is crying. She cries [...]. She begins to break glasses and dishes, she

throws cups and cooking pots and jars of food which shatter and break and spread over the kitchen' (p.65). The metaphor of entropy represents the violence which subtends the feminine mystique. Afforded no legitimacy within the cult of femininity, women's anger was expressed in a desire, as Rochelle Gatlin puts it, 'to go over the edge', to relinquish sanity.[29] Zoline's text might be read against Russ's heroic fantasy as a representation of women's anger and violence which is negatively internalized as a self-fragmentation rather than, as in Russ's text, directed towards an external enemy. Zoline uses SF to articulate the frustrated destructiveness of many women's anger; Russ's 'Adventuress' rearticulates this anger in an affirmative fantasy of power and autonomy.

These two stories were ground-breaking for feminist science fiction. They were the first texts to mediate the proto-feminist discourses of the mid-1960s in the contexts of magazine SF. Zoline's critique of the Happy Housewife Heroine and Russ's creation of a swashbuckling Adventuress created precedents for future feminist SF. John Clute, for instance, argues that 'the liberating effect of the Alyx tales has been pervasive'. He suggests that 'the ease with which later writers now use active female protagonists in adventure roles, without having to argue the case, owes much to this example'.[30] The influence of Zoline's story upon feminist SF has been less remarked upon, both because Zoline is associated with the New Wave rather than the feminist movement in SF, and because she has published very little science fiction.

Russ's influence, however, has been profound and she has been described as 'the single most important woman writer of science fiction'.[31] Her publications include five SF novels (*Picnic on Paradise* (1968); *And Chaos Died* (1970); *The Female Man* (1975); *We Who Are About To...* (1977); and *The Two of Them* (1978)), and two collections of interacting SF stories (*The Adventures of Alyx* (1983) and *Extra(Ordinary) People* (1984)). The Alyx stories are significant for Russ's writing because they introduce the humour, as well as themes and motifs which features in all Russ's later, explicitly feminist SF. Specifically, these tales develop and critique the character of the female Agent as both a metaphor for feminist agency and as a role model for women. Russ returns to this critique most directly in the later novel *The Two of Them* which questions the role of the female Agent through an exploration of the interactions between gender and genre conventions.

The Adventures of Alyx: The Female Hero as Role Model

Roz Kaveney has argued that the Alyx tales were created within an argument of themes between Russ and the older writer Fritz Leiber.[32] In 1960, Leiber had coined the term 'sword-and-sorcery' to describe the quasi-feudal often mystical landscapes of heroic fantasy, which Russ also termed 'Fritz Leiberland'.[33] 'The Adventuress' recalls one of Leiber's two sword-and-sorcery heroes, Fafhrd, as an old lover of whom Alyx is particularly fond: 'Ah! What a man [...]! - Fafnir - no, Fafh - well, something ridiculous. But he was far from ridiculous. He was amazing' (p.26). Leiber repays the compliment in his 'The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar' (1968) in which Alyx appears as a minor character who watches wryly from the margins as Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser are duped by lesbian lovers.[34]

But Russ was not, as Damon Knight claimed, the first writer to feature a sword-and-sorcery heroine. C.L. Moore had published a series of stories in *Weird Tales* (which also published Robert Howard's Conan tales) about a female swordswoman, Jirel of Joiry. Jirel suggested new possibilities for female characters which potentially challenged the overtly masculinist nature of heroic fantasy. She was nevertheless extremely popular with the predominantly male readership of *Weird Tales*. Lester Del Rey argues that 'every male reader loved the story ["The Black God's Kiss" (1934)], forgot his chauvinism, and demanded more stories [about] the intensely feminine Jirel'.[35] Unlike Moore's heroine, Alyx does not compensate for her aggression by a strikingly fierce beauty. She is defiantly non-feminine: and this, rather than the role of the female warrior in itself, is what Russ found most difficult to write. She explains:

> I cannot tell how hard writing that first story was. It was dropping the mask and stepping out in my own person. I felt hideously ashamed and guilty of some unspeakable crime. People would point at me in the streets. People would say I wanted to be a man. Reviewers would howl in derision. By writing an adventure story with a female hero I was clearly breaking some basic taboo. It took weeks even to sit down at the typewriter [...], I kept trying and trying to make my protagonist *beautiful*. You know, just to show that in spite of everything, I knew which priorities *really* came first. However she refused to be falsified like that, and came into the world as a short, stocky, unremarkable looking peasant.[36]

The differences between Alyx and Jirel reflect their different historical and publishing contexts. But Russ's refusal of femininity also distinguished the Alyx tales from other contemporary representations of active female protagonists in SF, such as Rosel George Brown's proto-feminist Sybil Sue Blue. Sybil, who first appeared in 1966, is a cigar-smoking, intergalactic police agent, who balances her career with parenting her sixteen-year-old daughter, Missy. She is also determinedly feminine. Brown's writing seems to delight in the incongruity between the cosmetic demands of femininity and the strenuous demands of Sybil's many escapades. In *The Waters of Centaurus* (1970), for instance, Sybil rescues her daughter from an undersea world, escapes several times from certain death, and saves the macho male hero from being baked alive. Finally, she sees herself in the mirror:

> She let out a howl. She looked awful. Her skin was peeling - from water or sun or both - and her hair wouldn't do it at all - it was still briny. Sybil looked down at her clothes, which were all wrong and rumpled besides, and felt utterly depressed.[37]

Russ's character refuses even the tongue-in-cheek femininity of Brown's Sybil. Alyx presents a female agency which is neither compromised nor facilitated by feminine wiles. This is perhaps why Gardner Dozois has described Alyx as 'a kind of Grey Mouser in drag' (he is referring to Leiber's more sophisticated male hero).[38] But Russ's character is not figured as a role-reversal. She usurps the hero's role, and in doing so redefines the gendered associations of heroism. Alyx is the female exception in an otherwise all-male world, but she uses that position to encourage other women to develop their own potential agency.

As a proto-feminist hero in sword-and-sorcery, Alyx figured the swordswoman as a potent symbol of female power. She is presented, especially in the earlier stories, as an Amazonian trickster who is 'among the wisest of a sex that is surpassingly wise' (p.9). In this characterization, Russ anticipates the feminist re-evaluation of mythic female archetypes, such as the Amazons, who represented powerful role models for women. She may also respond to what has been described as a specifically white women's need for role models. Feminist historians have argued that the desire for inspirational female characters in fiction was not an urgent need for Black women who, in the 1960s and 1970s, could emulate the many exceptional Black women in the Civil Rights movement.[39] In Alice

Walker's *Meridian* (1976), Meridian contrasts the black woman who were 'outrageous' and always 'escaping to become something unheard of' to white women who were never heard of '*doing* anything that was interesting'. She claims that 'there were positively no adventurers - unless you counted the alcoholics - among them'.[40] Sara Evans argues that for young white women, white female role models were hard to find, and, for those in the Civil Rights movement, black women were inspirational. One white Civil Rights worker proclaimed that 'for the first time I had role models I could really respect'.[41]

The mythical figures of female power, such as the swordswoman, demonstrate a cross-cultural appeal which is illustrated by their representation in texts by women writers from many different ethnic backgrounds. Women warriors and Amazonian societies feature in many feminist SF and mythical narratives, including Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975); Paula Gunn Allen's anthology of traditional Native American tales, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (1989); Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) which was published in the United States in 1971; and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Shattered Chain* (1976). Suzy McKee Charnas argues that her novel, *Motherlines* (1978), explored the 'potentialities of an Amazon-like society unconstrained by our own distorted and fragmentary notions of real historical Amazons'.[42] Charnas's recreation of an Amazonian matriarchy demonstrates the speculative possibilities of these archetypes for feminist SF. Mandy Merck has argued that, whether or not historical research reveals these archetypes to have been feminist (and she concludes that the historical resonances of the Amazon myth may make it 'ultimately inappropriable'), the feminist 'search for a militant female past' suggests 'a new will to power born of the unease of our own patriarchal era'.[43]

The first three Alyx stories ('The Adventuress', 'I Gave Her Sack and Sherry' (1967), and 'The Barbarian' (1968)), feature the barbarian-Hellenistic setting of (Amazonian) heroic fantasy.[44] But in the fourth tale, the novel *Picnic on Paradise* (1968), this mythical past has been displaced by a science-fictional future. Alyx has been rescued from certain death by the Trans-Temporal Military Authority and has been relocated to the far-future planet of Paradise.[45] Paradise is a 'tourist planet' which has found itself embroiled in a commercial war, and Alyx's task is to escort a group of stranded tourists from one base to another (A to B). In *Picnic*, Alyx's ancient skills are out of place amongst the 'Super-People' of the future. She is the alien in Paradise.

In her own quasi-historical context, Alyx was characterized as a 'wit, arm, kill-quick for hire', but in this science-fictional world she is portrayed quite explicitly as an Agent.[46] When this status is challenged by the first man she meets, she gives a violent demonstration of her role: 'he finished his thought on the floor, his head under one of his ankles [...]. She let him go [...] and said, "I am the Agent. My name is Alyx," and smiled. She was in a rather good humor' (p.71). The identification of Alyx as an Agent signals the generic transition between *Picnic* and the earlier sword-and-sorcery tales; but Alyx's direct assertion of her role as the Agent may also be read as a suggestive metaphor for women's unfolding personal and political agency within the nascent Women's Movement. Alyx is a refreshing figure for female readers, for whilst her aggression repeats the novelty of Jirel's fierce presence, the differences between them suggest that Alyx is a character written for women's rather than men's admiration.

Dorothy Allison argues that when she began to reconsider her 'life as a teenage science fiction fan', she found herself 'thinking about the different levels of meaning I took from science fiction - not just the straightforward adventures, but the symbolic and political lessons I abstracted'.[47] She identifies Russ's *Picnic* as a significant text because of the ways in which Alyx demonstrates a sexual as well as a social agency. When Alyx fucks the adolescent young man Machine, 'she screamed at him to hurry up and called him a pig and an actor and the son of a whore (for these epithets were of more or less equal value in her own country)' (p.123). Allison comments, 'this wasn't about coding or veiled references. It was flatly heterosexual but still seem[ed] to offer tacit encouragement to female sexual desire and female sexual aggression'.[48]

Alyx's social and sexual agency confronts and confounds the generic expectations of female characters in SF. As Allison observes, Alyx is set against 'the rich white jock [Gunnar] who in any other book would have been the hero'.[49] Gunnar's 'conventional heroism' contrasts with Alyx's assertion of an unexpected agency (p.139). When Gunnar 'indulgently' informs Alyx that the other tourists have chosen him as their leader, and that she is 'not big enough' to challenge him, she asserts her Agenthood as she has before - violently (p.83). Alyx repeatedly proves herself, and her Agenthood, to her audience (of characters and readers) through her aggressive subversion of expected feminine behaviour.

Alyx is introduced in *Picnic* as if she were, like Sybil Sue Blue, a conventionally feminine character: 'She was a soft-spoken, dark-haired, small-boned woman, not even

coming up to their shoulders' (p.71). But Russ's manipulation of gender expectations transforms apparent femininity into violent and self-assured heroism. When the authorities demand that Alyx surrender her weapons before her journey across Paradise, she demonstrates that feminine appearances can be deceptive: 'From each of her low sandals she drew out what had looked like part of the ornamentation and flipped both knives expertly at the map on the wall - both hands, simultaneously - striking precisely at point A and point B' (p.77). Alyx performs her stunts with style, enjoying her defiance of conventional gender roles.

At the end of the novel, Alyx is required to teach her skills to an elite corps of students, who will become the 'Cadre of Heroes and Heroines' of the future Trans-Temporal Authority. But Alyx derides the idea that her 'special and peculiar skills' are detachable from her 'special and peculiar attitudes' (p.162). Her skills, her Agenthood, cannot be separated from her gendered, racial and cultural identity. Russ defines Alyx's agency precisely within the juxtaposition of her female sexual status and her (conventionally) masculine role, as a challenge to both gender and genre expectations.

The generic shifts between the Alyx stories inflect the characterization of the female hero. Alyx is transformed from a picklock on the decadent streets of Ourdh into a female Agent who is effective across time and space. In the final story, 'The Second Inquisition' (1970), the generic mode is subverted once more as the narrative is no longer directed by the perspective of the Agent. In this text, the Agent (Alyx's great-granddaughter) is working covertly in small-town America during the 1920s. For the teenage girl who narrates the tale, the arrival of this strange visitor into her parents' home stimulates exciting and frightening fantasies of inter-galactic intrigue:

> 'Without you,' [the visitor] would say gravely, 'all is lost,' and taking out from the wardrobe a black dress glittering with stars and a pair of silver sandals with high heels, she would say, 'These are yours. They were my great-grandmother's, who founded the Order. In the name of the Trans-Temporal Military Authority.' And I would put them on.
>
> It was almost a pity she was not really there.[50]

The change in narratorial perspective throws the generic identification into doubt. Is this text SF or the fantasy of a frustrated teenager, as this passage would suggest? Russ's narrative suggests a playful self-consciousness about generic signifiers that makes this question impossible to resolve. As Samuel Delany has observed, Russ sets her story in

1925, the year in which Robert Howard published his first sword-and-sorcery adventure in *Weird Tales*.[51] The narrator also draws upon the imagery of nineteenth-century fantasy, including the work of Poe, and especially Wells's *The Time Machine* (which both the narrator and the Agent read throughout the tale), to describe their adventures.

When the Agent must leave she desires to take the narrator with her, but she cannot rescue this female child. She returns briefly, appearing to the narrator as a figure seen through the looking-glass. When the Agent disappears for the last time, the narrator finds herself staring at her own reflection, dressed in a home-made version of the uniform of the Trans-Temporal Military Authority, 'the tights were from a high school play [...] and the rest was cut out of the lining of an old winter coat' (p.192). The generic props of science fiction (time-travel, uniforms, Agents) have been replaced by, or revealed to be, the inventions of a teenage mind (Robert Howard was also just nineteen when he published his first story, 'Spear and Fang'). The narrator of this tale remains in 1925, in her parents' home, where her dreams of going to Radcliffe College seem as fantastic as the existence of the Trans-Temporal Authority:

> For a moment something else moved in the mirror, or I thought it did [...]. I wished for it violently; I stood and clenched my fists; I almost cried; I wanted something to come out of the mirror and strike me dead. If I could not have a protector, I wanted a monster, a mutation, a horror, a murderous disease, anything! anything at all to accompany me downstairs so that I would not have to go down alone.
> Nothing came. Nothing good, nothing bad. I heard the lawnmower going on. I would have to face by myself my father's red face, his heart disease, his temper, his nasty insistencies. I would have to face my mother's sick smile, looking up from the flower-bed she was weeding, always on her knees somehow [...].
> And quite alone.
> No more stories. (p.192)

As the series of Alyx stories ends, both the narrator and the reader are alone. Unlike the previous tales, which all end with a promise of more ('But that's another story'), this text marks a finality. There are no more stories. This generic wrench from the fantastic worlds of sword-and-sorcery and science fiction to the historical realism of 1920s small-town America dramatizes a reorganization of narrative perspective. It questions the effects of these escapist fantasies and fictional role models. What happens when the reader puts down the book, or when, for the protagonist in the tale, the fantasy ends? How do these

fictions influence and affect the ordinary lives of their readers? These are questions to which Russ returns in her later novels, when she explores the relationships between readers and texts through a metafictional narrative style. 'The Second Inquisition' suggests both an appreciation and a critique of SF escapism. It also signals Russ's interest in the political power of women's writing, even as it suggests, ultimately, that women must relinquish fantasy and face the world as it is in order to change it.

The Two of Them: Representing the Female Agent

The narrative of *The Two of Them* (1978) returns to the Alyx series to represent the escape from suburban suffocation that the narrator of the final tale so desired.[52] This later novel allows its protagonist, Irene Waskiewicz, to escape the 'feminine mystique' of the 1950s and become an inter-galactic Agent. As a white, middle class teenager growing up in Mid-West America, Irene is crushed by the everyday tedium of her life. The arrival of a male visitor, Ernst Neumann (the earnest new man?), an old acquaintance of her mother's, opens up possibilities for a new life of adventure. This is not the story of How She Fell in Love or How She Went Mad, although the narrative echoes both those plots with a regretful irony. It is the story of how she found her own (feminist) agency.

When the Agents are first introduced in the text the two of them are working on a mission in the supremely patriarchal underground planet Ka'abah, a setting which is taken directly from Suzette Haden Elgin's story, 'For the Sake of Grace' (1969).[53] On Ka'abah the poet is the most highly regarded of all scholars, and each family hopes to enter its sons for the Poetry Examinations. In Elgin's original story, a twelve year old girl, Jacinth, enters the Poetry Examinations without the permission of her family, and, through exceptional merit, passes with the highest honours. Jacinth's completion of the Poetry Examinations is an act of bravery, self-respect and solidarity with her Aunt, who failed the examinations and was sentenced to a life of solitary confinement.

Russ's use of 'For the Sake of Grace' as the foundation for her own exploration of female agency in *The Two of Them* illustrates the thematic interactions in feminist SF. Russ also returns to the ideas of her own previous work to develop her analysis of the Agent as an archetype for feminism. The struggle for agency in Elgin's text is centred upon women's freedom to write, and Russ's re-articulation of this theme is found in both her SF and

critical texts. In the story, 'Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds' (1983) Russ answers the question, 'Where do we writers get our crazy ideas?' by directing the reader to the many women writers who have preceded her. She asks us, 'Are you truly curious?' and provides the only answer: '*Then read our books!*'[54] In Russ's adaptation of Elgin's original story the Agent rescues the child Zubeydeh from a patriarchal culture that will not allow her to write, an action which perhaps corresponds to the feminist 'rescue' of lost women writers during the 1970s. Russ's critical text, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), follows from the earlier work of Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter to catalogue the ways in which women writers have been silenced by the hegemony of the Canon of Great Literature.

The rescue of the young woman writer in *The Two of Them* again suggests the relationship between this novel and 'The Second Inquisition'. In the earlier text the Agent could not 'save' the narrator, but in *The Two of Them*, Irene transgresses her official role as an Agent to assert the importance of the child. Her act precipitates a crisis in the narrative that disturbs both the equilibrium between the characters and the stability of the fiction. Towards the end of the novel, the narrative engages an overtly metafictional feminist didacticism which ejects Irene and Zubeydeh from SF. It also denotes a breakdown of generic structures, as the surface of the narrative collapses revealing the mechanisms of its construction.

The transition between genres corresponds to a shift in the representation of Irene. By the novel's conclusion, she is no longer portrayed as an exceptional inter-galactic Agent, but as 'an unimportant and powerless person', a divorcee in a motel in Albuquerque (p.178). Reviewers have asserted that this genre slippage negates the impact of the tale, making it a 'hopeless book, depressing to read, [and] not well constructed [sic]'.[55] John Clute argues convincingly that Russ has deliberately 'flunk[ed]' the generic protocol of the story to illustrate that Irene, as a female Agent, 'cannot ultimately inhabit genre, or protect herself through its buffering guidelines for conduct and self-definition'.[56] In summarizing Russ's intentions as a writer, Clute astutely demonstrates her self-conscious refusal of generic convention:

> You think I'm telling you X; well I wouldn't tell you X if my life depended on it. In fact my life depends on my *not* allowing you to get away with hearing X from my lips. Your willingness to suspend disbelief so as to luxuriate in the telling of X is tantamount to complicity with the invidious systemic violation of women in this world, whose roots are homologous

> with the engendering impulses behind traditional genre fiction, or X, baby. It tolls for thee.[57]

Russ attacks the SF reader's 'willingness to suspend disbelief' by refusing to construct a familiar fantasy. She identifies the reading of fiction as analogous to the everyday 'reading' of society, and positions her text as a political intervention in those interpretations. The narrative of *The Two of Them* (and her other major novels of the 1970s) is a slap in the face for the unresisting reader, whose unthinking expectations of the science-fiction genre she associates with a similarly unthinking complicity in the oppression of women.

But Russ's re-presentation of Elgin's story raises problematic questions about the intersections between the oppression of women because of their gender and the oppression of women because of their race, or ethnic origin, or religion. Russ's use of Ka'abah (a fundamentalist quasi-Muslim society which has been excommunicated by Islam) to represent, or perhaps exemplify, patriarchy assumes a universal understanding of male power and female oppression that makes no reference to cultural difference: Irene has no difficulty 'understanding' the structures of power in Ka'abah. And, whereas in the original story the subaltern girl triumphed to reclaim and fulfil the crushed dreams and talents of her Aunt Grace; in Russ's revision, change is effected by the actions of the Agent, Irene, and not the girl-child, Zubeydeh.

The relationship Irene develops with Zubeydeh is founded upon her empathy with the child and her determination to rescue her from what Irene perceives to be an intolerable situation. Irene privileges gender over all other features of identity, ignoring issues of class, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or culture. The assertion of a cross-cultural sisterhood, whereby a white Jewish woman rescues a Muslim girl, might suggest that the text represents an implicit ethnocentrism. If so, the text might be read as an unconscious mediation of the white-centredness of the Women's Liberation Movement, which, by 1978, had long been criticized by Black feminists. In *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Russ acknowledged her own complicity in the exclusion of writers of colour when teaching and even when writing *How to Suppress*: 'after complaining about exclusivity from the victim's viewpoint, I had then spent four years as a cultural solipsist myself' (p.137).

However, the relationship between Irene and Zubeydeh might also be read as a deliberately polemical demonstration of the possibility and necessity of women's cross-

cultural alliance. Irene seeks to facilitate Zubeydeh's ambition to be a poet, and thus works against the suppression of writing by women of colour that Russ identified in her own critical practice (perhaps this novel anticipates that perception). Irene's defiant solidarity with Zubeydeh forces her to reflect upon her own autonomy as a political Agent in Trans-Temp and more personally, as an individual agent in her relationship with Ernst. She begins to recognize her enforced isolation from other women in her role as an Agent:

> She thinks, *My expensive weapons, my expensive training, I'm exceptional, I should know better.*
>
> She thinks idly of her mother. [...]
>
> She thinks, *My expensive position, my statistically rare training, my self-confidence, my unusual strength.*
>
> *And I'm still afraid.*
>
> *Of what?* (p.114)

By generic definition, Irene, as an Agent for Trans-Temp, occupies a position of power that distinguishes her from other women. She assumes the 'universal' perspective of the inter-galactic Agent. But she is also marginalized precisely because she is a woman, and, as the idle thoughts about her mother intimate, she is beginning to draw connections between her own experiences and those of other women *as* women. Irene has presumed that her privileged position as an Agent protects her from prejudice. On Ka'abah she realizes that it does not - and never has. Confronted by the repeated misunderstandings between herself and Ernst, especially over the fate of Zubeydeh, Irene begins to comprehend the (institutionalized) power difference between the two of them.

When Irene takes Zubeydeh, Ernst prevents them from rescuing Zubeydeh's mother Zumurrud. He tells Irene, quite rationally, that Zumurrud does not wish to escape from Ka'abah, provoking Irene's angry rebuke: 'Wish! [...] What can that woman decide or that woman wish?' (pp.110-111). Ostensibly Irene, not Ernst, denies the agency of the subaltern woman. As Sarah Lefanu has observed, however, the gendered experiences of the Agents influence their perspectives. Lefanu comments that 'it is Ernst's vision that is broad enough to allow for conflict, but that is because he sees, and speaks, from a privileged position'.[58] Irene, on the other hand, disregards cultural differences in her struggle to connect her own experience of oppression (and the choices available to her as a white Agent) to the experience of the other woman. In her desire for solidarity, she is unable to accommodate conflict.

This potentially problematic encounter allows Irene to assert a feminist agency that she is denied in her official role as Agent. When Irene performs the acts of espionage demanded by Trans-Temp, her Agenthood is quite specifically constructed in opposition to her femaleness. Whereas Alyx's Agenthood was established through her open defiance of femininity, Irene operates as a secret Agent, who must either disguise her sex or simulate an ineffectual femininity. Her major function as an Agent in Ka'abah is to obtain certain information from the planet's computer system. To escape detection, Irene disguises her actions by assuming the conventional position of women in the planet.

In Ka'abah there are individual elevators for women that record the movements of their occupants through the city by registering each stop. Irene instructs the elevator to stop everywhere possible on its way to her destination, and then slips into the ventilation shaft, allowing the elevator to continue its journey unoccupied. Having gained a difficult access to the central terminals she 'plays piano on the keyboards' before double checking everything she has done, slipping away from the unconscious guards, and retracing her steps to come out 'not where she entered but where she sent the elevator' (p.77). She signals her success to Ernst by ironically reinforcing a stereotypical femininity:

> She says, 'I got stuck in the elevator. I did something wrong; it stopped at every damned stop.'
> So now he knows. (p.77)

Recent feminist theorists have suggested that gender should be redefined, not as a fixed or natural identity, but as a (social and psychic) positionality, which is reproduced through the repetition of cultural signifiers. Judith Butler, for instance, claims that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender'. She suggests that sexual identity is not pre-given in any material sense, but is 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'.[59] These observations facilitate a metaphorical reading of Russ's text that draws upon these theoretical ideas to suggest the interactions of Agenthood and gender positionality.

When Irene abandons the elevator, it continues to signify her whereabouts, her position (both geographically and culturally) as a woman. When she slips away through the ventilation ducts, which 'keep no records at all', she escapes not only the physical confines of the elevator, but also its implicit imposition of femininity. Irene steps out of a legitimate physical and gender position. Because she is assumed to be inside this female space, the

elevator serves as a disguise which replaces her (in this way it becomes, or signifies her sexed body). When she has performed her task (knowing neither why, what, or who for) she retraces her steps, erasing the evidence of her Agenthood.

Metaphorically, the female Agent's actions represent an 'out of body' experience, in which gender and agency have been isolated (and constructed) through the different performances of artificial and physical bodies. Irene, through not retracing the path of the elevator, will not retrace the steps of the artificial body, which functions as an empty symbol of her presence as a gendered subject. It is an effect, a signifier of a gendered subject that exists, not because of what it contains (any inner essence) but because of where it is - within a network of cultural discourses that give that artificial body meaning.

Irene's identity as the female Agent is fractured, held open, while she metaphorically moves beyond her gendered self. The subversive potential of her Agenthood is realized precisely as a discontinuity of her identity as a gendered female subject. When she has returned from her mission, however, the narrative asserts her female identity as a biological essentialism. As she ponders her ignorance and her powerlessness within 'The Gang' (Trans-Temp), her femaleness assaults the reader:

> [Irene] knows nothing, for The Gang, in addition to its ostensible purposes (in which she doesn't believe) always gathers all the information it can. She wonders if she'll ever know The Gang's real purpose. She hopes her tampon will last the day, but it ought to; she's put in two of them. She thinks with amusement of leaving menstrual blood in a trail down Great Way. (p.78)

Irene's lack of knowledge is explicitly placed in relation to her femaleness. She is not the universal inter-galactic Agent that Ernst assumes himself to be because she is a woman.

The Two of Them: Russ's Metafictional Style

When Irene forces Ernst to abduct Zubeydeh, the unease between the two of them is intensified. The three of them leave Ka'abah to return to Trans-Temp headquarters at 'Center', but their journey is interrupted. In response to Irene's 'strangeness' (and dramatically enforcing Zubeydeh's refrain; 'the gentlemen always think the ladies have gone mad'), Ernst attempts to invalidate Irene's Agenthood by instructing the ship's computer to reject her identity discs. This action precipitates a struggle between the two of them in which Irene kills Ernst, and escapes with Zubeydeh to Earth. After Ernst's death, the

narrator begins to intrude into the text, demonstrating the arbitrariness of her choices as the teller of the story, and refusing to take responsibility for the fantasy.

The narrative structures collapse precisely when the composition of 'the two of them', as a heterosexual couple, has been disrupted. Just before Irene kills Ernst, the narrator interrupts the action to address the reader directly: 'You don't want to know how Irene hates looking at that good man and neither do I; it tears her in two' (p.158). She provides alternatives to the action that she is about to describe (create), but dismisses them: 'I've contemplated giving Ernst stomach 'flu and letting the other two run while he's retching, but I don't think so. Not really. I don't think it happens like that. I think they meet in the hall' (p.158).

When they meet, Irene kills Ernst. The transgressiveness of this act is accentuated by the way in which she murders him. She does not kill him by using the techniques he has taught her, which would generically familiarize her as the pupil who has learnt too well and now usurps the master. This battle of the sexes is not played out according to the rules of master/pupil because Irene refuses to perform traditional roles. She defies our expectations of their relationship and the genre of adventure SF: 'She used to think it mattered who won and who lost, who was shamed and who was not. She forgot what she had up her sleeve. Sick of the contest of strength and skill, she shoots him' (p.162).

When Ernst dies the narrative structure is disrupted by the metafictional voice of the narrator who refuses to allow the possibility of his death:

> It occurs to me that she only stunned him, that soon he'll get up, facing nothing worse than a temporary embarrassment (because they can't find him in the computer), that he'll come looking for her, penitent, contrite, having learned his lesson.
>
> Well, no, not really. (p.163)

The reluctance to acknowledge Ernst's loss corresponds to a reluctance to recognize that 'the two of them' no longer signifies the binary man/woman but the continuum woman/girl: Irene and Zubeydeh. The heterosexual binary of male and female (master and pupil), which, as Judith Butler argues, 'requires and produces [...] the internal coherence of gender' has been displaced.[60]

During her escape, Irene is forced, by wild circumstance, to also take a small and helpless five year old boy, Michael. This child re-establishes a male presence within the diadic relationship between the woman and the girl, but he cannot substitute for Ernst.

When they reach Earth the narrator changes her mind: 'She didn't take him. She didn't do it. I made that part up' (p.175). The narrator revels in the self-conscious fictionality of the text, flaunting her power to 'make it up'. She unnerves us, challenging our complicity with her textual authority by demanding that we recognize that she can no longer be trusted to tell it straight. The text begins to doubt itself, question the reader, change its mind, proclaim that it would be better as something else: 'this is all very much nicer as a comedy' (p.158).

Why does Ernst's death create such nervousness and such defiance? His murder is described with a slow-motion pathos (it occurs in zero-gravity) which renders them as dancers not killers. But it is not because this death is so distressing that the narrative breaks down. Ernst's absence disturbs the construction of Irene as a female counterpart to his more experienced Agenthood. The narrator questions and exploits her authority because the fiction is no longer balanced: the expectations of gender and genre have been unsettled. The metafictional voice alternately worries about and relishes the consequences and dangerously unfixed possibilities of gender identities which are not heterosexually constituted:

> I wish I could talk to her. I wish I could nudge her. I wish I could walk down the corridor with her and whisper, *Hey, baby, you wanna fuck? Hey, Miss, you...uh...dropped your panties.* Though I wouldn't say that. I *couldn't* say that. (p.163)

The narrator adopts the role of the (male hetero-) sexual predator, playing with the legitimacy of sexual power and desire, repeating abuse as the perpetrator rather than the victim. Her repetition is thrilling: *'Hey, baby, you wanna fuck?'*, but it positions her as a voyeur within the fiction, a role which implicates us as readers as we also watch her watching Irene.

The narrator responds to the crisis in the text (which is generated by Ernst's death) by attempting to imitate heterosexual constructions of gender, even if she has to assume a 'masculine' position (and so subvert her efforts) to do so. Her desire for Irene must remain a fantasy shared only with the reader:

> What I want to tell her is what it's really like, what happens to you, the ises and isn'ts of guilt. [...] I would nudge Irene from the side. I would tell her that her deed has not closed her in. [...] That Zubeydeh is very important, that she must listen to Zubeydeh, that she must get Zubeydeh out of here. (p.163)

The narrator, now speaking explicitly as a female subject, characterizes herself as a woman whose experience prefigures Irene's. In the manner of the feminist confessional she wants to 'tell her what it's really like'. But the narrator cannot speak to the characters in the text. The reader must witness the frustrated silences in the narrative, and recognize the connections that the narrator attempts to draw between women's shared experiences.

Irene's surrender of her position in the 'Center', and her escape to the margins, represents a rejection of inter-galactic universality and her assertion of a local, situated agency. It also corresponds to a recognition within feminist theory in the mid-1970s of the need to transcend individual struggle and establish a more collective focus. The conclusion of *Picnic* revealed that Alyx was the first Agent, and that she founded the 'Cadre of Heroes and Heroines' that would become Trans-Temp. But this collective Agency has coalesced at the 'Centre'. Irene's accomplishments are isolated from their political meanings, she has no idea what her Agenthood achieves.

In *The Two of Them*, Irene's relationship with Zubeydeh alerts her to the ineffectualness of her Trans-Temporal Agenthood. When she returns to Earth (both literally and metaphorically) after her adventures among the stars, they hitch a ride to Albuquerque, posing as mother and daughter. Irene's arrival is unremarkable, even anti-climactic, marked only by the corny line of her adolescent fantasies, 'I've been away' (p.117). She is no longer an Agent, and must reconstruct her agency, her relationship to power, as an ordinary 'unimportant and powerless person' (p.178). She is full of regret for her lost power, and afraid for the future. She knows that change will take 'longer than one woman's lifetime; [that] now she'll never get to it except the hard way: a civilian attacking from the outside. A nobody' (p.178). But the narrator reassures us that Irene's lost agency will be reconfigured within a coalition of activists: 'she can find other unimportant and powerless people' (p.178).

The emphasis upon collectivity was integral to the Women's Movement as a movement, but the forms which that collectivity should take had always been contested. Debates about the organization of meetings, the desirability of leadership, the status of famous feminists and so on were often divisive ones in feminist groups in the early 1970s.[61] These debates have evolved in feminist theory as the terms of feminist collective action continue to be negotiated. Lillian Robinson argues in 1977 that:

> It is not role models we need so much as a mass movement, not celebration of individual struggle, however lonely and painful, so much as recognition that we are all heros [sic]. Only from an understanding of the mass experience that forces us to *become* heros [sic] can we build a movement to make fundamental changes in social institutions or our own lives.[62]

Russ's critical work has identified SF as a mode in which 'the protagonists [...] are always collective, never individual persons'.[63] The most significant feminist exposition of a collective protagonist in SF is Russ's own *The Female Man* (1975) in which the main characters, Joanna, Janet, Jeannine and Jael, have been read as different versions of a single self.

In the transgression of genre conventions, *The Two of Them* once again echoes 'The Second Inquisition'. The novel also concludes with a fantasy which raises questions about its status as SF, but unlike the earlier tale, the conclusion of *The Two of Them* promises many more stories. Audre Lorde argues that it is not difference which immobilizes and separates women, but silence: 'and there are so many silences to be broken'.[64] The conclusion of the novel suggests that the differences, in generation, race and culture, between Zubeydeh and Irene are generative, not disabling. When Irene rescues Zubeydeh she is confronted by the rawness of the girl, by her youth as well as her different expectations of gender roles and social organization. She is forced to respect both the unexpectedness and the familiarity of this child, who (as in other stories, such as 'The Little Dirty Girl' (1982)) also represents her own remembered self.

Irene's relationship with Zubeydeh represents the possibilities for cross-cultural bonds among women, and for Zubeydeh, her enforced silence now broken, the relationship facilitates her agency as a writer. The final words of Irene's concluding dream mirror the structure of the final words of the Alyx series. In her vision, the desert landscape of women's historically generated silence reverberates to the whisperings of new voices. A message begins to stir among the dust. Women's collective agency has achieved something that all the sorcerers in heroic fantasy could not:

> Something is coming out of nothing. For the first time, something will be created out of nothing. There is not a drop of water, not a blade of grass, not a single word.
>
> But they move.
>
> And they rise. (p.181)

1. See Betty King, *Women of the Future: The Female Main Character in Science Fiction* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1984).

2. Nan Bowman Albinski, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.163.

3. Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Responsibilities and Temptations of Women Science Fiction Writers', in *Women Worldwalkers: New Dimensions in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Jane B. Weedman (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1985), pp.25-42 (p.29).

4. Poul Anderson, 'Reply to a Lady', *Vertex*, 2 (1974), 8 and 99 (pp.8 and 99).

5. Joanna Russ, 'What Can A Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write', in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), pp.3-20, (p.12).

6. See Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.77; and Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.52.

7. See for example the authors' afterwords in Harlan Ellison's *Again, Dangerous Visions*, 2 vols (London: Pan 1977) which connect science fiction to Haight-Ashbury and the drug culture; the overthrow of capitalism; the Chicago riots, and the Vietnam war.

8. Casey Hayden and Mary King, 'Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo', and (attributed) 'SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement', in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. by Judith Clavir Albert and Stuart Edward Albert (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp.114-116 and pp.133-136.

9. Cited in Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women*, p.93.

10. Joanna Russ, 'On Setting', in *Those Who Can: A Science Fiction Reader*, ed. by Robin Scott Wilson (New York: Mentor, 1973), pp.149-154, (p.149); Joanna Russ, 'The Adventuress', reprinted as 'Bluestocking', in *The Adventures of Alyx* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), pp.9-28 (p.9). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

11. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.59.

12. Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), p.45.

13. This objectification was highlighted when, in 1967, *New Left Notes* published the motion presented by Jane Adams and other SDS women to the SDS national convention. It was illustrated with a cartoon of a girl wearing a babydoll polkadot dress, waving a placard which declared 'we want our rights and we want them now!' See Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women*, p.94; and Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature*, p.55.

14. See Marge Piercy, 'The Grand Coolie Damn', in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. by Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp.421-438 (p.434).

15. Luise White, in 'Women in Science Fiction: A Symposium', ed. by Jeffrey Smith, *Khatru*, 3&4 (1975), p.84.

16. Samuel Delany, 'Alyx', in *The Jewel Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (Elizabethtown, NY: Dragon Press, 1977), pp.211-230 (p.224).

17. Joanna Russ, 'Recent Feminist Utopias', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Marleen Barr (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), pp.71-85 (p.79). See Kathleen L. Spencer, 'Rescuing the Female Child: The Fiction of Joanna Russ', *Science Fiction Studies*, 17 (1990), 167-187.

18. Joanna Russ, 'On Setting', pp.149-150.

19. Cited in *The Mammoth Book of Contemporary SF Masters*, ed. by Gardner Dozois (London: Robinson, 1994), p.415.

20. Cited in Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu, 'Introduction', in *Despatches From the Frontiers of the Female Mind: An Anthology of Original Stories*, ed. by Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu (London: The Women's Press, 1985), pp.1-7 (p.3).

21. Ellen Morgan, 'Humanbecoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel', in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), pp.183-205 (p.185).

22. Cited in Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.173.

23. James Blish as William Atheling, Jr, 'The Fens Revisited', in *The Issue At Hand: Studies in Contemporary Magazine Science Fiction* (Chicago: Advent, 1973), pp.124-130 (p.128). This may have been the comment that Joanna Russ was referring to when she argued that *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* once earned 'a deserved slap over the knuckles' from Blish for its 'Ladies' magazine fiction'. See Joanna Russ, 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction', in *Images of Women in Fiction*, pp.79-94 (p.88).

24. Ellen Morgan, 'Humanbecoming', p.185.

25. Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters: The Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.31.

26. Pamela Zoline, 'The Heat Death of the Universe', in *Busy About the Tree of Life* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp.50-65 (pp.53-54, p.60). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

27. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p.98.

28. David Ketterer, 'Solaris and the Illegitimate Suns of SF', *Foundation*, 3 (1973), 52-54 (p.53).

29. Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women*, p.62.

30. John Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. by John Clute and Peter Nicholls (London: Orbit, 1993), p.1035.

31. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.173.

32. See Roz Kaveney, 'The Science Fictiveness of Women's Science Fiction', in *From My Guy To Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Helen Carr (London: Pandora, 1989), pp.78-97 (p.86).

33. Joanna Russ, 'On Setting', p.149.

34. Fritz Leiber, 'The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar', in *Swords Against Wizardry* (London: Granada, 1979), pp.80-96. Roz Kaveney in 'The Science Fictiveness of Women's Science Fiction', and Samuel Delany in 'Alyx', also note these interactions.

35. Lester Del Rey, 'Introduction: Forty Years of C.L.Moore', in *The Best of C.L. Moore*, ed. by Lester Del Rey (New York: Taplinger, 1977), pp.1-5 (p.2).

36. Joanna Russ cited in Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.58.

37. Rosel George Brown, *The Waters of Centaurus* (New York: Lancer Books, 1970), p.139.

38. Gardner Dozois, *Contemporary SF Masters*, p.415.

39. See Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage), pp.47-53.

40. Alice Walker, *Meridian* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p.105.

41. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics*, p.51.

42. Suzy McKee Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Marleen Barr (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), pp.103-108 (pp.104-105).

43. Mandy Merck, 'The City's Achievements: The Patriotic Amazonomachy and Ancient Athens', in *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity*, ed. by Susan Lipshitz (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp.95-115 (p.112). Merck demonstrates that historical representations of the exploits of the Amazons' were used 'to confirm sexual dimorphism and the sexual

division of labour'. She argues that the Amazons' successes 'literally remove them from female comparison, rendering them either masculine or divine. Nothing of the real oppression of their sex is challenged by these mythic heroines, it is merely transcended'. However, she still presents the possibilities of 'break[ing] with history [and] remaking its images as we choose' (pp.112-113).

44. See Russ, 'On Setting', p.149.

45. Joanna Russ, *Picnic on Paradise*, in *The Adventures of Alyx* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), pp.69-163. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

46. Joanna Russ, 'The Barbarian', in *The Adventures of Alyx* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), pp.47-67 (p.49).

47. Dorothy Allison, 'Puritans, Perverts, and Feminists', in *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class and Literature* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1994), pp.93-100 (p.97).

48. Dorothy Allison, 'Puritans, Perverts, and Feminists', p.98.

49. Dorothy Allison, 'Puritans, Perverts, and Feminists', p.97.

50. Joanna Russ, 'The Second Inquisition', in *The Adventures of Alyx* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), pp.164-192 (p.172). Further references to this novelette are given after quotations in the text.

51. Samuel Delany, 'Alyx', p.211.

52. Joanna Russ, *The Two of Them* (New York: Berkley, 1978; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1986). Further references will be given after quotations in the text.

53. Suzette Haden Elgin, 'For the Sake of Grace', in *Science Fiction A to Z: A Dictionary of the Great SF Themes*, ed. by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), pp.587-606. Elgin's story appears as the entry for 'Women'.

54. Joanna Russ, 'Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds', in *The Hidden Side of the Moon* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp.23-28 (first publ. in *Heroic Visions*, ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: Ace, 1983)).

55. L.J. Hurst, review of *The Two of Them*, in *Vector*, Dec 1986/Jan 1987, p.17.

56. John Clute, review of *The Two of Them*, in *Foundation*, 15 (1979), 103-105 (p.105).

57. John Clute, review of *The Two of Them*, p.104.

58. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.193.

59. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.25.

60. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.22.

61. See Leah Fritz, *Dreamers and Dealers: An Intimate Appraisal of the Women's Movement* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1979), p.17; and Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p.162.

62. Lillian Robinson, 'Working/Women/Writing', in *Sex, Class and Culture* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp.223-253 (p.230).

63. Joanna Russ, 'Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 112-119, (p.113).

64. Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), pp.40-44 (p.44).

3. Unnatural Acts: Explorations of Gender in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*

Every act of becoming conscious
(it says here in this book)
is an unnatural act.
Adrienne Rich, 'The Phenomenology of Anger', 1972[1]

In 1973, Robin Morgan gave the keynote address to the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference in Los Angeles. She began by asserting her 'credentials' as a woman and a feminist who identified as a lesbian (a claim which had been challenged) to speak about the contradictions in the Women's Liberation Movement. She intended to focus specifically on the 'Lesbian-Straight Split', to articulate the need for unity amongst all women. But the assembly was disrupted by the presence of a male transvestite, who also identified as a woman and as a lesbian. The conference 'promptly split - over this man', and Morgan condemned him as a trouble-maker who divided women from each other. For Morgan, the definitions of (sexual) difference were clear; and the binary man/woman demarcated the feminist frontier. She did not recognize this cross-identification as significant for feminist sexual politics.[2]

The alien presence of the transvestite female man (or male woman) challenged the definitions of 'woman', 'lesbian' and 'feminist', which grounded feminism as a politics of experience, to demand whose and which experiences counted. Morgan reports that more than half the women attending the conference 'demanded that he [the transvestite] be forced to leave', while others 'defended him as their "sister"'.[3] This man's intrusive presence exposed contradictions that Morgan preferred to be left undisturbed, and disrupted assumptions about an innate sexual or gender identity to ask what it meant to 'be' a woman.[4] Can this identity be claimed or is it a natural fact? And does such transvestite identification reconfigure the (potential) subjects of/in feminism?

These questions are familiar in the work of postmodern-feminist theorists such as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway who celebrate the possibilities of sexual boundary crossing. Butler's construction of gender performativity and Haraway's theorization of the cyborg both focus on the dissident promise of 'unnatural' identifications.[5] But in 1973, when the differences between women (lesbian and straight women, women of color and white women, rich women and poor women) threatened to fragment the illusion of global

sisterhood, such questioning of the legitimacy of the category Woman was dangerous and unwelcome.

Morgan asserted the importance of women's experiences *as* women in patriarchy to articulate a specifically female feminism, a sexual specificity which was echoed by Joanna Russ when she claimed that, for writing as well as politics, sexual difference made a difference: 'maleness or femaleness is among the most important concrete, specific data of a human being's situation, and to write authentically one must write from a concrete, absolutely specific history'.[6] The Women's Liberation Movement, as a politics of experience, urged women to re-articulate their personal histories within a feminist context so that their experiences might not only be demystified and politicized, but also reclaimed as a creative source for feminism. In 'Blood, Bread and Poetry', for example, Adrienne Rich urged women to write 'directly and overtly as a woman, out of women's experience', taking 'women's experience seriously as a theme and source for art'.[7]

When Russ describes her reasons for writing science fiction she explains that SF allowed her to represent her experience as a woman:

> When I became aware [in college] of my 'wrong' experience, I chose fantasy. Convinced that I had no real experience of life, since my own obviously wasn't part of Great Literature, I decided consciously that I'd write of things nobody knew anything about, dammit. So I wrote realism disguised as fantasy, that is, science fiction.[8]

By describing SF as 'realism disguised as fantasy', Russ invokes Rich's appeal to experience as a creative source, but defers any easy identification between that textualized experience and the reader. Russ complicates the referential framework which familiarizes the characters' experiences by representing alien perspectives and environments.[9]

Frances Bartkowski identifies Russ's SF as an adaptation of 'Brechtian techniques of alienation and estrangement in order to bring to consciousness the desires and fears of her audience of readers'.[9] Russ studied Brecht at the Yale School of Drama before becoming an English professor, and her fiction, with its emphasis on political strategy over the formal structures of conventional narrative, reveals the influence of Brecht's epic theatre. Indeed, *The Female Man* may be read against Brecht's analysis of literary forms as, in Russ's words, 'realism disguised as fantasy'. For Brecht, realistic means:

> Discovering the causal complexes of society / unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power / writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing

> difficulties in which human society is caught up / emphasizing the element of development / making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.[10]

The Female Man (1975) is a significant text for feminist SF both because it identifies feminism as the discourse through which to discover the 'causal complexes of society' and because it confronts the contradictory impulses in feminist politics.[11] In the Alyx series Russ had redefined what a heroine could do to assert a specifically female agency in SF. In *The Female Man*, Russ returns to an exploration of female agency as an expression of women's power and potential, but she also invokes a new questioning of the nature of Woman, and of the significance and meanings of sex, gender and sexuality. The text generates a series of contradictions which remain deliberately unresolved. *The Female Man* repeatedly affirms the significance of women's experience as the foundation for feminist politics and feminist art. At the same time, it also attempts to transcend the category of Woman altogether and to explore feminism's promise of transgressive gender identities. The motifs of SF enable the creation of future worlds in which the 'female man' and the 'male woman' are normal and unquestioned identities.

The Female Man has four female protagonists, whom Rachel Blau DuPlessis has termed a 'cluster protagonist'.[12] These women, who are all the same genotype, exist in four different parallel worlds. They are known as the four Js: Janet, Jeannine, Joanna and Jael. The four Js represent alternative selves, but, as critics have observed, they also represent different strategies for addressing the social consequences of gender inequality.[13] The science-fictional intersection of past, present and future worlds brings conflicting ideas about gender into collision to expose the ways in which 'woman' and 'man' are culturally constructed. The narrative positions Joanna as a feminist-in-progress whose consciousness is raised by her alienating experiences in alternative worlds. However, as the text presents the evolution of a feminist subject, it also continually questions just who and what are the possible subjects of feminism.

Janet Evason is from a philosophically and technologically sophisticated feminist utopia called Whileaway, a post-gender world where men no longer exist.[14] Jeannine Dadier lives in an alternative 1969 (the year in which Russ began the novel) in which the Second World War never happened and the Depression continues. She dreams of marriage as the legitimation of her life. Joanna also lives in the present (1969). Her world

corresponds to Darko Suvin's concept of the 'zero world', but it too is 'made strange' by satire.[15] Alice Jael Reasoner is the Agent who has brought the other women together. She is a vengeful murderess from a future dystopia which is enduring the final war of Us and Them. Her world is divided into Womanland and Manland as the Battle of the Sexes has disintegrated into a Cold War stalemate.

The four Js have been identified by critics as a fragmented representation of one woman, as 'different phases/faces of the same self'; as 'intersect[ing] like dimensions of one personality'; or even as 'various aspects of the female self'.[16] The critical reintegration of the Js into a single self can be read as a reflection of the feminist concern with unified subjectivity in the 1970s. But critically collating the four Js into an Everywoman figure risks obscuring the unresolved disparities between them. *The Female Man* may be read literally as what Russ terms an 'attempt to get [her] head together' without proposing a unified 'female self' or resolving those fragments into a representation of Woman.[17] The interactions between the four Js also suggest the diversity fostered by the collective politics and communal impulse for change in the Women's Movement. The text cannot be reduced either to a metaphorical representation of women's fragmentation in patriarchy, nor to a metonymical representation of potential feminist community.

How then are we to read the interactions between the Js? Does their shared genotype signal a culturally translatable essence of self or womanhood? Or does their genetic sameness highlight their cultural differences to question rather than confirm the nature of Woman? The metaphor of the female man, and the multiple interpretations of that contradictory identity in the different worlds, challenges the polarities of gender. *The Female Man* is an ironic title which both acts as a metaphor for the possibilities of cross-identification, and also exposes the incompatibility of the categories 'female' and 'human'. For Russ, women are made alien by the condensation of all humanity into Man. The narrative presents many versions of the female man, but this dialectical identity is one that proliferates beyond the text. The inconsistent roles which Russ imposes on her reader as she complicates the terms of gender also make us, whether male or female, potential female men.

Russ's *The Female Man* has received more critical attention than any of her other works, primarily as a feminist utopia. However, the critical identification of *The Female Man* as a utopian text often obscures the more difficult questions posed by the novel. The

importance of Russ's text lies not in any individual character or world, but in the interactions between the Js and their different cultures; the alternative history, the ironic present, the feminist utopia and the segregated dystopia.

The Female Man is motivated by the feelings of anger, empowerment and self-discovery which characterized the Women's Liberation Movement. Russ's narrative strategies, such as the thematization of anger, draw from the energy and the promise of the early 1970s, and by contextualizing the novel (as a product of the second wave feminist movement) we can recognize the political challenge *The Female Man* presented to its readers, especially to its non-feminist SF readers. The novel also presents theoretical challenges to feminist readers. It asserts the importance of female agency and female sisterhood but it also problematizes notions of sex and gender. In the construction of the four Js and the parodic cross-identification of the female man, the narrative anticipates the more recent theoretical debates which arise in the intersections between feminism and postmodernism.

Rosi Braidotti, for instance, echoes the structure of *The Female Man* when she situates the conceptual challenges for feminism within the contradictory identifications of the female subject as both a 'dazzling collection of integrated fragments' and a 'theoretical, libidinal, ethical and political agent'.[18] *The Female Man* confronted uncomfortable issues and posed difficult questions for the 1970's Women's Movement which are still relevant to contemporary feminist theory. In its focus upon the contradictions within women's identities the novel asks, as Robin Morgan refused to do, who or what is a natural woman?

Performing Gender: Representing Female Men and Male Women

The Female Man is a difficult book to read. It is structured in nine parts, which each contain between five and eighteen sections that range in length from three words to several pages. These disparate sections form a montage of different voices and perspectives as poetry and party games intersect with interviews, staged dialogue, lectures and confessions. Of all the protagonists, only Jeannine does not speak for herself: Jael, Janet and Joanna each narrate discontinuous parts. The distinctions between the Js, and especially between Joanna and the persona of the author (also a Joanna), are often difficult to sustain, and the authorial character occasionally invades the text as the fifth J.

In interview, Russ has argued that the reader experiences the confusion of (often unidentified) voices as either a 'celebration', a kind of literary zap action, or a 'torture' which will prove infuriating.[19] Either way, Russ engages the reader as an agent in the text, who must work to construct the novel's meaning. The act of reading is indeed an activity. To decipher the 'plot', we must unravel and re-articulate the montage of voices and worlds in each section. The reader's experience as a participant in the production of new meanings from these textual fragments reflects Joanna's experience as she negotiates her position in relation to the other women. It also simulates the process of consciousness-raising which is represented both in the narrative (in the construction of Joanna as a feminist-in-process), and promoted by the narrative in the metafictional feminist polemic.

The novel's structure revises the literary experimentalism which was associated with the SF New Wave to create a fictional self-referentiality that exposes what John Barth has termed the 'used-upness' of conventional narrative forms.[20] Bonnie Zimmerman has argued that in the 1970s 'self-reflexive fiction was perceived to be an apolitical luxury' which feminist writers could not afford.[21] Zimmerman strategically distorts Barth's metaphor of postmodern fictionality ('the literature of exhaustion') to suggest that 'feminist writers did not feel alienated or exhausted [...]; they felt angry and energized'.[22] *The Female Man* is characterized by a feminist energy, wit and righteous, ironic anger which is integral to Russ's textual innovations. Richard Law argues that Russ's disruption of fictional conventions enables her to 'overtly control the disjointed narrative by means of her dominant didactic or polemic purpose'.[23] As Law observes, Russ's experimentalism is politically motivated and her narrative explores new forms as a way to articulate a new politics.

Russ (ironically) conceded those reviews which claimed, as did *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, that '*The Female Man* is advertized as a SF novel, but it is not one. It is not a story. It is not an action. There is no narrative thread'.[24] In 1981, in *The Advocate*, Russ argued that *The Female Man* 'is not a novel. It's not that kind of shape'. Her challenge to novelistic convention was not just an expression of literary postmodernism. It was an attempt to represent personal feminist strength in and through collective political struggle. She asks: 'How the hell do you use a form that must end with individual failure or individual success when you're not talking about that at all?'[25] The anarchic structure of *The Female Man* enabled Russ to articulate the contradictions within

and between different oppositional perspectives without then reconciling them in a linear narrative. She used the possibilities of SF to create estranging visions and points of view which overtly challenged the gender politics of the 'zero world'. In the feminist journal *Quest*, Russ argued that if *The Female Man* was propagandist, as reviewers accused it of being, it was so because it articulated prohibited desires. She suggested that 'perhaps the only propaganda there can be for a forbidden feeling or belief or existence is simply to present it'.[26]

The Female Man does not use SF motifs to present possible futures. Russ argued that the narrative was not a proposal for either a separatist utopia or a violent war against men. She claimed in *Quest* that: 'Books are not blueprints. They are experiences. The worlds in *The Female Man* are not futures. They are here and now writ large'.[27] The future worlds in which Janet and Jael live mark both a celebration and a critique of the illegitimate gender possibilities which were being explored in the early 1970s by the Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Liberation Front. The dystopian world of Manland, for example, criticizes the sexual stereotyping of gay male role play, but it also confronts the challenges these transgressive identities present to feminist politics.

When Jael finally transports the three other Js to her world she takes them, disguised as lepers, into Manland to show them the state of the war. There they meet Anna, a 'half-changed':

> Such a vision was he, so much he wore, such folds and frills and ribbons and buttons and feathers, [...] the world exists to look at Anna; he - or she - is only a real-man turned inside out.
> An eerie sisterliness, a smile at Jeannine. (pp.171-173)

Pronouns become difficult when describing Anna; 'he' has male genitals, and yet 'he' is an excessive parody of femininity, beside him the four Js look like, 'four lumpy parcels' (p.172). However, the construction of these sentences draws the reader's attention precisely to the pronouns: 'such a vision was *he*'.

As the language available to describe these gender parodies is revealed to be grossly inadequate, so the authorial persona begins to assert her presence in the text by focusing the reader's attention on the processes (and possibilities) engendered in language use. Russ's indecision about the name of the bar, 'The Trench or The Prick or The Crotch or The Knife' (p.167), represents a textual openness which encourages and implicates the

reader in the production of meaning. By refusing to decide upon one name, and effectively reminding the reader that there are always alternative possibilities, Russ underlines that these worlds are discursive worlds, representing only one possibility in an infinite range. She therefore exploits the science-fictional trope of parallel universes to indicate that these different worlds are the result of the choices we make (political or otherwise): 'every choice begets at least two worlds of possibility, that is, one in which you do and one in which you don't; or very likely many more' (p.6).

Manland demands that its 'real-men' are heterosexually orientated. Anna, as one of the little boys who failed the passage to manhood, has been transformed through a process of self-starvation and decoration into a model of sanctioned and legitimized femininity ('real-women' are loathed):

> [...] little boys are made into Men - though some don't quite make it; sex-change surgery begins at sixteen. One out of seven fails early and makes the full change; one out of seven fails later and (refusing surgery) makes only half a change: artists, illusionists, impressionists of femininity who keep their genitalia but who grow slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine, all this the effect of spirit only. Five out of seven Manlanders make it; these are the 'real-men.' The others are 'the changed' or 'the half-changed.' All real-men like the changed; some real-men like the half-changed; none of the real-men like real-men, for that would be abnormal. (p.167)

When Russ began writing *The Female Man* in 1969 the phenomenon of sex-change surgery was gaining greater scientific and medical recognition. In the mid-1960s the John Hopkins Hospital announced that it was to be the first American medical institution to specialize in the performance of transsexual surgery. This greater medical recognition corresponded to an increased media interest. By the 1970s, articles about transsexualism or 'gender dysphoria' were appearing in wide circulation women's magazine's such as *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping*.[28]

In *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), Janice Raymond argued that the male-to-female transsexual posed 'the question of self-definition - who is a woman?' which, 'in true phallic fashion, is thrust upon us'.[29] Whereas Raymond, like Morgan, resisted such questions as anti-feminist and divisive, Russ's text represents them as precisely the areas of difficulty and contradiction that feminism must explore.[30] In the SF fanzine, *Khatru*, Russ proposed science fiction as a mode of writing which 'at least theoretically' challenged the

'ancient dualities [of] day and night, up and down, "masculine" and "feminine"'. She suggested that in SF the contingencies of gender could be exposed and 'the Eternal Masculine and the Eternal Feminine' revealed as 'the poetic fancies of a weakly dimorphic species [...] in a vain search for what is "natural"'.[31]

Sophisticated technology enables Manlanders to transform the physical attributes of sex, but the half-changed reorganize gender through, 'the effect of the spirit only'. Their physical or 'natural' body does not ground their sexual identity but is repeatedly manipulated by their performances of femininity. *The Female Man* suggests that if the 'changed' and the 'half-changed' are impressionists of femininity, then they are no more so than Jeannine and Joanna, who also practice such fakery when they:

> dress for The Man
> smile for The Man
> talk wittily to The Man
> sympathize with The Man
> flatter The Man
> understand The Man
> defer to The Man
> entertain The Man
> keep The Man
> live for The Man. (p.29)

In these terms, the 'eerie sisterliness' between Anna and Joanna and Jeannine can be interpreted as a mutual recognition of shared performance. Anna also represents the female man: his/her name echoes that of the protagonist and the author, 'Joanna', half-changed.

Esther Newton observes that in the late 1960s, 'the camp queen makes no bones about it; to him the gay world is the "sisterhood"'.[32] Russ's text critiques the implicit (and sometimes explicit) misogyny of camp gender parody as it also explores the subversive potential of parodic femininity. (The lesbian-feminists at the West Coast conference in 1973 who supported the male transvestite as their sister similarly recognized themselves as 'the brotherhood of camp'.[33]) In its representation of the changed and the half-changed, *The Female Man* demonstrates the way in which femininity is not natural but is constructed within a heterosexual sex-role structure. Gender is shown to be a cultural rather than a natural fact. Russ's text can be read as an assault on, or a Jael-like assassination of, what she terms SF's 'assumptions about "innate" values and "natural" social arrangements'.[34]

The Female Man can also be read against earlier SF representations of gender, especially Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Russ argued in *Quest* that Le Guin's novel was 'the nearest thing we have to an androgynous vision', and established an explicit relation between *The Left Hand of Darkness* and her own work: 'I would like to think that *The Female Man* is a gynandrous vision'.[35] The differences between Le Guin's and Russ's texts are significant. Le Guin's characters are biologically hermaphroditic aliens. Once a month they have an oestrus period called kemmer during which they experience sexual desire and, in heterosexual partnership with another person, develop appropriate (opposite) sexual characteristics.

In contrast, Russ's characters are human beings, whose unnatural gender is not biological but performative. Russ draws from the feminist critique of the sex-gender system, to assert that sex-role conditioning, and not biology, produces and regulates gender identities. Russ's reversal of 'androgyny' ('gynandry') is not just a linguistic ploy. It signals both a prioritization of women and an awareness of the implicit gender codings within the counter-cultural celebration of androgyny. In 1974, Cynthia Secor argued that androgyny was 'pertinent, popular, seemingly possible now, and terrifying'.[36] But feminists also observed that popular culture was 'more likely to produce an Alice Cooper, a man who flaunts certain feminine characteristics' than a woman who is avowedly masculine.[37]

When Janet first appears in Joanna's world, she arrives at the Pentagon. Standing 'hands in her pockets, feet planted far apart', she asks, 'Where the dickens are all the women?' (p.8). Janet's stature (self-confident, authoritative) and her emphatic language constitute mannish behaviour on the zero world. Russ's presentation of this female man exposes the cultural specificity of 'womanliness'. This strange person does not behave as a woman should. Such gender parodies can be read against the theoretical deconstruction of gender in the 1990s. Judith Butler asserts that the Women's Movement's attempt to mobilize feminism as an identity politics had the negative effect of limiting the cultural possibilities which feminism sought to open up. She suggests that the critical task for feminism now is to 'locate subversive strategies of repetition' which participate in the regulatory practices of gender, and show those performances to be open to parody and criticism.[38] For Butler, the unnatural acts of gender generate 'a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects'.[39]

Anna and Janet challenge the norms of gender and, in Butler's terms, 'have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: "man" and "woman"'.[40] Janet's non-comprehension of legitimate gender renders her 'sex' culturally unintelligible. The disjuncture between her sex and her gender forces an appeal to the naturalness of biological sex, which in Manland is no longer possible. In Manland, the physical specifications for surgically creating the changed 'every year grow wilder and wilder and there isn't a murmur of protest' (p.169). Anna's unnatural acts also suggest that if femininity is performative women do not necessarily have any prior claim over that performance. S/He does not imitate 'women' as a male copy of female originality, but rather parodies the very idea that there is an 'original' feminine identity.

Responses to Feminist Anger in *The Female Man*

In *The Female Man*, Russ's metafictional confrontation with the incongruities of gender is shadowed by an 'eerie twinge of laughter [which] garlands these paradoxes' (p.140). Russ's text presents the disjuncture between the cultural myths of femininity and women's experiences of their lives as gendered subjects with an angry wit:

> Woman is the gateway to another world; Woman is the earth-mother; Woman is the eternal siren; Woman is purity; [...]
>
> 'I am the gateway to another world,' (said I, looking in the mirror) 'I am the earth-mother; I am the eternal siren; I am purity,' (Jeez, new pimples) [...] (Somehow it sounds different in the first person, doesn't it?)
>
> Honey (said the mirror, scandalized) Are you out of your fuckin' *mind?* (p. 205)

The mirror replies to Joanna's personification of the myths of Woman using a recognizably African-American intonation, and thus reminds the reader that (even feminist) constructions of a generic Woman are often implicitly racially coded as white. Jael has to draw Joanna's and Jeannine's attention to the fact that the Js are all white. She knows that they have both absorbed the white-ethnocentricism of their different versions of 1969, and do not identify themselves, or other white women, in terms of their racial identity.

Joanna's feminist outrage is formed through her interactions with the other Js. The alternative perspectives generated in/by their worlds force her to reconsider her own

position as a woman in America in 1969. If Janet is a feminist 'saviour' who represents 'a blessedness none of us will ever know', Jael represents feminist anger (p.213). For many women, especially during consciousness-raising, anger was the emotion that reconstructed their interpretation of their lives (a changed perspective which fuelled their anger). As the realization of their own oppression began to hit women 'like a relentless sledge hammer', feminist groups encouraged the reclamation and release of 'healthy anger'.[41] In 1971, Susi Kaplow argued that, 'the emotion which accompanies the first steps toward liberation is, for most women, anger [...]. Controlled, directed, but nonetheless passionate, anger moves from the personal to the political and becomes a force for shaping our new destiny'.[42]

Jael is a personification of an ironic feminist anger which changes Joanna's, and especially Jeannine's, understanding of and reactions to their own lives. She is a spectre who (encouraging the violent responses of the others) inhabits the narrative long before she is identified as a man-killer. Throughout much of the first seven parts of the novel, Jael's disembodied voice berates and abuses the other characters, satirizing the hegemonic expectations of femininity and (by deliberately mishearing what they say) converting trained feminine responses into feminist ones:

> I found Jeannine on the clubhouse porch that evening, looking at the moon. She had run away from her family.
>
> 'They only want what's good for you,' I said.
>
> She made a face.
>
> 'They love you,' I said.
>
> [...] 'You ought to appreciate them more, Jeannine.'
>
> 'I know,' said Jeannine softly and precisely. Or perhaps she said *Oh no*.
>
> [...] 'You ought to marry someone who can take care of you, Jeannine.'
>
> [...] 'Not Cal.' *Ah hell.*
>
> [...] 'What do you think you're waiting for?'
>
> 'For a man,' said Jeannine. *For a plan.* (pp.113-114)

Russ suggests that when reviewers objected to *The Female Man*, it was not primarily the novel's ostensible disorganization which caused upset, but the glorification of female anger. She cites the example of one reviewer in *Mother Jones* who, ignoring the utopian world in the novel, called the text 'a scream of anger'. He quoted at length from two violent incidents in the text, one in which Joanna slams the door on a man's thumb, and another in which Jael kills a man as part of the Cold War between the Sexes. Russ

asserts that it is not violence in itself which is problematic, but women's anger and violence against men.[43] She asks in *The Village Voice* in 1972, 'what male reviewer found Hitchcock's *Frenzy* one-20th as revolting as Solanas's SCUM manifesto?'[44] Russ goes further to say the unsayable. She asserts her feminist anger as 'man-hating', which she knows 'gives the show away': 'we aren't merely liberals; our complaints are drastic; we're demanding not asking; we're breaking the mold in the most thorough way possible; *we really mean it*'.[45]

When Frederik Pohl accepted *The Female Man* for Bantam Books, Russ recalls that 'he rather wistfully asked me if I wouldn't make it clear that Jael was insane by having her kill a woman! I said no dice and that she wasn't insane'.[46] Pohl's objection to Jael perhaps explains the oversight on the back-cover of the first edition of *The Female Man*. It reads:

Reality Times 3

> Joanna's world is recognizable - very like our own. Jeannine's world is much the same [...]. Janet's world is something else again. In her world wars are fought, children are born, countries are governed and wilderness conquered...and she is the only kind of man there is.

Where is Jael? The four Js have been reduced to three, as the most troubling of these female incarnations has been erased from the text.

The transgression of the taboo against women's rage in *The Female Man* met with hostility in both SF and mainstream reviews. However, Russ anticipated many of the anti-feminist responses her book provoked by including pre-emptive (fictional?) reviews in the text itself. The narrative dismisses predictable complaints about the didactic anti-novel style ('we would have gladly listened to her (they said) *if only she had spoken like a lady*') and predicts the sexist rhetoric of male and female critics:

> Shrill ... vituperative [...] selfish femlib ... needs a good lay [...] twisted, neurotic ... some truth buried in a largely hysterical [...] another of the screaming sisterhood ... a not very appealing aggressiveness [...] pseudo-masculine brusqueness [...] violently waspish attack [...] the predictable fury at anatomy displaced to [...] we 'dear ladies,' whom Russ would do away with, unfortunately just don't *feel* [...]. (pp.140-141)

Gardner Dozois indicates the hyperbolic reactions which the text provoked when he reports that, on publication of *The Female Man*, Joanna Russ became 'a *bête noire* of

unparalleled blackness, practically the Antichrist' in some science fiction circles.[47] Several important male SF writers disparaged the novel. Russ recalls in particular that Lester del Rey in *Analog* 'HATED it!'.[48] Even women writers objected to the text. Marion Zimmer Bradley argued that her own books were 'read by women who would have pitched *The Female Man* across the room'. She described the novel as a 'cruel and bitter book', adding:

> I did not like it. I don't think Joanna wrote it to be liked. I think it was intended - in fact she admitted it to me - as a political tract. I personally don't think novels should be didactic and I don't like the idea of an author preaching in her novels. Joanna said that she saw nothing wrong with it. She defended it as one of the many ways to write a novel.[49]

The Female Man presents an overt and aggressively feminist didacticism which was unprecedented in SF. The text confirmed Russ's reputation as the most out-spoken writer of feminist SF. Thirteen years after the publication of *The Female Man*, Russ still raised hackles. Joan Gordon reports that when Russ was presented with the Pilgrim award by the Science Fiction Research Association in 1988, 'there was great indignation among the (male) membership of the SFRA over the blatant politicization of the award committee's decision'. She adds that, 'when Le Guin won the same award in 1989, the award committee's decision met with universal approval' and asks 'isn't Le Guin as politically committed a feminist as Joanna Russ? Yes; but [...] she's not so aggressive a feminist'.[50] Gordon describes the contrast between Le Guin and Russ in terms of their respective positions in SF, and claims them as the 'good cop-bad cop' of feminist SF.

The difference between these writers' feminist strategies was evident in the 1970s. Russ overtly promoted *The Female Man* as her 'feminist book', but Le Guin was initially defensive about the feminist appropriation of her text. In 1976 Le Guin published 'Is Gender Necessary?' in which she asserted that, 'the real subject of the book [*The Left Hand of Darkness*] is not feminism or sex or gender or anything of the sort'.[51] Ten years later, she dismissed her own earlier comments as evasive 'bluster': 'I had opened a can of worms and was trying hard to shut it'.[52]

Le Guin also acknowledged the negative impact of her use of the generic masculine to describe the characters in the novel. Androcentric language had been contested by feminists since the early 1970s, but it was perhaps the success of Marge Piercy's 'per/person' in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) which influenced Le Guin's re-appraisal of the significance of generic pronouns.[53] By 1987 she had rethought her position: 'I still

dislike invented pronouns, but I now dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his which does in fact exclude women from discourse'.[54] As Le Guin came to agree, the use of the generic masculine to describe the people of Gethen has the effect of deleting women rather than erasing gender. It is the eclipsing of women behind the universal masculine that Russ identified and satirized in *The Female Man*.

Becoming the Female Man: Russ's Exploration of Cross-Identification

Russ's exploration of the generic masculine is indicated by the title of her text, *The Female Man*, which does not suggest a female human so much as an oxymoronic parody of sex.[55] To be part of Mankind, a woman must be a man. There is 'Java Man' and 'the future of Man' and 'the values of Western Man' and 'too many Mans to count or look at or believe. There is Mankind' (p.140). In Rachel Blau DuPlessis's evocative phrase, Russ 'ricochets' between man as human and man as male 'until we are astir and enraged again at the appropriation of all personhood by the term *man*'.[56] But Russ does not reveal the female man until the reader understands that the female woman is equally performative. Joanna promises to tell the reader how she 'turned into a man': 'First I had to turn into a woman' (p.133).

The implication that Joanna must 'turn into a woman' follows closely from de Beauvoir's suggestion that, 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one'.[57] In Russ's rewriting of that famous phrase, however, the passive 'becomes' has a renewed force as the imperative 'had to'. As Meredith Tax argued in 1971, 'we didn't get this way by heredity or by accident. We have been *molded* into these deformed postures [...]. We have had our mental and emotional feet bound for thousands of years'.[58] Joanna's gender transformations are both performed by her and upon her. She becomes a woman (as she must) and then she turns into a man (as she must to be human - for humanity is Man).

Joanna does not become a female man through a transcendence of gender as Janet does, or through Jael's violent parody of heterosexual identities. She becomes a female man because she resists being a woman in a man's world. *The Female Man* exposes the way in which seemingly dissident performances of gender are often coerced or forced upon women, who then construct themselves in culturally prescribed roles. When Joanna

becomes a female man her masculine 'drag' is portrayed as a strategic and essential dissembling tactic for women existing in patriarchal culture:

> For a long time I had been [...] One Of The Boys, because if you walk into a gathering of men, professionally or otherwise, you might as well be wearing a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS! [...] If you get good at being One Of The Boys it goes away. Of course there's a certain disembodiment involved, but the sandwich board goes; I back-slapped and laughed at blue jokes, especially the hostile kind. Underneath you keep saying pleasantly but firmly No no no no no no. But it's necessary to my job and I like my job. (p.133)

Against the banter of a misogynist culture, which demands her disembodiment, Joanna's gender performance is a necessary disguise that deceives her audience into forgetting her sex.

Russ explains the necessity of women's cross-identification in her critical article 'Dear Colleague: I am Not an Honorary Male'. She exudes mock sympathy for the 'goodguys' who accept women as 'equals' in a man's world: 'You like liberated women [...]. In fact, you treat her just like a man, just like one of the boys. You even tell dirty jokes when she's around. What's your reward? She hates you'.[59] The female man is baffling. She evades the legitimate identities of both men and women. Her masculinity does not compromise her 'womanhood' but constructs it as a resisting identity subtending her performance. She is culturally positioned as female, and yet is able to swap her position by imitating male behaviour. Hers is the artistry of drag.

In exploring 'the imitative structure of gender', Judith Butler returns to Esther Newton's analysis of female impersonators in the late 1960s and early 1970s in *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972). Butler suggests, following Newton, that drag 'mocks [...] the notion of a true gender identity'.[60] However, Newton's work retains an ambivalence about the subversive potential of drag. Newton stresses that for the stage impersonators 'the whole point of female impersonation depends on maleness', but she also argues that drag 'wrench[es] the sex roles loose from that which supposedly determines them, that is, genital sex'.[61] She describes male drag as a 'double inversion'. On the one hand it says to its audience, 'my "outside" appearance is feminine but my essence "inside" is masculine [the body]'. On the other hand, it symbolizes the opposite, 'my appearance "outside" is masculine [my body, my gender] but my essence "inside" [myself] is feminine'.[62] Similarly, but inversely, Joanna is saying to her audience of men (and readers):

> I'm not a woman; I'm a man. I'm a man [outside] with a woman's face [inside]. I'm a woman [outside] with a man's mind [inside]. Everybody says so. (p.134) [my additions]

Joanna's drag both articulates the dualities of gender and collapses categories of masculine and feminine, man and woman. Like Newton's characterization of camp as a 'strategy for a situation' which highlights 'incongruous juxtapositions', the female man questions the binary constructions of gender to ask what it means to 'be' a man or a woman.[63]

In becoming first a woman and then a man, the female man intends mischief. She exposes the discursive methods by which men have appropriated the signifiers of humanity to assert that she too can claim that power:

> I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man; I think you will write about me as a Man from now on and speak of me as a Man and employ me as a Man and recognize child-rearing as a Man's business; you will think of me as a Man and treat me as a Man until it enters your muddled, terrified, preposterous, nine-tenths-fake, loveless, papier-mâché bull-moose head that *I am a man.* (And you are a woman.) (p.140)

Joanna's self-identified manhood in this sex-change manifesto, which also demands that the reader recognize himself/herself as a woman, is both discursively and collectively constituted. Joanna claims manhood, but it is the reader who must 'call' her, 'write about' her, 'speak of' her, 'recognize' her, 'think of' her and 'treat' her as a man. And it is only through this discursive process of identification that the realization of her manhood will happen. This sleight of hand on Joanna's part, in which the reader actually produces the transformation while all the time being abused for not already recognizing her as a man, neatly allegorizes the duplicities of gender. Here the readers (as women) facilitate the narrator's assumption of power (manhood) and his/her corresponding right to identify us, even though it is only our work (as readers) that enables his/her sex-change.

Samuel Delany has suggested that Joanna Russ is a writer who works at the highest level of rhetorical risk.[64] In *The Female Man*, Russ's metafictional daring corresponds to the danger implicit in transgressing gender boundaries. She reminds the reader that to be a female man in a male world has potentially hazardous material and political consequences. It represents, what Judith Grant has more recently termed, a 'gender crime'.[65] Russ confesses to the implied (hostile) reader of 'Dear Colleague' that, 'if I met you in person, it's very unlikely I would talk to you the way I'm doing in print. It's too

much trouble, it's painful, it leads to fights [...]. Only at a distance and in print am I brave enough (and unexhausted enough) to risk fights more than once or twice a week'.[66] The fusion of incompatible identities (female-woman, female-human, female-man) generates personal and social tensions which 'lead to fights'.

In *The Female Man*, Russ's resolution of this tension is drastic. She stages a physical absorption of conflict and contradiction which is brutally enacted in the narrative as an electrocution. According to Joanna the only way to, 'resolve contrarieties, [is to] unite them in your own person':

> [...] take in your bare right hand one naked, severed end of a high tension wire. Take the other in your left hand. Stand in a puddle. (Don't worry about letting go; you can't.) Electricity favors the prepared mind, and if you interfere in this avalanche by accident you will be knocked down dead, you will be charred like a cutlet, and your eyes will be turned to burst red jellies, but if those wires are your own wires - hang on. [...] Women are not used to power; that avalanche of ghastly strain will lock your muscles and your teeth in the attitude of an electrocuted rabbit, but you are a strong woman, you are God's favorite, and you can endure; [...] if you let yourself through yourself and into yourself and out of yourself, turn yourself inside out, give yourself the kiss of reconciliation, marry yourself, love yourself -
>
> Well, I turned into a man. (pp.138-139)

Russ's ironic imagery enacts a transformation of self that suggests a violent reconstruction of gendered subjectivity. But it also represents power. The little known short-story, 'The Precious Object' (1970) indicates Russ's use of this metaphor to express female power: 'I feel very proud of myself. I feel the geyser of power that is myself pour through the soles of my feet just as if I were an exposed copper wire overcome by current.'[67]

Russ's imagery represents both power and danger. For women to assert personal or political agency in a man's world is to transgress the codes of feminine behaviour and risk cultural condemnation. Russ uses the metaphor of the female man to highlight the 'incongruous juxtapositions' of female and human, but she also uses this cross-identification to explore the cultural estrangement of newly feminist consciousness. In 1978, Ellen Morgan described *The Female Man* as 'the truest, most complete account available of what it feels like to be alienated as a woman and a feminist'.[68]

Before Second Wave feminism, proto-feminist writers who explored the motifs of androgyny were unable to develop the political significance of gender transgression. For instance, in a letter to Morgan written in 1970, June Arnold reassessed her earlier novel,

Applesauce (1967), stating, 'I think I am much surer now (after Liberation consciousness) than I was when I wrote the book as to how central feminism was to the story'.[69] In *Applesauce*, the protagonist, Liza Durach, models herself into 'different' women who represent stereotypical, but nevertheless strategic, roles for the survival of womanhood. Liza first becomes the sexually precocious Eloise, then the intellectual Rebecca, and then the maternal Lila. But none of these roles can be sustained, all the women 'die'.

Liza's final metamorphosis is not into a woman but into a man, a female man. Liza becomes Gus Ferrari, the man to whom all her previous self-incarnations were married:

> 'I am Gus Ferrari,' he said to the mirror. A square forehead, imprecise eyebrows, set and solid flesh looked back at him in agreement. 'I am Liza Durach.' The mouth became fluid, the cheeks soft, the eyes almond-shaped in complicity.[70]

The roles which Liza adopts are sequential, and unlike the four Js in Russ's text who repeatedly interact, Liza's different incarnations are isolated from each other. When Arnold wrote the novel in the mid-1960s there was no collective feminist movement. Her heroine struggles with, in Arnold's words, 'the impossibility of being a woman' without ever identifying the political implications of this problem.[71] In contrast, *The Female Man* deliberately enters into the debates taking place in Second Wave feminism. The text is both a SF fantasy and a political tract which confronts sexism and embraces the movement for women's liberation. The narrative represents the collective impetus of feminism not only through its characterization of the four Js, but through its interaction with the reader. Sarah Lefanu argues that Russ's position on authorship is radical both because she 'insists that books have a political life', and because she constitutes the reader as 'someone who can, and indeed must be affected'.[72] For Russ the focus and the organizing principle of the textual montage is the reader.

Cruising the Reader: The Experience of Reading *The Female Man*

Writing *The Female Man* is, in Tom Moylan's words, 'Joanna's own method of resistance'.[73] Writing the text is an assumption of power and an incitement to the reader's sensibilities. But Russ/Joanna also offers a reciprocal role to the reader, who, by reading critically, participates in the discursive struggle for power. As Natalie Rosinsky points out,

Russ presents, 'reading as a form of authorship, potentially destructive as well as constructive'.[74] Russ represents the reader as an active agency in the text who is able to choose what she reads: 'If you don't like it, you can skip to the next chapter' (p.29). She confronts the reader, radically disorientating her by challenging and berating her for her implied reading practice: 'don't read between the lines; there's nothing there' (p.29). This textual device thus both constructs the (resisting) reader's participation in the production of meaning, and the author's attempts to direct that involvement. It also acknowledges the way in which the reader's responses are beyond authorial control.[75]

The Female Man is very obviously didactic and politically partial, but Russ's engagement of the reader as a character who will alternately enjoy, despise, applaud or simply resist her feminist intentionality, makes her authorial role inherently unstable. By deliberately constructing the possibilities of mis-reading and mis-interpretation (in the reviews and extra-narrative voices), Russ integrates the challenges to the authority of her own feminist didacticism into the text. Such ironic strategies reveal the invasiveness of dominant discourses as they also reveal Russ's awareness of the contentiousness of her text. *The Female Man* is written with pleasure as much as anger and Russ's feminist humour directs, as it expresses, her feminist polemic.

In the most violent scene in the book, in which Jael kills Anna's boss with her teeth and nails, Russ demonstrates the extreme and violent results of the cultural enforcement of gender. She also presents the pleasure Jael takes in performing those roles: '"Take your filthy hands off me," I say clearly, enjoying his enjoyment of my enjoyment of his enjoyment of that cliché' (p.180). The clichéd roles of heterosexual melodrama, in which the woman attempts an ineffectual fight against the rough sexual advances of the heroic, or villainous, male, are dangerously parodic. Russ's representation of femininity as a process of construction and consolidation allows her to expose the discursive processes of gender conformity, and, to use Judith Butler's phrase, 'occasion their subversive resignification'.[76] The cliché circulates between Jael and the boss as a joke, as an ironic play on heterosexuality, through which Jael constructs her self as a woman (she is a master of disguise).

Jael's performance is a flirtation, not only with the boss, but with the Js and the reader - to whom she narrates. She knows that we are about to be shocked. Her (lesbian)

seduction of the reader is both ironic and intense, a mock enticement which is evocative of Barthes's description of the pleasure of the text. He asserts that:

> [The writer] must seek out [the] reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss [jouissance] is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.[77]

Jael delights in the re-articulation and re-contextualization of heterosexual roles, as her parody of feminine outrage constitutes an expression (rather than a denial) of female power.

The Female Man draws upon such 'subversive strategies of repetition' throughout the narrative.[78] Russ imitates the dominant discourses of patriarchal, heterosexual culture and re-presents them as extra-narrative voices in the structural interstices between the parallel worlds:

> XV
>
> A dozen beautiful 'girls' each 'brushing' and 'combing' her long, silky 'hair,' each 'longing' to 'catch a man'. (p.75)

Russ explores the ways in which all discourses, including her own, not only describe but continually reinforce gendered behaviour. She quotes these signifiers of femininity to create a pastiche of contemporary magazine and high art images, which she positions in an alienating context. The passage numbered XV divides two scenes which explore different lesbian relationships between Janet and Laura-Rose, a teenager in Joanna's time, and between Janet and Vittoria, her 'wife' on Whileaway. These words are not Russ's words, and the quotations marks deny her authorship of them. The narrative recontextualization of these images exposes them as cultural constructions, and opens up new possibilities for women's sexual and gender identity.

Similarly, Russ includes various parodies of anti-feminist condescension:

> V
>
> Burned any bras lately har har twinkle twinkle A pretty girl like you doesn't need to be liberated twinkle har Don't listen to those hysterical bitches twinkle twinkle twinkle I never take a woman's advice about two things: love and automobiles twinkle twinkle har May I kiss your little hand twinkle twinkle twinkle. Har. Twinkle. (p.49)

Such interruptions demonstrate the way in which the narrative positions the reader in a woman's role and dictates that they read from a woman's perspective. Neither the speaker nor the listener are identified in the text and this short tirade speaks out directly to the reader: positioning her first as a feminist; then as potentially so; then as incapably feminine, and finally as a love object. Russ expects her readers to recognize themselves within her representation of sexism, and draw from their own experiences of gender oppression in their reading practice. Most of all she expects us to get the jokes.

Russ's literary polemic insistently grounds itself in terms of women's experience of sexism. However, it also disrupts, through its non-sequential, fragmented structure, any easy elision between the writer's, the characters' and the readers' experiences as women. Russ's exploration of the relationships in the text, between for example character and author, or author and reader, is premised on a shared recognition of certain experiences. At the same time, Russ also recognizes that these very interactions, and the process of interpretation, implicitly construct the meanings and significance of the experiences she represents.[79] Experience is both a defining category (feminism is a 'politics of experience'), and continually open to redefinition (through, for instance, consciousness-raising or, in the narrative, through the interactions between characters, which includes the various textual personae of the author and the readers). Russ's text invokes the authority of experience at the same time as it parades its fictionality. As Joanna tells us when she dresses Janet for a party: 'Oh, I made that woman up; you can believe it!' (p.30).

In the finale of the narrative, the four Js meet for 'Thanksgiving'. They exchange farewells, and say 'goodbye to all that' (p.209).[80] Jael asks each of the others if their worlds will play host to Womanland's armies; only Janet refuses. When they part, their connection to each other (as aspects of one woman) is highlighted by the characterization of a fifth J who embraces them all. But this authorial presence does not absorb or assimilate their differences. The Js refuse to be unified, and assert their individual agency:

> I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I, Jael, I myself. (p. 212)

As Angelika Bammer observes, Russ does not claim universal or timeless significance for her text.[81] In contra-distinction to traditional literary values, Russ prizes her novel precisely for its proposed mortality, not in spite of it. *The Female Man* is an act

of resistance which anticipates its own political 'exhaustion'. To underline the historical specificity of her narrative, Russ concludes the text with an envoi which contextualizes the book in geographical, feminist, social, personal, commercial and historical terms. This conclusion marks Russ's final ironic gesture. The envoi addresses the book itself, ignoring and marginalizing the reader who at the end of the narrative must reconstruct both her relation to the preceding pages and her role as a (newly feminist?) agent in her own (extratextual) cultural environment.

The envoi also implicitly connects *The Female Man* to the tradition of 'Great Literature' from which Russ, as a woman SF writer, has been excluded. Russ paraphrases Chaucer's envoi in *Troilus and Creseyde* ('Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye / [...] And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace/ Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace') to assert her own influences and utopian hopes:[82]

> Go, little book, [...] bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest; behave yourself in people's living rooms [...]; and take your place bravely on the book racks of bus terminals and drugstores. Do not scream when you are ignored, for that will alarm people [...]. Live merrily, little daughter-book, even if I can't and we can't; recite yourself to all who will listen; stay hopeful and wise. [...] Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.
>
> Rejoice, little book!
>
> For on that day, we will be free. (pp.213-214)

1. Adrienne Rich, 'The Phenomenology of Anger', in *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), pp.25-31 (p.31).

2. Robin Morgan, 'Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?', in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp.170-188.

3. Robin Morgan, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', p.171.

4. Morgan identifies the transvestite as 'the same man who single-handedly divided and almost destroyed the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis Chapter; the same man who, when personally begged *not* to attend this conference, replied that if he were kept out he would bring federal suit against these women on the charges of "discrimination and criminal conspiracy to discriminate"' (p.180). She argues, convincingly, that he is an opportunist. In drawing attention to this man's presence I do not aim to defend his motivation for attending the conference. Rather, I aim to highlight the wider implications of cross-gender identification for feminist politics.

5. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

6. Joanna Russ in 'Women in Science Fiction: A Symposium', ed. by Jeffrey Smith, *Khatru*, 3&4 (1975), p.66.

7. Adrienne Rich, 'Blood, Bread, and Poetry: the Location of the Poet', *Massachusetts Review*, (1984), p.536.

8. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p.127.

9. In interview, in 1983, Russ highlighted the art involved in writing 'from experience'. She acknowledged that she used a lot of her own experience, both 'real' and 'imagined', in her work. But she also stated that it had taken her, 'almost a quarter of a century to perfect that "personal" tone'. She added, 'it is *not* spontaneous or easy, damn it. Writing is *work*'. See Charles Platt, 'Profile: Joanna Russ', *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, March 1983, pp.30-45, (p.45).

9. Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p.61.

10. Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', trans. by Stuart Hood, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Ronald Taylor (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp.79-85 (p.82).

11. Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (London: The Women's Press, 1985). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

12. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.182.

13. See Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*; and Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1984). The four Js might also be seen to approximate different ideologies in and about feminism in the United States in the 1970s: Janet is a lesbian-separatist; Jeannine is a pre-feminist woman; Joanna is raising her consciousness; and Jael is a feminist-terrorist, reflecting groups such as SCUM (the Society for Cutting Up Men).

14. Whileaway first appeared as a lesbian utopia in Russ's 1972 Nebula award-winning short-story, 'When It Changed', in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, ed. by Harlan Ellison (London: Pan, 1977), pp.266-281.

15. Darko Suvin, 'On the Poetics of the SF Genre', *College English*, 34 (1972), 372-382.

16. Thelma Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature By Women*, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, 22 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.167; Richard Law, 'Joanna Russ and the "Literature of Exhaustion"', *Extrapolation*, 25 (1984), 146-156 (p.152); Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.63.

17. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction: An Interview with Joanna Russ', *Building Feminist Theory: Essays From 'Quest a Feminist Quarterly'* (London: Longman, 1981), pp.243-250 (p.246).

18. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. by Elizabeth Guild (London: Polity, 1991), p.281.

19. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction', p.245.

20. John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.70-83 (p.70).

21. Bonnie Zimmerman, 'Feminist Fiction and the Postmodern Challenge', in *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by Larry McCaffery (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.175-188 (p.176).

22. Bonnie Zimmerman, 'Feminist Fiction and the Postmodern Challenge', p.176.

23. Richard Law, 'Joanna Russ and the "Literature of Exhaustion"', p.148.

24. Cited in Richard Law, 'Joanna Russ and the "Literature of Exhaustion"', p.152.

25. Cited in Richard Law, 'Joanna Russ and the "Literature of Exhaustion"', pp.151-152.

26. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction', p.245.

27. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction', p.247.

28. See Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire* (London: The Women's Press, 1980), p.xiv.

29. Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, p.113.

30. In the 1990s, the issues raised by cross-gender identification and gender realignment are increasingly being posited as important ones for feminist theory. Sandy Stone suggests that transsexuals should be constituted 'as a *genre* - a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored'. See 'The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. by Julia Epstein and Kristine Straub (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.280-304 (p.296).

31. Russ, *Khatru*, 3&4, p.47. Contemporary SF novels, such as Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976) and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), also speculated upon the implications of sex change technology for feminist sexual politics.

32. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Anthropology of Modern Societies Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p.111.

33. Robin Morgan, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', p.171.

34. Joanna Russ, 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction', in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1972), pp.79-94 (p.80).

35. Joanna Russ, 'Reflections on Science Fiction', p.247.

36. Cynthia Secor, 'Androgyny: An Early Reappraisal', *Women's Studies*, 2 (1974), 161-170 (p.162).

37. Catharine Stimpson, 'The Androgyne and the Homosexual', *Women's Studies*, 2 (1974), 237-248 (p.244).

38. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.147.

39. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

40. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

41. Susi Kaplow, 'Getting Angry', in *Radical Feminism*, ed. by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), pp. 37-42 (p.38).

42. Susi Kaplow, 'Getting Angry', p.41.

43. Joanna Russ, 'Recent Feminist Utopias', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Marleen Barr (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1981), pp.71-85 (p.81).

44. Joanna Russ, 'The New Misandry', *The Village Voice*, 12 October 1972, p.5.

45. Joanna Russ, 'The New Misandry', p.5.

46. Joanna Russ, personal correspondence with Amanda Boulter, 16 June 1994.

47. Gardner Dozois, *The Mammoth Book of Contemporary SF Masters* (London: Robinson, 1994), p.415. Dozois adds, 'maybe it was just that [Russ] was an uppity woman who wouldn't stay in her place'.

48. Joanna Russ, personal correspondence with Amanda Boulter, 16 June 1994.

49. Marion Zimmer Bradley, 'Responsibilities and Temptations of Women Science Fiction Writers', in *Women Worldwalkers: New Dimensions of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Jane B. Weedman (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1985), pp.25-42 (p.34).

50. Joan Gordon, 'Dancing Gracefully But Cautiously: Ursula Le Guin's Criticism', *Science Fiction Studies*, 17 (1990), 117-119 (p.117).

51. Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (London: Paladin, 1992), pp.7-16 (p.8).

52. Ursula Le Guin, 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', p.8.

53. For a discussion of feminist responses to generic pronouns in the 1970s see Wendy Martyna, 'The Psychology of the Generic Masculine', in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. by Sally McConnel-Ginet, Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp.69-78 (p.76).

54. Le Guin, 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', p.15.

55. Russ's title might also be seen to pun on Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).

56. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.183.

57. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley (London: Pan, 1988), p.295.

58. Meredith Tax, 'Woman and Her Mind: the Story of Everyday Life', in *Radical Feminism*, pp.21-30 (p. 26).

59. Russ, 'Dear Colleague: I am Not an Honorary Male', *Colloquy*, 7 (1974), 40-43 (p.40).

60. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.137.

61. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp*, pp.102-103.

62. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp*, p.103.

63. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp*, pp.105-106.

64. Samuel R. Delany, 'Orders of Chaos: The Science Fiction of Joanna Russ', in *Women Worldwalkers: New Dimensions of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Jane B. Weedman (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1985), pp.95-123 (p.99).

65. Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.164.

66. Russ, 'Dear Colleague', p.42.

67. Russ, 'The Precious Object', *Red Clay Reader*, November 1970, pp.108-115 (p.114).

68. Ellen Morgan cited in Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures*, p.67.

69. June Arnold cited in Ellen Morgan, 'Humanbecoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel', in *Images of Women in Fiction*, pp.183-205 (p.193).

70. June Arnold, *Applesauce* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p.25.

71. June Arnold cited in Ellen Morgan, 'Humanbecoming', p.193. For a sustained study of women's fiction which features feminist androgyny see Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures*.

72. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp.177-178.

73. Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.81.

74. Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures*, p.75.

75. For an analysis of the ways in which women read male authored texts as 'resisting readers' see Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

76. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.xii.

77. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p.4.

78. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.147.

79. For an analysis of the problematic nature of experience as a foundation for feminist politics see Joan Scott, 'Experience', in *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.22-40; and Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism*.

80. This farewell puns on Robin Morgan's feminist manifesto, 'Goodbye to All That' which was first published in 1970 in *Rat* magazine. See 'Goodbye to All That', in *Going Too Far*, pp.121-130.

81. Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.99.

82. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Creseyde*, in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by F.N.Robinson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.385-479 (p.479).

4. Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr: Textual Personae in the Short Fiction of Alice Sheldon

In 1977 the Hugo and Nebula award winning author James Tiptree Jr became a woman. More precisely, 'Tiptree' was revealed to be a female man; the male persona of the female writer Alice Sheldon. For nine years, from 1968 when Tiptree's first story was published in *Analog*, to 1977 when she was exposed in *Locus* magazine, Alice Sheldon had successfully masqueraded as a man.[1] Tiptree had published almost forty stories in science fiction magazines and anthologies during those years, and had not only passed as a man but had been described as the most masculine of all science fiction writers.

The title of Tiptree's first published story, 'The Birth of a Salesman' (1968), is ironically suggestive of the literary construction of this authorial persona.[2] The story presents a comic extrapolation of contemporary commerce, which adopts science-fiction's conventional androcentrism, describing the only woman in the story as 'a kitten in an aqua lab coat' (p.295). The salesman of the title, however, is not only in the text, he is also behind it. Alice Sheldon is the salesman who must sell the masculine authenticity of James Tiptree Jr to the unsuspecting readers.

This authorial deception has made Alice Sheldon a particularly exciting figure for feminist critics of science fiction. Sheldon reported in 1983 that when Tiptree was first revealed to be her pseudonym, feminists claimed her disguise as a victory against what we might describe, following Mary Ellmann, as 'phallic criticism'.[3] Tiptree's reputation demonstrated that there was no inevitable connection between biology and writing, the penis and the pen. By successfully writing as a man, Alice Sheldon, in her own words, had 'shot the stuffing out of male stereotypes of women writers'.[4]

In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist critics have not only concentrated their analyses on those of Tiptree's stories which explicitly address gender, but have also identified a feminist subtext in many of the less overtly political texts. This critical re-evaluation of Tiptree's work is a constructive one for feminist SF, but to the extent that it engages in a retrospective feminization of James Tiptree Jr it is also problematic. Post-1977, Sheldon's pseudonym is too often rendered transparent by critics who aim to identify the authentic voice of the woman writer within the text. This collapse in the distinction between (male)

persona and (female) writer allows contemporary critics to avoid the sex-gender ambivalence in the work of James Tiptree/Alice Sheldon.[5]

Anne Cranny-Francis, for instance, asserts that Tiptree's short-story 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973) might be read as an exemplar of feminist science fiction.[6] This characterization may be valid within the contemporary construction of feminist SF when Tiptree is known to be a woman, but by ignoring the history of Sheldon's pseudonym it avoids issues of context that might make such a statement problematic. At the time of publication, 'The Women Men Don't See' was perceived to have been written by a man and Sheldon was not revealed as the author for a further four years. This in itself does not refute Cranny-Francis's claim, but it does complicate it. By 1973 Tiptree had established a reputation as a powerfully masculine writer, and many of his earlier stories are (at best) seemingly indifferent to feminism. Moreover, when he did write several explicitly feminist stories in the mid-1970s, he avoided much of the censure (at least while he was a man) that feminist women writers, such as Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas, suffered.

The history of Tiptree's career makes him a problematic figure for feminist SF and raises certain (perhaps awkward) questions about the feminist implications of Sheldon's authorial disguise. How should we read Sheldon's transvestite texts? Is her pseudonym a subversive strategy, an incidental pen-name, a refusal of femininity, or an escape from the sexist politics of science-fiction publishing? Does (and did) the pseudonym alienate women and address an implied male reader? Or does Sheldon's assumption of a masculine voice radically destabilize the conventional connections between gender, sex and biology?[7] Ursula Le Guin asks what it means to say that 'Tiptree is Sheldon' or that 'James Tiptree Jr is a woman', and argues that the contradictions in this authorial identity force a re-examination of (feminist) assumptions about 'the woman as writer and the writer as woman'.[8] The knowledge that 'Tiptree is Sheldon' does affect feminist critical practice. But the textual, inter-textual and extra-textual constructions of Sheldon/Tiptree since 1968 disrupt any easy identification of these texts as 'women's writing'.

Michel Foucault argues that critics must reconceive traditional ideas about the author to assert the ways in which the author is constructed by the text he or she produces. He proposes that the author is an 'author-function' which operates as an impediment to the proliferation of meanings in the text. The name of the author acts to limit 'the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition

of fiction'.[9] Foucault locates the author-function in the 'scission' between 'the real writer' and 'the fictitious speaker'.

Tiptree has no material existence, but, as Le Guin argues, it's idiotic to say, "There is no such person as James Tiptree, Jr." There is. The proof [...] is these stories'. Following Foucault we can identify Tiptree as a discursive function of the texts in his name, an 'author-function'. The name of the author generates a series of extra-textual assumptions (about gender and genre among others) which limits the inter-textual field within which these fictions might circulate. When, for instance, the writer is identified as a man or a woman, his or her work is positioned in different critical contexts by both feminist and non-feminist readers.

The different critical responses to Tiptree before and after 1977 imply that it matters less who is speaking than who is presumed to be speaking. If the author is constructed in the productive interactions between the text and the reader, as Foucault suggests, then Sheldon's male disguise exposes the gender expectations implicit in the reading process. Critical responses to Tiptree demonstrate the work of the reader in substantiating the author's expected sexual identity. As critics, we should not reduce the textual artifice, or strip away the discursive ambivalence of the author-function to find a material writer, the 'naked' body of Alice Sheldon hidden beneath the text.[10] Instead, we must question the discursive construction of the author-function as a gendered identification in the 'scission' between the male persona and female writer. In 1980 Sheldon noted 'sf's well-known talent for reading between and beneath the lines'.[11] Only such doubled vision will enable a new exploration of the feminist implications of 'Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr'.[12]

Pseudonyms and Styles: Constructing James Tiptree as a Masculine Writer

In 1975 Tiptree contributed, as one of three male participants, to a written symposium about 'Women in Science Fiction'. Letters were sent between Suzy McKee Charnas, Samuel Delany, Virginia Kidd, Ursula Le Guin, Vonda McIntyre, Raylyn Moore, Joanna Russ, Jeffrey Smith, James Tiptree Jr, Luise White, Kate Wilhelm and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro; and were compiled in the fanzine *Khatru*.[13] Tiptree was subsequently asked to leave the symposium because many of the women objected to his elevation of motherhood

which Vonda McIntyre dismissed as the 'Baboon Theory of Human Behaviour' (p.56). Tiptree's theorization of sexual behaviour is more complex than McIntyre implies, but it is the style of these letters, rather than their argument, which makes them especially interesting. Sheldon's contribution to *Khatru* can be read in terms of the discursive construction of Tiptree's masculinity. Tiptree begins aggressively, dismissing the subject of the symposium: 'First, to hell with talking about women in sf' (p.17). He later addresses Suzy McKee Charnas in the manner of the perfect gentleman: 'But Suzy. Dear lady, your essay on the death-relatedness of women was excruciatingly interesting. But - if you will forgive a stranger - may I seize your arm, gaze into your eyes and plead with you to cast that thought from you with all your power?' (p.102).

As Tiptree had already been requested to leave the symposium this gender play-acting suggests a dangerous humour. It also reveals the way in which Tiptree was constructed by Sheldon as an identifiable character. Pseudonyms are common in science fiction. The 1987 publication *Who's Hugh?* for instance lists over three thousand known pseudonyms in SF. But Tiptree was no mere pen-name, he was an established figure in his own right within the science fiction world of the 1970s. Other than Sheldon's husband nobody knew that Tiptree did not exist. Using techniques that she had learnt whilst working in the CIA in the 1950s, Sheldon established Tiptree with a bank account and a postal address in Virginia (Sheldon herself lived in Washington D.C.).

Earlier in her life Sheldon had used such methods herself to disappear. In 1955 she wrote a two-line letter of resignation from the CIA, 'and ran away from *everybody*':

> I used the techniques the CIA had taught me, and in half a day I had a false name, a false bank account, a false social-security card, and had rented an apartment and moved in. I was somebody else.[14]

She returned to her husband, but not to the CIA. Instead she went back to college, studying for a doctorate in experimental psychology. During her Phd exams, she wrote her first SF stories as James Tiptree Jr. Before Sheldon was revealed to be Tiptree, he had an agent, personal friends, and science fiction colleagues with whom he corresponded; and nobody knew that he was a she.

A woman SF writer using a male name was not in itself either radical or unusual. Other women had used pseudonyms or ambiguously gendered names that assumed masculinity by default. C.L. Moore, Andre Norton, Leigh Brackett and C.J. Cherryh are all

examples. C.L. Moore also wrote in conjunction with her husband Henry Kuttner as Laurence O'Donnell and Lewis Padgett. It was the extent to which Sheldon 'sold' Tiptree that was extraordinary. When he was revealed not to exist Joanna Russ reports that she felt, 'oddly enough, very tearful for a few days. I had been extremely fond of the man I imagined Tiptree to be and grieved at losing the one man who really seemed to understand'.[15] Of her own forced 'outing', Sheldon explains that:

> When my identity was revealed, some people said that it proved that a woman could write like a man. Now in the first place, this assumes that I was *trying* to write like a man, which was the last thing I was trying to do. I was writing like myself, with the exception of deliberate male details here and there.[16]

Sheldon's representation of her Tiptree persona is characteristically elusive. What, for example, would constitute a 'male detail' in fiction? And what is the relation between these deliberately gendered details and the rest of the text? A survey of Tiptree's early stories reveals that what she describes as details, with the implication that they are superfluous, are in fact intrinsic to the text. Of all the James Tiptree stories written before Sheldon's identity was revealed, not one represents a female perspective: all are either narrated by the male protagonist or by a male-identified third-person narrator. Moreover, this masculine perspective is reinforced by the scarcity of female (human) characters in the early fiction.

This in itself though does not characterize Tiptree's science fiction as masculine. Many women writers wrote with a masculine perspective, from Leigh Brackett in the 1940s to Katherine MacLean in the 1970s. Lillian Heldreth argues that Tiptree was presumed to be male because the 'double cover' of a male pen-name and masculine narrator 'overwhelmed [the readers'] better judgement'.[17] But the 'deliberate male details' in the stories were also confirmed and reinforced by Tiptree's extra-narrative self-characterizations. When in *Khatru* he muses about 'the activity known as "flashing" among human males', he comments, 'the motive is an obscure and yet apparently potent one, which seems to have passed me by or be buried deep' (p.104). If we are to believe Sheldon's retrospective account of her pseudonym, such playfulness was not intended to deceive, but it certainly had that effect.

In his now infamous introduction to *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* (1975), the second collection of Tiptree's short stories, Robert Silverberg asserted that 'there is to me

something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing. [...] Tiptree's stories don't bore. They are lean, muscular, supple, relying heavily on dialog broken by bursts of stripped-down exposition'.[18] In this assertion of gender authenticity Silverberg drew a comparison with Hemingway, evoking 'that prevailing masculinity about both of them - that preoccupation with questions of courage, with absolute values, with the mysteries and passions of life and death as revealed by extreme physical tests, by pain and suffering and loss' (p.xv). With a final flourish (and, with hindsight, a precious irony) Silverberg argued that Tiptree was in fact the more masculine of the two because whereas Hemingway 'diluted his reputation as a writer in his later years by indulging in public escapades that made him look foolish and absurd; Tiptree has made no such error' (p.xv). Tiptree's error, we now know, was to be much more devastating to this characterization of the ineluctably masculine writer than Hemingway's excessive, almost parodic, masculinity - it was to be female; 'a medium-sized old lady in jogging shoes.'[19]

But how do we identify the 'prevailing masculinity' of a text? Peter Schwenger in *Phallic Critiques* suggests that, inversely, the very fact that Tiptree was mistaken for a man proves that there is something recognizable as masculine style:

> The fact that Tiptree's style can be labelled 'masculine' in the first place must bring us back, though, to the realization that there *is* such as thing as masculine style. It is not confined to men; it certainly is not one that is written by all men. It is not a style 'natural' to men, but one that is artificially created. Moreover, its nature as a masculine style is not absolute but relative. Because of the elusiveness of both style and sex, it will never be possible to pinpoint objectively the 'masculinity' of a piece of writing.[20]

In spite of such ambiguity, Schwenger does indicate what, in Sheldon's words, might characterize 'male details'. Reading Hemingway and Norman Mailer he identifies in both their styles a mimicry of colloquial speech, a literary evocation of the 'ordinary language of men, having its rough edges, its slang and obscenity, it stance of devil-may-care recklessness, and always a felt undercurrent of action' (p.31).

Such stylistic techniques are also identifiable in Tiptree's (especially early) work, where they are used to express a violently or sexually alienated masculinity. In 'The Man Who Walked Home' (1972), for example, John Delgano's body is represented as a weapon against his total alienation:

> Whatever it was, that place into which he transgressed, it could not support his life there, his violent and violating aberrance, and he, fierce, brave, crazy

> - clenched into total protest, one body-fist of utter repudiation of himself there in that place, forsaken there [...].[21]

This masculine perspective also dominates 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side' (1972) in which a spaceman warns against the overwhelming human desire for alien sex:

> [She] pulsed, waved, everted, contracted, throbbed, evolved unbelievably welcoming, inciting permutations. *Come do it to me, do it, do it here and here and here and now.* [...] Every human male in the room was aching to ram himself into that incredible body. I mean it was *pain.*[22]

When Misogyny is Feminist: Reading James Tiptree as Alice Sheldon

In the early stories, misogyny might be taken as an aspect of Tiptree's masculine style. One of the most problematic of Tiptree's stories for a feminist reader is 'Last Night and Every Night', first published in 1970.[23] In this text a young man 'picks up' newly dead women (under the pretence of helping them) and delivers them to the devil:

> He was not unimaginative. As he waited for the cow to come out, he could appreciate the dark slash he made in the pool of streetlight [...]. Where in hell was the cow? She came out then, hesitating at the lobby entrance of the expensive apartment building. A twat-head, he thought. (p.203)

Fantasizing the gaze of a spectator the young hustler constructs himself as an actor within the *mise-en-scene* of film noir. A 'dark slash' against the light, his role is a double one. He is both hero and villain waiting for the 'dame' in distress, who is unambiguously positioned as the victim. This doubleness is represented in the text through his manipulation of empty romantic signs, in which open declarations of tenderness are echoed by a cruel misogyny: 'He let their eyes meet in the way cows loved. [...] Tenderly he smiled his hatred, wondering where he would hurt her first. Those tits, yes, and then a boot up, sweet ...' (p.205).

The misogyny is vitriolic and difficult for a feminist/woman reader. But like the dystopian visions of other feminist writers, such as Suzy McKee Charnas or Sally Miller Gearhart, Tiptree's representation of an exaggerated hatred, especially as the undercurrent of romantic discourse, draws attention to the everyday misogyny of 'ordinary' society.[24] Commenting in *Khatru* on Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World*, Tiptree observed that

'the opening scenes of [her] novel struck me as all too lifelike. In fact, I've seen it alive' (p.61). The textual excess of Tiptree's story forces the reader to take up either a misogynistic reading position (identifying with the hustler) or a proto-feminist one (not necessarily identifying with the woman-as-victim but identifying against the misogyny of the protagonist). The text does not offer a feminist reading position in that (unlike Charnas's or Gearhart's novels) it offers no representations of women which challenge the misogyny either in the text, or in society.

However, this is where reading Tiptree as a disguised woman writer potentially influences our interpretation. For a reader approaching this as a female authored text an alternative and feminist reading position becomes possible. This is not to suggest that there could be a direct access through the text to Alice Sheldon, but rather that the authorial voice can no longer be interpreted as univocally male. The hiatus between the implied author (Tiptree) and the empirical author (Sheldon) represents a gender slippage, a trans-sexual space. To borrow Umberto Eco's construction, this space represents the 'Author on the Threshold' (here both a textual and a sexual threshold), who now signifies the possibilities of, and the margin for, feminist anger.[25]

The knowledge that Tiptree is a woman writer affects our reading of the masculine writing style, alerting us to possibly subversive contradictions and ironies in the early stories. Even when stories such as 'I'm Too Big But I Love To Play' (1970) evoke a sexually explicit objectification of women this can, when read with hindsight, also reveal a feminist irony.[26] In 'I'm Too Big' an enormous alien being occupies different human bodies in order to experience the condensed pleasures of human physicality. Although the alien takes on the bodies of both men and women the narrative is always mediated through a male perspective. When it assumes the body of an older woman the reader's perspective is shifted accordingly to identify with her lover, for whom she represents 'the retirement plan' (p.275):

> Christ but he was tired! Whacked out ... young cunt, old cunt, soft, sinewy, bouncy, bony, wriggly, lumpy, slimy, lathery, leathery cunt squeaking shrieking growling - all of them after him, his furry arms, his golden masculinity, his poor old never-failing poker - Oh Ches I've never oh Ches it's so it's oh Ches oh Darling darling darlingdarlingdarling. (p.274)

The sexual disgust which reduces women to 'cunt', desperate for the attentions of the male stud, alienates the woman reader. As Judith Fetterley argues in *The Resisting*

Reader women must 'identify with a male point of view, and [...] accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny'. [27] We cannot interpret this passage in the same way in which we were able to approach the narrator's cat-calling and sexual suggestions in Russ's *The Two of Them*, as a taking up of a male position, or a 'trying on' of language that is dangerous and daring. For here the feminist/woman reader is not 'in' on the joke (of male impersonation) but is forced to identify against herself.

However, Tiptree's writing is not without irony. In 'I'm Too Big' the alien disguise soon exposes the folly of male narcissism. As Ches and the alien/woman make love the alien begins to resume its original form, 'she' tells him she is about to explode, he, taking it as a compliment, contemplates life as a sex guru. Too late he sees the original woman, whose shape the alien has assumed, standing outside the window: 'The nebulous extension which had been compressed into a mimic of the woman [...] reverted to its original state. A monstrous local discontinuity [...] bloomed into the thermosphere from the Majorca cliffs' (p.276). The 'monstrous discontinuity' caused by this alien metamorphosis reflects the unnatural slippages in this text between woman/man/alien, and ultimately between male persona and female author. When Ches recognizes the woman outside the window as his original lover there is a narrative implication that appearances can be deceptive. Ches's recognition is too late, his 'poor old never-failing poker', the sign of his 'golden masculinity', is blasted to insignificance by the explosion of the alien masquerade. The appearance of the woman outside the window signals the end of this glorified phallic power, just as the appearance of the woman (Sheldon) 'outside' the text signals the glee in this comic representation of the ultimate female orgasm.

'How to Read the Name': Is James Tiptree a Woman Writer?

Reading in hindsight then, the figure of the woman on the edges of the text reorganizes the reader's perspective, so that alternative feminist readings become possible. Seemingly misogynistic texts now appear ironically feminist. These radically different readings depend not only on the political inclination of the reader, but more specifically on the gendered expectations they bring to the text. If we know that Tiptree is Sheldon we are prompted to read beyond the apparent textual androcentricism. As Joanna Russ argues in '*Amor Vincit*

Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction' a woman writer 'does not, obviously, have the same stake in the myth [of male superiority] as male authors may have'.[28] Following Russ, can we assume that a woman has a different stake in writing like a man?[29] Nelly Furman suggests that she has, 'for what is a vapid expression in a man's world becomes under a woman's pen a wilful transgression and a cause for scandal.'[30]

If a woman writer transgresses what Furman terms the 'gender-marked lexicons' to write as a man, this is a potentially radical act. But if a woman writer is not known to be female, and her writing is accepted as that of a man's, can we still claim this as feminist? Can we, in retrospect, claim Tiptree's texts as examples of 'women's writing'? And if we can (because, after all, they were written by a woman) does this challenge the construction of women's writing itself, as a critical category? In *The Female Imagination*, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that there is an identifiable female literary tradition. She asserts that a woman 'can imitate men in her writing, or strive for an impersonality beyond sex, but finally she must write as a woman: what other way is there?'[31]

Spacks's questioning constitutes something of a *mise-en-abyme*, for what does it mean for a woman to write as a woman? As Peggy Kamuf points out, the repetition is potentially infinite, '... a woman writing as a woman writing as a ...', never finding an original or final identity.[32] We cannot assume an essential connection between women and writing just as we cannot assume an essential nature of Woman. To escape this tautology, Nelly Furman later argues that feminist critics should not consider whether or not a text is written by a woman but 'how it lends itself to be read from a feminist perspective'.[33] But when reading Tiptree's early stories, it is precisely the knowledge that they are written by a woman that allows, or reveals, a feminist subtext. A 'feminist perspective' is grounded in the belief, to paraphrase Christine Di Stefano's phrase, that sexual difference is a difference that makes a difference and this must surely include the (assumed) sexual identity of the writer.[34]

To illustrate this point we need only consider the responses Tiptree prompted in *Khatru*. I have already suggested how Tiptree's letters established his masculine identity, but this does not acknowledge the work of the other participants in (unwittingly) confirming that gender status. Responding to Tiptree's suggestion that motherhood is 'leadership without aggression', Luise White quips '"leadership without aggression" - now that's somebody's *son* speaking' (p.84). Similarly Joanna Russ comments, 'Tip says things

which are silly to me [...]. The gulf of experience! [...] Tip's question is, unavoidably, master-talk not servant-talk, however sensitive' (p.100). These responses cannot be dismissed as wrong: White and Russ are not simply misreading Tiptree's letters. Rather their assumptions about Tiptree's masculinity consistently (mis)inform their reading practice. The feminist participants are simply more interested in the views of the other women.

Perhaps it was a recognition of the way in which the implied male gender of the author affected reading practices (and especially those of women) which prompted Alice Sheldon to create a female pseudonym in 1974. Speaking of her second pseudonym, Sheldon recalls that she 'felt the need to say some things impossible to a male persona'.[35] The stories by Raccoona Sheldon (hereafter Raccoona) do not differ in tone or style from those written by Tiptree. Where there are differences however is in their representations of women. Alice Sheldon wrote several feminist stories between 1973 and 1977 which explicitly address gender politics. Of these, 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973), 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1974) and 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (1976) are all by Tiptree; 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!' (1976) and 'The Screwfly Solution' (1977) by Raccoona Sheldon. Both stories by Raccoona include a female perspective, although in both texts it is interrupted and partial. Unlike any of the later Tiptree stories, they also describe sexual violence (rape and murder) against women.[36]

That, post-1970, Sheldon did not represent such violence directly in Tiptree's stories might indicate an authorial awareness that his position as a man, 'however sensitive', identified him as a potential perpetrator rather than a potential victim. This identification is illustrated in *Khatru* when Tiptree represents himself as a 'natural lynchee' and is summarily corrected (p.103). When he questions the effectiveness of the Women's Liberation Movement by asking, pessimistically 'Are women doomed? [..] Will the hand that holds the club really lay it down?' he is attacked by another participant (p.22). Interestingly, Samuel Delany, rather than any of the women contributors, demands, 'Who are you threatening?' (p.50).

In 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!' Raccoona also represents anti-feminist women, drawing attention to the ways in which women participate in gender oppression.[37] The radical feminism of this story's future, in which all women are

sisters, is contrasted in the narrative by the intrusive female voices of the present who despise 'women's-lib freaks' (p.164):

> She was one of *them*, one of those bra-burners [...]. What I say is, a girl like that is asking for it. Just asking for whatever she gets. I don't care what you say, there are certain rules. I have no sympathy, no sympathy at all. (p.154)

Identifying women's complicity in maintaining a patriarchal system would be a controversial contribution to male feminism. As a woman writer, Raccoona Sheldon is able to demonstrate that being female does not guarantee a progressive politics any more than being male precludes one.

If writing as a woman enabled Sheldon to say things (about women) that she could not say as a man, this would imply that the designated sexual identity of the author does influence the feminist possibilities of a text. At issue is not whether or not Sheldon writes as a man or a woman, for, as Kamuf would argue, when Sheldon writes as Tiptree this is no more of an imitation (of gender) than when she writes as Raccoona. In Kamuf's terms both pseudonyms are equally artificial and equally true. What is at stake is the way in which the (implied) sexual identity of the author inflects the reader's (re)construction of the text.

Sarah Lefanu draws attention to this process when she comments that when reading Tiptree, 'the question of the writer's gender becomes enormously significant, much more significant to me than I would like to admit'.[38] Lefanu presents her interest in Tiptree/Sheldon's sexual identity as if it were somehow illicit, a naughty peeking which might undermine her characterization of feminist SF as a mode which potentially subverts the conventional categories of sex and gender. But Lefanu's confession does not contradict her project. These texts are written from and read within a context in which gender conformity and biological sex matter, and obscuring their material effects will not hasten their transformation.

The (apparent) sex of an author potentially influences publishers' responses as well as the feminist expectations of feminist readers. Writing science fiction as a woman, Alice Sheldon experienced publication difficulties that Tiptree did not. Describing James Tiptree's entrance into science fiction, Harry Harrison remembers the first story he read:

> Here was a story by a professional, a man who knew how to interest me, entertain me, and tell me something about the world and mankind's affairs at the same time. I wrote at once and was pleased to hear, some years later,

> that the word from me arrived just one day before a check from John W. Campbell. Now *that* is the way to start a career in science fiction.[39]

Raccoona Sheldon's success was not quite so dramatic. Her first stories were not accepted until they were accompanied by a testimonial from Tiptree himself, which in turn provoked speculation that Raccoona might be his daughter, or alternatively his own pseudonym.[40] Ironically, the dissolution of the female pseudonym into the male is repeated by contemporary feminist critics. Anne Cranny-Francis and Marleen Barr both discuss 'The Screwfly Solution' as by James Tiptree. Lillian Heldreth credits Raccoona, but only in the notes as a pseudonym of Tiptree.[41]

Lefanu's personal response to the recognition that Tiptree is Sheldon signals the way in which, for a woman reader, this knowledge enables a new relationship to the texts. bell hooks makes the simple but important point that 'styles of language pointedly identify specific audiences both as subjects of the text and as that audience one addresses most intimately'.[42] Tiptree's 'style of language', the 'double cover' of masculine narrator/protagonist and pen-name, as well as the fact that he wrote mainly short-stories for publication in magazines, identifies his audience with the predominantly young, male readership of that genre.[43]

When Tiptree was revealed to be Sheldon some men, who perhaps presumed themselves to be among his most intimate audience, reacted angrily. Sheldon contended that 'vulnerable males decided that "Tiptree" had been much overrated. They sullenly retired to practice patronizing smiles'.[44] Whereas Tiptree's style was Hemingwayesque in 1975, by 1979 it had become, in the words of Richard Cowper, 'pinchbeck prose', a stylistic sham reflecting a counterfeit masculinity. The gendered (even misogynist) analogy Cowper draws in his review of Tiptree's first novel, *Up the Walls of the World* (1978), illustrates the backlash against Sheldon's fraudulent assumption of masculinity. He concludes, 'I believe the book to be an overlong tissue of sf clichés [...]. She follows the popular recipe as sedulously as any young bride baking her first cake from a packet of "Granny Gopher's Analog Cake Mix"'.[45]

Reading Tiptree in retrospect presents dangers for feminist critics. Knowing that Tiptree is a woman, or as Le Guin called Sheldon 'a beautiful-Jill-in-the-box', allows a female reader to imagine that beneath the male facade women are the intended audience.[46] Nancy Steffen-Fluhr, for example, comments that the Tiptree persona allowed Sheldon to

'express and explore the multiple dimensions of femininity' so that 'although most of her protagonists are nominally male, her stories are fundamentally about women'.[47] This reassertion of the woman writer within the texts involves a necessary distortion of Sheldon's masculine disguise, for although Tiptree's stories explore feminine gender roles, they are not fundamentally about women.

It is more convincing to argue that Tiptree's stories address and critique masculinity. Texts which explicitly expose the alienating effects of a culturally sanctioned masculinity include 'Fault' (1968), 'Your Haploid Heart' (1969), 'Amberjack' (1972), 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973), 'Her Smoke Rose Up Forever' (1975) and 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (1976). That Sheldon's Tiptree persona engaged a masculine style, a masculine perspective, and (arguably) a masculine reader cannot be ignored. Feminist critics must address this textual transvestitism, or what Judith Butler has termed 'cross-writing', to explore the questions it raises about the discursive construction of identities:[48]

> At issue is how to read the name as a site of identification, a site where the dynamic of identification is at play, and to read the name as an occasion for the retheorization of cross-identification or, rather, the crossing that is, it seems, at work in every identificatory practice.[49]

Feminist critics must read the name of Tiptree as precisely a site where the dynamic of identification is at play. By 1973 Tiptree was writing explicitly feminist stories in which as a man he explored the alienation of and between the sexes. In retrospect, the cross-identification of the author suggests new and more complex readings of those gendered relationships and the ways in which they were constructed. Before such an explicit focus on gender was prominent in Tiptree's stories, however, several texts represented the imitative practices or 'crossings' of gender.

Alien Identifications: Tiptree's Exploration of Performative Identities

Tiptree's stories consistently feature extra-terrestrials as beings who represent not only the other to the human, but also the personal and collective alienation (between women and men, black and white, young and old) within humanity as a species.[50] Tiptree's representation of the alien as an (imitation) human, which was used to comic effect in 'I'm

Too Big', reconfigures human alienation, as it also exposes the imitative structures of identity.

The little known and extraordinary short story 'A Day Like Any Other', published in Britain in 1973, represents a series of alien transformations in which an entity we never see becomes first a man, then a hamster, a housewife, child and scientist.[51] Only one page in length, the story alternates stylistically between poetry and prose as the tone becomes progressively ironic, funny, maniacal and apocalyptic in response to these alien crossings. The prose paragraphs are framed and interrupted by italicized lines of verse, which are in turn interrupted and fractured by 'garble':

> *Man is a product, like so much else, of the play of natural* garble
> He decided to be a man today. He dressed in his executive doublestripe carefully with medallion: Gloves not to match boots. Masterfully in Sphinx to offisolarium.

The italicized first line indicates that this 'beginning' is itself only an interruption: not an origin but a continuation of another discourse. The opening statement, like the evolutionary rhetoric it espouses, is deceptive. Its promise of origins (of text and man) is curtailed by 'garble' which replaces the original ('natural') word, and places man as a product of a cacophony of cultural discourses. The pronoun 'he' is detached from its 'natural' association with man and the 'decision to be' is played out performatively as a dressing up game.

As a man, this (alien) male is 'in Sphinx', inscrutable, in disguise. The Sphinx, as both female and animal, represents the others which must be excluded to ensure the gender authenticity of this performance. It signals the construction of the masculine by simultaneously suggesting that which masculinity is defined against. As the riddle of the Sphinx confuses the identity of 'man', so the symbolic excess of this image troubles the stability of its generic (masculine) answer. Each role that the alien assumes is disturbed by this excess. As a hamster, he 'ran 15,924 revolutions of his 45cm exercise wheel. About 24 miles; too much for a male hamster. Tired, he debated the anomaly'. This alien is also too big to play and always exceeds the natural possibilities of the forms he assumes.

As a housewife, the tedium of repetition is resolved in murder, 'Windex on the windows, Soilex on the floors, Ovenex on the oven, in the evening he used Husbandex on the husband'. This sloganistic humour, as well as the elliptical succinctness and generic

ambiguity of the narrative, is evocative of Joanna Russ's writing. The discontinuities between each section, as words interrupt and collapse upon one another, and the frantic transformations in tone, voice and generic codes, make this, like *The Female Man*, a very difficult story to read. The reader must struggle to organize the competing conventions of comic strip anti-syntax ('zap-whirling hey Hey Hey [...] ecstasy-strobe FREEZE!') and poetic syntactical inversion ('Ill fares the land') into a comprehensible narrative.[52] The exploration of the identificatory role of different genres and styles is developed in later stories as Sheldon addresses the gender performance of her own cross-writing practice.

The much longer story, 'All the Kinds of Yes' (1972) explores identity in similar terms and with exaggerated comic effect.[53] A visiting alien, who assumes the body of a 1930s style romantic hero, is adopted by a group of humans. After a free-love playfulness, the alien is persuaded to unpack his luggage in order to discover his real identity. When he does so he finds that he is pregnant, and needs the Earth (which is regarded by the entire universe as totally expendable) as a placenta for his hungry offspring.

This unexpected, indeed alien, sex-change alters the terms of the narration in comic and stereotypical ways. As if trying out new roles, 'tears welled into the alien's eyes' (p.17) and when the humans declare that they cannot adjust to the alien being female, he/she/it replies, 'I - it's not - oh, it's all so *complicated*' (p.19). Ironically then, in explaining that it is beyond gender-as-we-know-it, the alien mimics a feminine breathlessness and discursive reticence, performing within gender structures just for the fun of it. As the pronouns shift from he to it to she and back again we are left uncertain, not only about gender, but, as John Clute points out, about which characters exactly *are* human.[54] This comic uncertainty cannot be read too seriously, but it demonstrates the explicit connections being made in Tiptree's work between gender identity and styles of language. In the later, explicitly feminist stories, 'The Women Men Don't See' and 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', this exploration assumes a self-consciousness which attests to Sheldon's play upon the ambiguity in her authorial identity.

Discursive Discrepancies: Male Alienation in 'The Women Men Don't See'

'The Women Men Don't See' was recommended for a Nebula award in 1974, but was withdrawn by the author, who claimed that he was making way for younger writers.[55]

Ursula Le Guin later suggested that Sheldon was worried that the story would elicit as many votes for its male feminism as for its narrative.[56] But not all contemporary critics were as certain that this text was an example of feminist science fiction. In *Khatru*, Luise White asserted that, 'James Tiptree in "The Women Men Don't See" isn't writing feminist science fiction [...], he's trying very hard to write topical science fiction, to keep up with the times, and tripping over 1970' (p.42). White's suspicions were not only about Tiptree's gender politics. His involvement in the CIA also troubled her. Placing each letter of each word under erasure, she wrote, '[there] may be an ex-CIA person in our midst' (p.121).

This veiled attack signals that gender and styles of writing are not the only identificatory practices at issue in the construction of Tiptree's Hemingwayesque masculinity. A biography which included service in the Army and the CIA also confirmed many conservative expectations of masculine achievement. Robert Silverberg suggested that 'The Women Men Don't See' revealed Tiptree's 'obviously first-hand acquaintance' with 'bureaucrats', 'hunters and fishermen' and so supported the notion that 'in "real" life' the author was a male government agent.[57]

Silverberg recognized 'The Women Men Don't See' as 'a profoundly feminist story told in an entirely masculine manner' but did not acknowledge the paradox implicit in that formulation.[58] In retrospect, it is a paradox which suffuses Tiptree's work as the masculine style is persistently destabilized by the feminist subtext. 'The Women Men Don't See' is narrated by Don Fenton who, as successive critics have observed, is the archetypal hard boiled narrator of genre fiction. He speaks with all the bravado that Schwenger characterized as masculine. His narrative is present tense and colloquial, evoking sexist and racist assumptions through 'slang and obscenity'. Fenton draws upon the conservative conventions of genre fiction and gender inequality to generate (genre-ate) an ultra-masculine self-representation. But as Anne Cranny-Francis observes, this 'self-representation in terms of stereotype' is challenged by the narrative resolution of his own text.[59] In spite of the 'felt undercurrent of action' in his narrative style, Fenton is not the agency within this text. He is not the 'I' that does, but the 'eye' that sees.

Fenton is a passenger on a light-aircraft which crash lands on a sand bar in the Quintana Roo. The other passengers are Ruth Parsons and her daughter Althea whom Fenton describes as 'small, plain and neutral-colored' women, the women men don't see (p.122). When Fenton first describes them this invisibility is confirmed: 'I come out of the

can and lurch into her seat, saying "Sorry," at a double female blur. [...] I continue down the aisle, registering nothing. Zero. I never would have looked at them or thought of them again' (p.121). Fenton mimics the stereotypical discourses of a self-contained, cynical masculinity, but in his first utterances, he represents his own loss of control: he uses the can; lurches into a seat; apologizes; is ignored, and registers nothing. In this initial conflation of the 'I' that speaks and the 'eye' that sees, Fenton inscribes an ambivalence about his own position as narrator. The reader is alerted to the significance of these 'nothing' women only through Fenton's anticipation of his forced second look.

After the crash, Don and Ruth leave the plane to find water. Isolated in the mangrove swamp, Don dislocates his knee by stumbling blindly towards the source of a powerful and unexplained light. The discrepancy between his masculine persona and his femininized physical passivity is highlighted by the description of his injured leg as, 'a giant misplaced erection bulging out of [his] shorts' (p.133). Rather than denoting virility this erection is disabling, a caricature of masculinity which, like the generic stereotypes that construct Fenton's world, alienates him from the action in his own narrative.

Ruth Parsons, in contrast, is 'humming like a high wire' because unlike Fenton, she has realized that the lights signal an alien technology (p.136). When the aliens re-appear we discover (with Don) that Mrs. Parsons has salvaged a piece of their equipment with which she intends to bargain for a passage to their world for herself and her (potentially pregnant) daughter. Ruth's negotiation with the alien creatures reverses what Silverberg terms 'the ancient s-f cliché - Earth woman carried off by flying saucer folk' which is itself a reworking of the Western cliché - white woman carried off by Indian folk.[60] Ruth's reversal of these terms is misunderstood by Fenton, who only draws upon the racist and sexist conventions of genre fiction. He attempts to rescue the vulnerable female from the monstrous alien invaders:

> 'Ruth!' My voice cracks. 'Ruth get over here behind me!' [...]
> 'RUTH!'
> At this moment the nearest white monster whips into a great S-curve and sails right onto the bank at her, eight feet of snowy rippling horror.
> And I shoot Ruth.
> I don't know that for a minute. (p.143)

Ruth refuses to conform to the position ascribed to her by patriarchy, she refuses to 'get behind' the man. This act of refusal symbolically confirms Ruth's alien-ness within Don's

world. She is not where his narrative places her (behind him), she has slipped away from the terms of his representation - making her literally alien. As Anne Cranny-Francis observes, her alienation is graphically represented when Don shoots her in his efforts to destroy the alien threat.

Ruth slips away from the expected role which Don affords her, but neither Don nor Ruth fit comfortably into the gendered positions available in the narrative. The difference between Don's self-representation and his physical incapability marks a comic discrepancy that might hint at an authorial joke. The discrepancy between Tiptree's masculine self-construction and Sheldon's female body makes him, like Don, 'the least threatening of men' (p.127). But there is no direct authorial voice in this text, and Fenton's reiteration of a hard-boiled masculinity does not imply that he speaks for Tiptree. Tiptree can as easily be aligned with Ruth, whose pessimistic construction of the Women's Liberation Movement he repeats as his own in *Khatru*.

The ambivalence in the relationship between Ruth and Don is highlighted when they must share a make-shift bed. Their heterosexual positioning assumes a gender coded behaviour which Ruth continually evades: 'We lie there like two fish on a plate [...]. It is absolutely the most intimately awkward moment I've had in years' (p.131). Don's initial reaction is violent. Unable to abide Ruth's proximity, 'the defiance of her little rump eight inches from [his] fly', he means to 'introduce [him]self' (p.131). But he cannot live up to the expectations of the masculine position he espouses as his own in the narrative. As for Ruth, she has 'judged things to a nicety', already 'imperceptibly inching away', she is never quite where Don (or the reader) presumes (p.131).

Ruth's 'obtrusive recessiveness' infuriates Fenton, but it also 'brings a chuckle to [his] throat' enabling him to relax and sleep (p.131). This recessiveness also serves as a metaphor for Sheldon's role in this text. Like the aliens, whose late arrival, as Cranny-Francis points out, confirms the text as science fiction, and provides a generic lens through which the previous text is refracted, so the revelation that Tiptree is Sheldon establishes the gendered lens through which we read this textual feminism.

Carolyn Brown contends that a woman writer adopting a masculinist position can effectively deconstruct the terms of that identity. She argues that masculinities are 'produced in and by different discourses of *representation*'. These discourses become potentially subversive when they are coopted by a woman who 'speak[s] with [their] codes

but as a biological female [...] run[s] rings around [their] assumptions and prejudices'.[61] This mimicking of masculinity, Brown suggests, severs gender from sex and the body and isolates it as a cultural and not a natural practice. But this potential for gender subversion is nevertheless resolutely grounded within an absolute biology. Masculine discourse becomes radical when voiced by a biological female because this constitutes a disruption of gender propriety, or to echo Judith Butler, a dangerous crossing. But this transvestite speech must always acknowledge the biological binary of male/female to establish its own transgression. In the terms of Brown's argument, it is only the fact of Tiptree's femaleness that would enable a progressive reconstruction of masculinity.

In 'The Women Men Don't See', however, the 'obtrusive recessiveness' of Sheldon's masquerade complicates such an easy identification of sex, as Tiptree also recedes from view. Fenton, as a biological male within the text, alone voices this reactionary masculinity. But even he does not occupy the truly masculine position his narration constructs. His age, his weakness and his disability all contradict and defy the terms in which he represents his own masculine authenticity. This story demonstrates that this imitative masculinity is as artificial from the mouth of a biological male as it is from that of a female. It suggests that it is not only sexual division that debars the subject from taking up an idealized masculinity. The differences in age, race and class among others, also inflect the individual's relations to, and in, patriarchal culture.[62]

At the end of his narrative Don is sitting alone trying to make sense of the Parsons's trip to the stars:

> With the third margarita I try to make a joke about alienated women, but my heart's not in it. [...] Two human women, one of them possibly pregnant, have departed for, I guess, the stars; and the fabric of society will never show a ripple. [...] *We survive by ones and twos in the chinks of your world machine ... I'm used to aliens.* ... She'd meant every word. Insane. How could a woman choose to live among unknown monsters, to say good-bye to her home, her world?
>
> As the margaritas take hold, the whole mad scenario melts down to the image of those two small shapes sitting side by side in the receding alien glare.
>
> Two of our opossums are missing. (p.148)

The Parsons's identification with the aliens is profoundly shocking for Fenton. It seems to confirm that, as Ruth implies, men and women are an entirely different species, their alienation from each other complete. But the style of Fenton's recollection suggests how

this opposition may not be so absolute. The feminist subtext of 'The Women Men Don't See' surfaces in the final line of this text as part of Fenton's own discourse. As he ponders Ruth's departure Don incorporates her words into his text. He first quotes her, textually indicated by the use of italics, and then ultimately assumes her discourse as his own: 'Two of our opossums are missing.'

The women's departure has confirmed their status as alien, but it has also reverberated in Fenton's narrative to engender the recognition that he too is an alienated subject: alienated from the stereotypical masculine role he constructs in the story, and alienated from a society which he presumed to know. The division between the sexes, which would appear insurmountable at the end of this text when Ruth and Althea leave for the stars rather than exist 'in the chinks of the [men's] world machine' (p.140), is reconfigured by an exploration of alienation in the text. There is not one world but many, and patriarchy's grand narrative is threatened by its recognition of this diversity. Ruth lives in the chinks of Don's world machine but her world is expanding and becoming more visible. He recognizes that 'the world is moving [her] way' (p.138). Together, women are emerging from those chinks and are forcing open the gaps within patriarchal ideology. Don's final words do not reiterate the narratives of a masculinist pulp fiction, but the feminist reflections of Ruth Parsons. In this denouement the proto-feminist implications of the story force their way into Don's narrative in the same way that, on seeing Ruth's 'friends', the word A-L-I-E-N-S spelt itself in his unwilling head.

Fenton's alienation also reverberates through the text. He, like Ruth, is middle-aged and single. He is also isolated from his family, paranoid, and unable to 'see' beyond stereotypes that can no longer be sustained. Fenton's final isolation is confirmed by Tiptree in *Khatru*, when he says, 'I've changed my mind, by the way: Of course it is not the women who are aliens. Men are' (p.61). Their shared alienation suggests that Don and Ruth are not so much opposites as reflections, mutually isolated within patriarchy. In their similarity they evoke the gender doubling in Kate Wilhelm's story 'The Encounter' (1971) in which the protagonist, Randolph Crane, is trapped in a bus shelter with an unknown woman who is 'as nondescript as her clothing'.[63] Her conversation increasingly anticipates his own and he becomes strangely disconcerted. Eventually they argue about their different perceptions of a young woman:

'Describe her to me,' the woman said. [...]

> Crane said, 'The broad was in her late twenties, or possibly thirties -'
> 'Eighteen to twenty.'
> 'She had a pound of make-up on, nails like a cat.'
> 'Fake nails, chapped hands, calluses. Ten-cent store make-up.'
> 'She had expensive perfume, and a beaver coat. I think beaver.'
> She laughed gently. 'Drugstore spray cologne. Macy's Basement fake fur.'
> (pp.89-90)

Crane, like Fenton, does not see these women. He sees only stereotypes drawn from the misogynist conventions of genre fiction. The contrasting perspectives of this man and woman, like those of Don and Ruth, represent the alienation between the sexes. However, in Wilhelm's story this gendered alienation is figurative. Crane and the woman represent a schizophrenic splitting, a self-alienation that is transformed through dialogue. Crane enters the shelter alone, but it is only the woman who leaves, as the masculinist perspective gives way to a proto-feminist one.

The ambivalence in this transvestite performance might illustrate Teresa de Lauretis's exposition of the conceptual paradox of 'sexual difference' which must recognize that 'women are, or want, something different from men' at the same time as it must acknowledge that 'women are, or want, the same as men'.[64] In *Khatru*, Sheldon, passing as Tiptree, debated whether 'a handful of genes on one chromosome has any identifiable effects on [our] way of being human' (p.18). As a biological female posing as a biological male (in print) Sheldon's position already complicated her questioning. Sexual difference, that is for de Lauretis also 'indifference' (or no difference), is the explicit focus of the last major story Tiptree published as a man, 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (1976).[65]

Sexual (In)Difference: Narrative Dialogue between James Tiptree's 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' and Raccoona Sheldon's 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!'

The ambivalence of sexual (in)difference troubles the narrative of 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', which is further problematized by its textual dialogue with Raccoona Sheldon's, 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!'. These two stories, one authored by the male pseudonym, one by the female, were published together in *Aurora: Beyond Equality, Tales of the Ultimate Sexual Revolution*, a contextual coincidence that

signals their relationship. Both stories describe a female separatist utopia, but their differently gendered authorial perspectives complicate their interaction.

The narrative of 'Houston' echoes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopia *Herland* (1915).[66] As in that story, three men, expressing different masculinities, accidentally discover an all-female world. The three men in 'Houston' do not stumble into a different country, but into a different time: returning from a mission to the sun they are propelled three hundred years into the future by a solar flare. Major Davis, an evangelical patriarch, Bud Geirr, a macho stud, and Doc Lorimer, the mission's scientist, are rescued by the spaceship *Gloria* and its crew of four women and a 'boy'. But there Tiptree's and Gilman's narratives diverge. Whereas Gilman's female community welcomed the reintroduction of men, albeit cautiously, Tiptree allows no such re-integration. In his text, the men are humanely put to sleep because the women 'have no facilities for people with [their] emotional problems' (p.221).

The narratorial perspective of 'Houston', like that of 'The Women Men Don't See', is directed through the eyes of the male protagonist. Doc Lorimer is the most sympathetic of the astronauts, and himself a reader of science fiction (he compares this future world unfavourably to the fictions of his past). As a result of a (man-made) pandemic that affected human fertility, no male babies have been born in the preceding centuries. Reproduction of the species is effected by cloning the eleven thousand genotypes that survived the wars of the 'crazies', producing a population of about two million people, all women. The 'boy' on the ship is in fact an androgyne (Andy), a woman, 'in biological disguise'.[67]

In 'Faces' the nameless female protagonist occupies two worlds simultaneously: the twentieth century city of Chicago and an all female future utopia which is evocative of the society in 'Houston'. In this utopia, the protagonist is a courier, walking across America delivering messages for her sisters. She is completely without fear, for there are 'no dangers left at all, in the whole free wide world' (p.150). Unlike 'Houston', 'Faces' is only partially narrated from the protagonist's point of view. The heroine's utopic vision is repeatedly interrupted by other voices from the twentieth-century world she denies. These narrative intrusions effectively distort the textual perspective, undermining the authority of the protagonist's voice, and denying her the narrative focus that Lorimer projects in 'Houston'.

As the text oscillates between the competing realities of present and future, it foregrounds the reader's responsibility for determining the truth. The narrative offers no mediation between these radically discontinuous worlds. Either we judge the heroine insane (the other voices suggest that she has escaped from hospital where she was receiving ECT to help her adjust to her role as wife and mother) or we assume, as Sheldon preferred to, that she has entered a parallel reality, or that her mind has been displaced in time.[68] The text itself remains ambiguous, fantastical in Todorov's terms, as these alternatives resist closure and the shadow of hesitation persists.[69] Unlike Lorimer who 'reads' the future world as science fiction made real, this woman 'writes' her utopia onto the present. The narrative mirroring of the protagonists' roles is ironic. They are both aliens trapped within the wrong narrative/world. Lorimer dies in the separatist utopia this heroine dreams of, while she is killed by the heterosexual world for which he is so nostalgic.

The power of the courier's utopian vision, whether we deem it fantasy or reality, is in its enactment of a feminist rebellion, a refusal even unto death to respect or accept the patriarchal interpretation of the world. The message she delivers to us is of the possibilities of resistance. The construction of madness as rebellion, as an expression of rage, is, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, a frequent and powerful one in nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's literature.[70] In women's science fiction, representations of female insanity (from Judith Merril's 'That Only a Mother' (1948), in which a mother refuses to recognize her baby's malformation through nuclear radiation, to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), in which Connie Ramos murders the doctors who threaten the utopia she 'visits') similarly evoke a denial of patriarchal reality.[71]

Piercy's text differs from Raccoona's in its explicit identification of a relationship between utopian vision and political action. Readers of *Woman on the Edge of Time* are urged to engage actively with the present to ensure the utopian possibilities of the future. In Raccoona's text the relationship between vision and action is complexly pessimistic. The heroine is raped and murdered by the very dangers her utopian imagination denies. Her feminist fantasy creates a progressive alternative to her suburban suffocation only by instating a fixed vision which can neither acknowledge nor anticipate the violence of patriarchy.

This premature assumption of a single-sexed utopia is reflected in 'Houston"s abortive sexual reconciliation. 'Houston' also ostensibly reinforces a pessimistic sexual

determinism, in which the differences between men and women preclude their co-existence. But such an essentialist interpretation does not address the ways in which Tiptree, both in the text and in his own persona, shows gender to be radically discontinuous from the sexed body. 'Houston' does not represent gender as either biologically essentialist or culturally determined. Instead it complicates this either/or model of the nature/nurture debate by focusing upon the 'investment' that sustains the sex-gender system.[72]

The title of Tiptree's narrative, 'Houston, Houston Do You Read?', is, in Veronica Hollinger's words, both a question and a warning to patriarchy.[73] But it is also a question and a warning to feminism. For although Lorimer is repeatedly shown to occupy a dialectical role between male and female, he persistently refuses to acknowledge his potential androgyny. He continues to strive for an ultra-masculinity which intellectually he knows to be a destructive fiction. Raccoona's representation of women's misogyny in 'Faces', and Tiptree's representation of Lorimer's resistance to a gender-free utopia, present a warning to feminism. Theoretical deconstructions of gender as a culturally constructed and maintained behaviour are not enough. Exposing gender's fictions will not in itself transform them. Feminism must also address and take seriously the pleasures and rewards of identification with this gendered hegemony.

The narrative of 'Houston' prefaces Lorimer's struggle for acceptance by the Alpha males with a memory of gender confusion and humiliation:

> He lives it again, that long-ago moment. Himself running blindly - or was he pushed? - into the strange toilet at Evanston Junior high. His fly open, his dick in his hand, he can still see the grey zipper edge of his jeans around his pale exposed pecker. The hush. The sickening wrongness of shapes, faces turning. The first blaring giggle. *Girls.* He was in the *girls' can.* (p.168)

The gender dislocation of this scene, 'the sickening wrongness of shapes', highlights the vulnerability as well as the significance of his penis. This 'pale exposed pecker' cannot support the weighty symbolism of the phallus, the sign of sexual difference. In the year following 'Houston"s publication, Tiptree was also stripped 'naked' and revealed to be the 'wrong shape'. But whereas Sheldon chose to retain the gender ambivalence of her Tiptree pseudonym, publishing only once more as Raccoona Sheldon in 1985, Lorimer violently resists this sexual (in)difference:

> The memory of gaping jeans flicks at him, the painful end part - the grinning faces waiting for him when he stumbled out. The howls, the dribble down his leg. Being cool, pretending to laugh too. You shit heads, I'll show you. *I am not a girl.* (p.172)

> For an instant Lorimer is back in that Evanston toilet. But they are gone, all the little giggling girls. All gone forever, gone with the big boys waiting outside to jeer at him. Bud is right, he thinks. *Nothing counts anymore*. Grief and anger hammer at him. He knows now what he has been dreading: not their vulnerability, his. (p.220)

Only too aware of its redundancy, Lorimer strives towards a hyper-masculinity, effecting only a dead gender posturing. Without the legitimation of sexual difference, 'nothing counts'. His desire for acceptance, for community in a man's world, can never be satisfied. In spite of his appreciation of the women's routines, he struggles against his own potentially ambiguous gender status, repeatedly, if metaphorically, reaffirming that he is *'not a girl'*. Lorimer's affinity with the women is repeatedly voiced in the text ('We think of you as different, you're more human like us' (p.206); 'Lorimer prefers the easy rhythm of the women and the cycle here fits him nicely' (p.185)), but he cannot finally identify with them.

As he responds to the drug he has been given, he attempts to assert his difference. He mis-represents the all-female utopia as embodying everything he does not enjoy as a man. Drawing upon a collection of pejorative adjectives, he defines an image of gender from a by-gone age.

> Trapped, he is. Irretrievably trapped for life in everything he does not enjoy. Structurelessness. Personal trivia, unmeaning intimacies. The claims he can somehow never meet. Ginny: *You never talk to me...* (p.168)

Lorimer constructs sexual difference as a difference in language, a difference in the ways in which women and men speak. He visualizes a continuum between this future world and his own past in which women are 'speaking faces on a matrix of pervasive irrelevance' (p.170). But Lorimer's forced connections cannot be sustained. The dialogue on the ship does not conform to these gendered terms: 'all the daily minutiae that occupied Ginny and her friends seems to have been edited out of these women's talk' (p.204). The discrepancy between his expectations and the women's behaviour is portrayed as a discursive strategy - their gendered utterances have been 'edited out'. Denying the evidence of his own

observations, Lorimer evokes a 'misogynist folk-linguistics' to ground the differences between masculinity and femininity in language.[74]

The assertion of gendered styles echoes the terms of both Silverberg's and Spacks's projects to assert sex through writing. It also signals Tiptree's linguistic self-awareness in the text. In the early stories Tiptree drew upon the conventions of masculine style to establish his voice as male. In 'The Women Men Don't See' he critiqued these masculine stereotypes, revealing Fenton's alienation through the terms of his own self-representation. In 'Houston' Tiptree develops this critique to explore the ways in which the various investments in sexual difference produce 'readings' of gendered discourse that work only to reproduce expectations, and sustain such alienation. Silverberg, like other readers in the 1970s, read Tiptree's stories in terms of the gendered expectations of male writing. Post-1977 feminist and non-feminist readers have engaged the 'opposite' expectations.

Lorimer voices the sexist assumptions about women's writing/speech that Sheldon's successful masquerade refuted:

> How they talk he thinks again, floating back to the real present. The bubbling irritant pours through his memory, the voices of Ginny and Jenny and Penny on the kitchen telephone, before that his mother's voice, his sister Amy's. Interminable. What do they always have to talk, talk, talk of? [...] Women have no self-respect. Say anything, no sense of the strategy of words, the dark danger of naming. Can't hold in. [...]
>
> 'Was I talking aloud? I'm sorry.' [...]
>
> But he has only thought of Ginny and them all for an instant - what has he been blabbing? What is the drug doing to him? (p.199)[75]

Lorimer's gender-distorted perception of women's language use is rendered ironic through the effects of the disinhibiting drug. Speaking every thought aloud, Lorimer is feminized by the excesses of his own masculine discourse. The text does not allow Lorimer's linguistic generalizations to exist unchallenged. Searching for the words to articulate his sense of masculine self-restraint he is unable to express what he means:

> 'We talk...' he gropes for a word to convey the judiciousness, the adult restraint. Objectivity, maybe? 'We talk when we have something to say.' Irrelevantly he thinks of a mission coordinator named Forrest, famous for his blue jokes. 'Otherwise it would all break down,' he tells her. 'You'd fly right out of the system.' That isn't quite what he means, let it pass. (p.200)

The drug first feminizes him and then ironically reveals his own definition of masculine discourse to be linguistically disabling, before the 'irrelevant' memory of the

mission commander, 'famous for his blue jokes', finally undermines these linguistic gender distinctions altogether. Having revealed the artificiality of this binary model, Lorimer then insists on its necessity: without these fictions the social structure would collapse, 'you'd fly right out of the system'. Of course these three male astronauts have literally flown out of that gendered system into a future world of single-sex human beings. Their conceptions of femininity and masculinity have been rendered meaningless by the reorganization of gender into a spectrum of possible personalities.

Lorimer betrayed the other men by resisting their attempts to re-create a patriarchal culture, but he is too invested in those myths himself to welcome a genderless utopia. He accepts his death in the final stages of the narrative because he is an alien within this utopia. His own isolation, in his striving for masculine acceptance, has been thrown into relief in this world of women. In 'Faces', the heroine laments that men probably would not have liked her utopian world even if they had lived to see it: 'Too bad they never lived to know the beautiful peaceful free world. But they wouldn't have liked it probably. They were sick, poor things' (p.157). Her musing speculation that 'maybe [men] could have been different; they were people too' is the missed opportunity that haunts Lorimer's death. He chooses the 'peace and freedom' of death rather than the 'peaceful free world' of the utopia in which his masculinity would simply be irrelevant. That final choice is chilling.

The dialectic between these two stories suggests that feminists must neither retreat into separatist utopian desires nor assume that the deconstruction of gender will shatter the investment in sexual difference. The ambivalent signature of James Tiptree Jr demonstrates the performative possibilities of gender, but it also alerts us to the work of the audience in defining that performance within established conventions. In reading these representations of sexual (in)difference we must risk the miscegenation of utopian and deconstructive models of gender. To re-theorize gender challenges the ways in which feminists also invest gender and sexual difference in our self-representation. But only through such a radically destabilized perspective will we be able to theorize the dynamic of identification in the name of Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr.

1. 'Tiptree Revealed', *Locus*, 30 January 1977, p.1.

2. James Tiptree Jr, 'Birth of a Salesman', in *Ten Thousand Light-Years From Home* (New York: Ace, 1973), pp.293-314 (first publ. in *Analog*, March 1968). Further references to this collection are given after quotations in the text.

3. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile: James Tiptree Jr', *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, April 1983, pp.27-49 (pp.42-43). Mary Ellmann satirically comments that, 'books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips'. See *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p.29.

4. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile', p.43.

5. Only Sarah Lefanu in *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988) acknowledges the potential difficulties the male persona presents for the feminist reader.

6. Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.26.

7. My argument about the gender complexities of Sheldon/Tiptree's authorial identity are informed by recent lesbian and gay theory, and especially Judith Butler's analysis of the performativity of gender. Butler, following Monique Wittig, proposes that the distinction between gender and sex is a false one, because, she argues, sex is already a gendered category. For Butler, gender cannot be regarded as the cultural representation of a natural sex, because 'sex' is only established as a natural category by the performative expressions of gender. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

8. Ursula Le Guin, 'Introduction', in James Tiptree Jr, *Star Songs of an Old Primate* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), pp.vii-xii (pp.ix, xi).

9. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', trans. by Josue V. Harari, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp.197-210 (p.209).

10. Joanna Russ has written that Sheldon described the revealing of her identity in terms of a physical nakedness. Personal correspondence, 16 June 1994.

11. James Tiptree/Alice Sheldon, letter in *Locus*, February 1980, p.5.

12. Ursula Le Guin, 'Introduction', in *Song Songs*, p.x.

13. 'Women in Science Fiction: A Symposium' ed. by Jeffrey Smith, *Khatru*, 3&4 (1975). Further references to this fanzine are given after quotations in the text.

14. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile', p.38.

15. Joanna Russ, personal correspondence, 16 June 1994.

16. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile', p.42.

17. Lillian Heldreth, '"Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death": The Feminism and Fatalism of James Tiptree, Jr.', *Extrapolation*, 23 (1982), 22-30 (pp.22-23).

18. In spite of his insistence upon Tiptree's masculine authenticity, Silverberg's critique of the stories is astute and perceptive. Robert Silverberg, 'Who Is Tiptree, What Is He?', in James Tiptree Jr, *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), pp.ix-xviii (p.xii and p.xv). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

19. Alice Sheldon in Mark Siegel, *James Tiptree Jr*, Starmont Reader's Guide 22 (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont Press, 1985), p.7.

20. Peter Schwenger, *Phallic Critiques: Masculinity and Twentieth Century Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.12. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

21. James Tiptree Jr, 'The Man Who Walked Home', in *Ten Thousand Years From Home,* pp.197-220 (p.197) (first publ. in *Amazing Stories*, May 1972).

22. James Tiptree Jr, 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side', in *Ten Thousand Years From Home,* pp.1-13 (p.8) (first publ. in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, March 1972).

23. James Tiptree Jr, 'Last Night and Every Night', in James Tiptree Jr, *Crown of Stars* (London: Sphere Books, 1990), pp.203-207 (first publ. in *Worlds of Fantasy 2*, 1970). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

24. Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk To the End of the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1974; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1989); Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground* (Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1980; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1985).

25. Umberto Eco, 'Between Author and Text', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.69. Eco suggests that 'between the empirical author and the Model Author (which is nothing else than an explicit textual strategy) there is a third, rather ghostly, figure [...] christened Liminal Author, or the Author on the Threshold - the threshold between the intention of a given human being and the linguistic intention displayed by a textual strategy' (p.69).

26. James Tiptree Jr, 'I'm Too Big But I Love To Play', in *Ten Thousand Light-Years From Home*, pp.267-292 (first publ. in *Amazing Stories*, March 1970). Sheldon's literary male-identification might also be read against her acknowledgement to Joanna Russ that she was a lesbian. Perhaps a male disguise enabled Sheldon to express desire for women in legitimate heterosexual terms. Sheldon wrote to Russ: '[I] wonder if I ever told you in so many words that I am a Lesbian - or at least as close as one can come to being one having never had a successful love with any of the women I've loved, and being now too old and ugly to dare try. Oh, had 65

years been different! I *like* some men a lot, but from the start, before I knew anything it was always girls and women who lit me up. (Oh, the sad, foolish, lovely tales I'm going to have to put down some day!).' Cited in Joanna Russ, Letter, *Extrapolation*, 31 (1990), p.83.

27. Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p.xx.

28. Joanna Russ, '*Amor Vincit Foeminam*: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 7 (1980), 2-15 (p.12).

29. I am grateful to Monica Pearl for reminding me that feminists are frequently too quick in assuming that women are not misogynist. Identifying Tiptree as Sheldon does not in itself erase the misogynist implications of her fictions. Feminist critics must address the ways in which Sheldon, writing as Tiptree and as Raccoona Sheldon, manipulates misogynist discourses in her texts.

30. Nelly Furman, 'Textual Feminism', in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. by Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp.45-54 (p.48).

31. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1975), p.35.

32. Peggy Kamuf, 'Writing Like a Woman', in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, pp.284-299 (p.298).

33. Nelly Furman, 'The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?', in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.59-79 (p.69).

34. Christine Di Stefano, 'Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity and Postmodernism', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.63-82 (p.78).

35. Alice Sheldon, cited in the editor's introduction to Raccoona Sheldon, 'Morality Meat', in *Despatches From the Frontiers of the Female Mind: An Anthology of Original Stories*, ed. by Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p.209.

36. The one exception to this pattern is Tiptree's early story 'Last Night and Every Night' (1970). However in this text, unlike Raccoona's, violence against women is fantasized and anticipated but not realized.

37. Raccoona Sheldon, 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1990), pp.149-167 (first publ. in *Aurora: Beyond Equality, Tales of the Ultimate Sexual Revolution*, ed. by Vonda McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1976), pp.16-35). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

38. Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, p.106. As I have noted, Lefanu is the only critic who acknowledges these difficulties.

39. Harry Harrison, 'Introduction', in *Ten Thousand Light-Years From Home*, pp.vii-viii (pp.vii-viii).

40. See Mark Siegel, *James Tiptree Jr*, p.10; and Ursula Le Guin, 'Introduction', p.ix.

41. Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, pp.53-56; Marleen Barr, '"The *Females* Do the Fathering!": James Tiptree's Male Matriarchs and Adult Human Gametes', *Science Fiction Studies*, 13 (1986), 42-49 (p.42); and Lillian Heldreth, '"Love is the Plan"', p.29.

42. bell hooks, 'Narratives of Struggle', in *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing*, ed. by Philomena Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp.53-61 (p.56).

43. During the 1960s *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, normally considered the least technologically oriented of the three major American SF magazines, reported a female readership of 29%. In 1974 *Analog*, the most technically oriented magazine, reported a female readership of 25%. Although this was a massive improvement on the figure of 25 years before (in 1949 it was estimated that 6.7% of *Astounding/Analog* readers were female) the vast majority of Tiptree's contemporary readers would have been male. See Albert Berger, 'SF Fans in Socio-Economic Perspective: Factors in the Social Consciousness of a Genre', in *Science Fiction Studies: Selected Articles on SF 1976-1977*, ed. by R.D. Mullen and Darko Suvin (Boston: Gregg Press, 1978), pp.258-272.

44. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile', p.43.

45. Richard Cowper, review of James Tiptree Jr, *Up the Walls of the World* (1978), *Foundation*, 15 (1979), 73-75 (p.75). The strength of Richard Cowper's reactions might be related to his feelings of uneasiness about his own pseudonym. John Middleton Murry Jr explains 'at first it felt rather odd being addressed as "Dear Mr Cowper," but I got used to it. Yet at the back of my mind lingered the uneasy suspicion that I was engaged in perpetrating some outrageous confidence trick and one day I would be exposed for the fraud I was'. See 'Backwards Across the Frontier', in *The Profession of Science Fiction: Writers on Their Craft and Ideas*, ed. by Maxim Jakubowski and Edward James (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.78-94 (p.79).

46. Ursula Le Guin, 'Introduction', in *Star Songs*, p.ix.

47. Nancy Steffen-Fluhr, 'The Case of the Haploid Heart: Psychological Patterns in the Science Fiction of Alice Sheldon ("James Tiptree, Jr")', *Science Fiction Studies*, 17 (1990), 188-220 (p.193).

48. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.144.

49. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.143.

50. Sarah Lefanu also identifies alienation as the key theme in Tiptree's writing. See *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, pp.105-129.

51. James Tiptree Jr, 'A Day Like Any Other', *Foundation*, 3 (1973), p.49.

52. The line is from Oliver Goldsmith's, 'Edwin and Angelina, or the Hermit' (1766).

53. James Tiptree Jr, 'All the Kinds of Yes', in *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*, pp.1-23. Originally published as 'Filomena and Greg and Rikki-Tikki and Barlow and The Alien', in *New Dimensions 2*, ed. by Robert Silverberg (New York: Doubleday, 1972). Further references to the story are given after quotations in the text.

54. John Clute, 'Introduction', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, pp.ix-xv (p.xiii).

55. James Tiptree Jr, 'The Women Men Don't See', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, pp.121-148 (first publ. in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, December 1973). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

56. Ursula Le Guin, 'Introduction', in *Star Songs*, p.xi.

57. Robert Silverberg, 'Who is Tiptree?', p.xii.

58. Robert Silverberg, 'Who is Tiptree?', p.xvi.

59. I am indebted to Anne Cranny-Francis's reading of 'The Women Men Don't See'. Although Francis sees Fenton as an absolutely unsympathetic character who remains unaffected by 'the consciousness-raising which occurs in the story', we coincide in our appreciation of Tiptree's deconstruction of masculine discourse. If the story is read from a non-feminist position, the resolution of the tale (in which the Parsons escape a man-made world by leaving with aliens) is inexplicable and even more disturbing. See Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, pp.29-38.

60. Robert Silverberg, 'Who is Tiptree?', p.xvi.

61. Carolyn Brown, paper given at the Sexual Difference Conference (Southampton University, 1985). Cited in Peter Middleton, *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.142.

62. Tiptree was acutely conscious of the impact of age and illness on sexuality and self-image. See James Tiptree Jr, 'Going Gently Down', *Phantasmicon*, 11 May 1974, pp.94-97.

63. Kate Wilhelm, 'The Encounter', in *Nebula Award Stories 7*, ed. by Lloyd Biggle Jr (St Albans: Panther Books, 1974), pp.77-99 (p.79) (first publ. in *Orbit 8*, ed. by Damon Knight (New York: Putnams, 1970)). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

64. Teresa de Lauretis, 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1988), 155-177 (p.155).

65. James Tiptree Jr, 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, pp.168-222 (first publ. in *Aurora: Beyond Equality, Tales of the Ultimate Sexual Revolution*, pp.36-98). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

66. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

67. Nancy Steffen-Fluhr, 'The Case of the Haploid Heart', p.206.

68. Alice Sheldon in Mark Siegel, *James Tiptree Jr*, p.53.

69. Todorov suggests that 'either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life'. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), p.31.

70. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.67.

71. Judith Merril, 'That Only a Mother', in *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp.56-66 (first publ. in *Astounding Science Fiction*, June 1948). Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (London: The Women's Press, 1979, 1987).

72. 'Investment' is the term used by Wendy Hollway to indicate the emotional and practical considerations which motivate the assumption of specific gender positions. See Wendy Hollway, 'Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity', in *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, ed. by Julian Henriques and others (London: Methuen, 1984), pp.227-263.

73. Veronica Hollinger, '"The Most Grisly Truth": Responses to the Human Condition in the Works of James Tiptree, Jr.', *Extrapolation*, 30 (1989), 117-132 (p.122).

74. Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.32.

75. The assonance between the women's names symbolizes a closeness from which Lorimer is excluded, but it also presents a dystopian conformity. Both these aspects of same-sex similarity are repeated in the utopia in 'Houston'. Accordingly, the story has been read as both a feminist dream and a feminist nightmare. See Nancy Steffen-Fluhr, 'The Case of the Haploid Heart'; and Lillian Heldreth, 'Love is the Plan'.

5. Polymorphous Futures: Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

Octavia Butler's writing identifies her as a distinctive voice in feminist science fiction. Like Joanna Russ and James Tiptree she also works within and against the conventions of the genre, drawing upon familiar themes (such as alien contacts, telepathy or immortality) to expose and reconfigure the implicitly sexist assumptions which, until the 1970s, characterized SF. Unlike most other feminist SF writers, however, Butler also exposes the implicitly racist or white-focused nature of much SF. From the mid-1970s Butler's novels have consistently featured black women as their protagonists, an assertion of black female identity that has not only challenged the unthinking racism and sexism of the science fiction pulps, but has also highlighted the repetition of a white hegemony in feminist SF.[1] Her narratives evoke African legend and African-American history as well as contemporary Black (and) feminist politics.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Butler was the only recognized African-American woman writing in the genre, and her texts resonate with this oppositional perspective. She characterizes herself as a 'black feminist science fiction writer from Southern California', locating her writing in her particular social and historical experience as a black woman in the United States.[2] However, as Adele Newson also observes, Butler generates a 'characteristic ambivalence towards her message' that disturbs didactic or partisan readings of her texts.[3]

Butler's science fiction creates powerful images of black women in a genre in which and from which they have traditionally been marginalized and excluded. Amber, the heroine of Butler's first published novel, *Patternmaster* (1976), is in many ways, as Dorothy Allison points out, prototypical of all of Butler's heroines.[4] She is a powerful and independent woman who has survived abuse because she has the ability both to heal and to kill when necessary. The Patternist series continues to feature such strong, black heroines: Mary in *Mind of My Mind* (1977); Alanna in *Survivor* (1978); and Anyanwu in *Wild Seed* (1980).

Butler asserts that she began writing about power 'because [she] had so little'.[5] Her exploration of power disrupts existing hierarchical structures, not only by challenging dominant race and gender stereotypes, but also by reconceptualizing power in symbiotic rather than parasitic terms. This reconception is dramatized in *Mind of My Mind* when

Mary achieves power through her creation of a new community. Mary is a poor and neglected young woman who struggles to control her latent telepathic abilities. Before her 'transition' these latent powers bind her to the emotions of strangers, forcing her to experience the random miseries of 1970s Los Angeles. Mary fights her family and her environment for her own survival and uses her growing power to establish the Pattern, a network which is communally sustaining, but over which she has total control. She finally draws on this collective telepathic strength to secure her own power and kill her immortal father, Doro, whose forced breeding programmes amongst his traumatized children have produced these telepathic prodigies.

Frances Smith Foster argues that the heroines in Butler's Patternist series represent 'a new kind of female character in both science fiction and Afro-American literature'.[6] That Butler's heroines are complex and powerful, however, does not suggest a break with black writing in America, so much as demonstrate the connections between Butler's science fiction and other black, especially women's, writing. Foster's characterization of Butler's protagonists as 'combinations not only of Eve and Madonna, but also of God and Satan' might equally describe Toni Morrison's Sula or Pilate as Butler's Mary or Alanna.[7]

Butler's heroines, like Morrison's, establish their power and their identity through their relations to and within their family and community. Unlike Russ's Alyx tales, in which the female heroine was empowered through her escape from her family, Butler's texts emphasize the creation of new families which will enable women's power. Alanna leaves an oppressive (white) community to join a more enabling, if more dangerous, people; Mary transforms a dysfunctional family into a supportive community; and Anyanwu, when displaced from one community, forms a new one around her.

Butler has suggested that her characters reflect her experience of radical Black politics in the 1960s which made her wary of absolutist assumptions about the heroism or complicity of previous generations. She argues that the representation of African-American history must acknowledge more complex models of resistance. Describing the experiences of her mother and grandmother who were both 'treated like a non-person; something beneath notice' in white society, she remembers both their absorption of these judgements and their strength in defying them.[8] Butler's texts represent strong and powerful women, but her heroines also show the heroism of expedience and the victory of survival. In her work, the heroines survive because they are prepared to use their abilities

to adapt to their environment. Butler's emphasis upon adaptability effectively redefines what, for Alice Sheldon, was 'the most grisly truth' to be learned from psychology: that 'Man does not change his behaviour, he adapts to the results of it'.[9] In Butler's texts, adaptability not only responds to, but also precipitates and directs change.

Butler's most recent novel, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), is her most explicit narrative representation to date of the necessity of personal and collective change. Set in a near-future, dystopian America, the novel extrapolates from the social deprivation and urban violence of contemporary Los Angeles to describe a rigidly class-segregated society: the middle-classes live in walled communities designed to protect them from the dangerous and desperate underclass who live outside. Those who live outside the walls not only shape the contours of the lives of those inside, they also haunt their future. The narrative describes the instability and ultimate collapse of the walled communities, including the one which protected the text's heroine, Lauren. Lauren escapes north, collecting other survivors to form a new community and a new religion, Earthseed, which consecrates the inevitability of change as the 'only lasting truth', the only 'God'.[10]

Sandra Govan has identified 'difference, adaptability, change and survival' as the thematic threads which weave together Butler's writing in the 1970s, 'as tightly as the first pattern [...] linked the Patternists'.[11] The concept of change is, for Butler, a defining characteristic of SF and she argues that representing change is 'one of the biggest challenges' she faces as a writer.[12] The novels she published in the 1980s are thematically comparable to the earlier Patternist series in their emphasis upon the exploration of change, but in these texts the focus is less upon the external transformation of a community or environment than upon the internal transformation of the body.

Clay's Ark (1984) and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (*Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989)) all envisage human evolution in terms of a biological transformation mapped out upon and within the body.[13] Only in the 1990s, in *Parable of the Sower*, does Butler's emphasis once again return to the exploration of primarily ideological changes in religion, power and social organization. Butler's narratives, whether focused upon social or biological structures, consistently work to represent the progressive possibilities of change, even forced or violent change. In her texts, displacements, transformations, or abductions mark the beginnings of new and potentially better lives.

In Butler's fiction during the 1980s human biology was represented as the catalyst for, rather than the impediment to, social change; a reconceptualization of the body which coincided with the contemporary speculations of popular science. Butler's extrapolation of the possibilities of genetics is subtended by an ambivalent optimism which attempts to negotiate the racist and sexist implications of sociobiology. In interview, Butler expressed her belief in genetic predisposition, but suggested that the possibilities of social change were improved when biological propensities were acknowledged and resisted rather than denied.[14]

The 1980s witnessed a cultural and scientific enthusiasm for the role of biotechnology in treating 'anti-social' behaviour. Daniel Koshland, the editor of *Science* magazine, stated in 1989 that the massive project to identify the three billion nucleotides of the human genome promised to reveal the causes of those diseases 'that are at the root of many current societal problems'.[15] As Evelyn Fox Keller notes, such rhetoric identifies alcoholism, manic-depression, schizophrenia, and even homelessness as examples of genetically determined conditions, and these (largely unfounded) statements generate corresponding changes in the general terms of the nature-nurture debate.[16]

For the new genetics 'nature' rather than 'nurture' is the harbinger of change. Human biology promises greater mutability than the depressed and resistant environments of the contemporary West. In the 1970s, feminists argued that biology did not equal destiny, because society and technology could overcome nature. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, scientists are reinstating the primacy of that biological equation to insist that biology *is* destiny, but that the social and not the natural world is its ultimate programmer.

In *Clay's Ark* and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy Butler draws upon cultural speculations about biotechnology to redefine the alien-contact motif. These texts are unusual in feminist SF because they directly address and develop claims about biological determinism. In these narratives the encounter between the human and the alien is represented as a genetic symbiosis that disturbs the relationship between 'self' and 'other'. The aliens penetrate the humans' flesh and reconstruct the microscopic codifications of the human genome, altering the pattern of genes which, according to some biotechnologists, defines the essence of humanity.[17] In *Clay's Ark* an extra-terrestrial virus invades human cells, mutating them as the alien and human DNAs merge. Infected humans are more alert, faster and stronger

than they were before, but the urge to infect others is compulsive as the virus, like the 'selfish gene', seeks its own replication.[18]

The *Xenogenesis* Trilogy: Identifying the Alien

The *Xenogenesis* trilogy is a post-holocaust alien-contact narrative that problematizes the 'rule them or be ruled by them' model which Stanislaw Lem has suggested as characterizing American science fiction.[19] In *Dawn* the survivors of nuclear World War are rescued/captured by an alien species, the Oankali. The humans are stored in suspended animation for two hundred and fifty years while the Oankali repair and replenish the devastated Earth. When they are 'awakened' they learn that the Oankali are drawn to humans because they are compelled to perform an inter-species gene trade. The Oankali are natural genetic engineers who achieve health, knowledge and sexual pleasure through their manipulation of DNA. They share their skills with humanity, genetically improving human memory, strength and longevity. This generosity however is subtended by a ruthlessness of purpose. They also alter reproductive cells, effecting an involuntary sterilization among humans, to ensure that all future human children will be the product of human-Oankali matings.

For the Oankali, the fusion of biologies and cultures represents an utopian evolution, but for the humans it represents a devastating ontology. The humans must adapt to survive, but the nature of their survival threatens their identity as Homo sapiens. The *Xenogenesis* trilogy demonstrates humanity's diversity as a species by representing gender, racial and cultural differences. But it also explores the ways in which the human characters negotiate these intra-species divisions to constitute themselves as all 'human' in relation to the 'non-human' other. In *Dawn*, this process of self-definition and exclusion is initially focused upon the difference in appearance between the aliens and the humans. Later, however, it is located more specifically in the different roles and structures of human and alien sexuality. The human characters define themselves against the aliens by insisting on male/female human coupling in contrast to the more diffuse sexual organization of the tri-sexual Oankali.

When the Oankali subjugate the resisting humans through sexual contact, and later impregnate an ostensibly unwilling woman, the spectre of forced reproduction analogizes the historical events of colonialism, slavery and miscegenation. The repetition of this (specifically African-American) history bears witness to the past as it also stages its reconstruction in the future. Butler uses the SF mode to tease out the structures of a horrific past which then mediates the creation of a new and extraordinary future. She asserts the inevitability of change and identifies the progressive possibilities (as well as the devastation) of the drastic loss of human identity which is represented by slavery and re-presented in this alien-contact. In this way the *Xenogenesis* trilogy remembers the past whilst also reformulating it to allow for a better future. In the trilogy, this potential is realized by the newly gendered, polymorphous human-Oankali being who narrates the final novel, *Imago*.

Butler draws out the complexities of power and identification in this alien-contact through the character of Lilith, the black heroine of *Dawn*, who is one of the first to be 'awakened' by the Oankali. The first chapter of *Dawn*, 'Womb', describes Lilith's rebirth into the organic body of the Oankali ship. Recovering from the shattering effects of 'awakening' she is unsure about the terms of her new life:

> Alive!
> Still alive.
> Alive...again. (*Dawn*, p.3)

This initial ambiguity about the nature of existence (is it birth, survival or re-incarnation?) prefigures the textual preoccupation with the conditions of human survival. Lilith awakes alone in a featureless room, where she is questioned by unseen interrogators; '*How old was she?* [...] *Had she been married?* [...] *Had she had children?* [...] *Had she had siblings?* [...] *What work had she done?* [...] *Did she remember the war?*' (*Dawn*, p.5). Lilith's answers to these questions reveal her history to the reader and the interrogator alike. They also constitute the conventional parameters of human self-definition (age, sexuality, reproduction, kinship and economic status) that this radical displacement of the human survivors renders obsolete.

When Lilith first meets an alien she experiences it as utterly abject. However, the narrative implicitly confuses the distinctions between the human and the alien even (as in

Lilith's and the reader's first glimpse of the Oankali) when the two species appear to be most starkly opposed:

> Lilith glanced at the humanoid body, wondering how humanlike it really was. 'I don't mean any offence,' she said, 'but are you male or female?'
>
> 'It's wrong to assume that I must be a sex you're familiar with,' it said, 'but as it happens, I'm male.'
>
> Good. 'It' could become 'he' again. Less awkward.
>
> 'You should notice,' he said, 'that what you probably see as hair isn't hair at all. I have no hair. The reality seems to bother humans.'
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'Come closer and look.'
>
> She did not want to be any closer to him. She had not known what held her back before. Now she was certain it was his alienness, his difference, his literal unearthliness. [...]
>
> 'Oh God,' she whispered. And the hair - the whatever-it-was - moved. [...] She frowned, strained to see, to understand. Then, abruptly, she did understand. [...]
>
> Medusa. (*Dawn,* p.12)

Lilith's assignment of sex to the alien attempts to resolve part of his species otherness by drawing him into a network of familiar human differences. But this artificial similarity cannot be sustained. Lilith is immediately confronted by the horror of his alienness, a horror represented by the potent myth of the Medusa.

The use of the image of the Medusa to represent the differences between Lilith and the alien is more problematic than it first appears to be. Jenny Wolmark suggests that by signifying the male alien as Medusa the narrative 'situat[es] him as masculinity's Other'. She argues that this gender contradiction, as well as the alien's role as a 'parent' to Lilith, demonstrates the way in which, 'the narrative almost immediately begins to unsettle the hierarchical and patriarchal assumptions about gendered and racial difference which are embedded in the science fiction convention of the alien'.[20]

In mythological and psychoanalytical discourse the Medusa represents the 'monstrous-feminine' and identifies woman as the grotesque 'other' to the dominant male.[21] Alice Walker argues, however, that the female figure of the Medusa myth is specifically racially inflected.[22] She suggests that this mythology depicts the Greek colonization of Africa, and that the Medusa figure represents the black woman whose dreadlocked hair has been transmogrified into snakes. The Medusa legend thus mythologizes past colonialism by constructing an opposition between the black woman and the white man in

terms of a contrast between the grotesque and the human. As a black woman Lilith has been historically represented as an alien (racially and sexually 'other' to the universal 'whitemale' human) by the very imagery that is used to establish her difference from the Oankali. The metaphoric representation of this initial revulsion subverts the apparently absolute difference between human and alien. The mythological resonance of human intra-species conflict, which designated some humans as more human than others, disrupts the identification of the Oankali as unutterably other.

Marketing the *Xenogenesis* Trilogy: The Black Heroine as Alien

The third person narrative of *Dawn* is focused upon Lilith's perceptions, so that the reader must identify with her as both the protagonist and the ambassador of humanity. Butler has said in interview that her readership is mainly white, and I would add that her publication by mainstream science fiction presses, such as Warner in the United States, and VGSF in Britain, suggests that this readership is also predominantly male.[23] In other words, Butler's publishing history indicates that her audience approximates the demographic proportions of the general science fiction readership. She suggests the diversity of her audience when she divides her readers into three distinct, but inevitably overlapping, categories, 'feminists, SF fans, and black readers'.[24]

Butler attributes her popularity as a writer to her commitment to story-telling and her refusal to be 'too pedagogical or too polemical' in her fiction.[25] Unlike Joanna Russ or Samuel Delany, Butler does not experiment with narrative structures or expectations to continually estrange or challenge the reader. Instead, as in *Xenogenesis*, Butler uses the comfortable conventions of third person and first person narratives to draw the reader into a series of empathetic relationships with progressively more 'alien' identities. Our perceptions are directed by a black woman in *Dawn*, a black 'construct' male in *Adulthood Rites* and finally a polymorphous, newly gendered (Ooloi) 'construct' in *Imago*.

Butler also explicitly contrasts her fiction to other SF narratives which homogenize humanity as a singular identity. Criticizing those science fiction writers who identify the universal (WASP) Man as the essence of humanity, she suggests that:

> many of the same science fiction writers who started us thinking about the possibility of extraterrestrial life did nothing to make us think about here-at-home human variation - women, blacks, Indians, Asians, Hispanics, etc. In

> science fiction of not too many years ago, such people either did not exist, existed only occasionally as oddities, or existed as stereotypes.[26]

The human characters in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy have been rescued mainly from the Southern Hemisphere, recreating a human community in which the white Euro-American peoples are no longer dominant. Butler's male and female human protagonists are black, Chinese, Hispanic and white.

Butler's explicit critique of white-only science fiction, and her own commitment to representing human diversity is not, however, reflected in the marketing of her texts. The artwork for *Dawn*, especially, indicates science fiction publishers' resistance to signifying humanity as black and female. The British VGSF edition portrays a racially ambiguous female face emerging from a ring of tentacles. However, as Donna Haraway reports, in the United States the jacket illustration for the Warner edition pictures Lilith as, 'an ivory white brunette mediating the awakening of an ivory white blond woman'. Haraway adds that this misrepresentation allowed several (presumably white) readers to read *Dawn* 'without noticing either the textual cues indicating that Lilith is black or the multi-racialism pervading *Xenogenesis*'.[27] This refusal to 'see' Lilith as a black woman suggests that these readers worked to produce a narrative which supported their expectations of SF as a white genre. Stephanie Smith adds that the representational 'violence' of the artwork for *Dawn* was repeated by Warner's cover for *Imago* (1989) which presented 'the polyphonic, polymorphous Jodahs' (a human-Oankali Ooloi) as 'a half-naked Caucasian woman with weird tentacles'.[28]

These marketing strategies echo editorial advice which Butler had received earlier in her career. It was suggested that she should avoid including black characters in her texts because 'they change the character of the story'. She reports anecdotally, 'he [the editor] went on to say that well, perhaps you could use an alien instead and get rid of all this messiness and all those people that we don't want to deal with'.[29] The suggested interchangeability of black people and aliens confounds the problems of identification in *Dawn*. For this (white male) reader/editor, Lilith, as both black and female, might appear to be effectively more estranging and generically unfamiliar than the Oankali. For a black woman reader, however, the complexities of the relationship between Lilith and the aliens might suggest the ways in which black women have themselves been made to figure 'the other of the other' in Western patriarchy.[30]

The attempted erasure of the characters' racial identity (and by extension Butler's racial identity) through these editorial and marketing decisions allows white readers to (mis)interpret her texts to reinforce a racialized hegemony that whitifies the genre. Just as readers participated in the constructions of James Tiptree's male voice to accord with their expectations of masculinity, so (white) readers of Butler can ignore the racial diversity of her texts to accord with their expectations of whiteness.

Human Contradictions: Alien Definitions of the Human

Butler records that the stimulus for her trilogy came from Ronald Reagan whose Republican policy of 'limited' or even 'winnable' nuclear war inspired the holocaust that immediately pre-dates the narrative of *Dawn*. She adds that he also focused her conception that humanity was genetically flawed.[31] In *Xenogenesis* the Oankali define this fatal flaw as the 'Human Contradiction' or 'Human Conflict'. Humans are (self-)destructive because their bodies have a 'mismatched pair of genetic characteristics' (*Dawn*, p.39): intelligence and hierarchical behaviour. This dangerous combination is both 'frightening and seductive [...] deadly and compelling' for the Oankali (*Rites*, p.8). Their desire for diversity and difference makes humanity's alienness irresistible, both sexually and scientifically (these impulses are not differentiated by the Oankali as they are by the humans).

Butler, however, has been criticized for representing 'human nature' in such biologist terms. Hoda Zaki asserts that:

> Butler's unmediated connections between biology and behaviour have an implicit corollary: that abandoning the human body is a necessary prerequisite for real human alteration. This represents an essentially retrogressive view of politics (ie. collective human action), which she never sees as offering the solution to social or political problems.[32]

Zaki rightly identifies such biologism as a potential cul-de-sac for radical politics. But she demonstrates the dangers of such biological reductivism by means of a similar textual reductivism. The narrative essentialism, which draws from biologism and naturalism, is neither consistent nor monolithic, but always ambivalent.[33] As Diana Fuss argues, the representation of essentialism within a text must not in turn be 'essentialized' by critics, but must be read in terms of its narrative motivation.[34]

The Oankali claim to understand the nature of humanity through their intimate knowledge of living human flesh, but they nevertheless repeatedly misinterpret or wrongly predict human behaviour. Their biological certainty does not 'solve' the mystery of 'human nature' (as indeed some contemporary geneticists claim for their own mapping of human DNA) but rather focuses the problems of definition onto the body, which is positioned as the primary signifier of human identity. The human characters also define their humanity in terms of a genetic integrity, but for them the body does not in and of itself denote humanity. They position the body as the lesser term within a mind/body split which demands that bodily impulses be regulated by social values. In *Dawn*, the newly awakened humans draw upon the redundant ideologies of twentieth-century America to reconstruct themselves as human in the face of the alien. The Oankali, however, do not recognize such Cartesian dualism. In *Xenogenesis*, the body remains a contested signifier: it represents both a genetic and a cultural 'text' that resists monological interpretations.[35] As living texts the humans are not only 'read' by the Oankali, they are also re-written.

The assertion in *Xenogenesis* that human identity is genetically determined may flirt with a dangerous reductivism, but it also generates dissenting perspectives within the narrative. The Oankali biologism initiates a questioning of the nature of humanity, which is made all the more urgent by the spectre of its permanent biological transformation. The reproduction of hybrid human-Oankali children threatens a potential species extinction which creates an anxiety about just what it means to be human. Is the category 'human' a biological, psychological, cultural or historical identity? When does an individual cease to be human, and what does s/he become? These questions invoke an exploration not only of what lies outside the human (the animal, the machine, or the alien), but also of how the identity 'human' can be universalized when it is also criss-crossed by differences of race, gender, sex, sexuality, class, age, nationality, ethnicity, culture, language and so on. How can such cultural diversity be encompassed, as the Oankali suggest, by an homogenous human biology?

In opposition to the Oankali biologism, the surviving humans invoke a naturalist, but equally essentialist, conception of their identity. Defining the difference between themselves and the Oankali as an inviolable opposition, they nevertheless work to suppress differences within, between and among humans that might complicate the binary between the self and the alien. In *Dawn* the struggle for a distinct species identity focuses upon the

role and nature of sexuality. The humans insist, at times violently, upon heterosexuality (and the relation between sexual pleasure and reproduction) as a defining characteristic of their nature as a two-sexed species. In contrast, the Oankali have three sexes (male, female and Ooloi) and their sexuality involves three or five partners. Sexual contact is focused upon pleasure not reproduction, which is engineered by the Ooloi in a special organ in their body. Among the humans, deviation from the heterosexual norm is synonymous with the non-human. The spectre of homosexuality haunts the inter-species group matings and is constructed as potentially more threatening to 'human nature' than the aliens themselves. When sexual differences between the humans are stripped of cultural, geographical or historical specificity aboard the alien ship they are re-invested as signifiers of the truly human.

'Alien Perversions': The Role of Sexuality in Defining Humanity

When Lilith has become accustomed to the Oankali's alienness, he (Jdahya) allows her to join his family aboard the ship. The Oankali family has three parents (a male, a female and an Ooloi) who form a unit with their children. The family is also an integral part of a much larger kinship structure. When Lilith joins Jdahya's family her new name reflects this complexity:

> Dhokaaltediinjdahyalilith eka Kahguyaht aj Dinso. The *Dho* used as prefix indicated an adopted non-Oankali. *Kaal* was a kinship group name. Then Tediin's and Jdahya's names with Jdahya's last because he had brought her into the family. *Eka* meant child. A child so young it literally had no sex - as very young Oankali did not. [...] Then there was Kahguyaht's name. It was her third 'parent' after all. Finally there was the trade status name. The Dinso group was staying on Earth, changing itself by taking part of humanity's genetic heritage, spreading its own genes like a disease among unwilling humans...Dinso. It wasn't a surname. It was a terrible promise, a threat. (*Dawn*, p.66)

In spite of her ambivalence about the Oankali Dinso, Lilith becomes a part of Jdahya's family and develops a friendship with the Ooloi child Nikanj. When it asks her, she helps it through its second metamorphosis and into adulthood. However, Lilith is unaware of the nature of the relationship she has entered. Nikanj has bonded chemically with Lilith during

metamorphosis, so that, even if she wants to, she will be physically unable to leave it for more than a few days.

After a period of adjustment, Lilith is used by the Oankali to awaken other English-speaking humans and accustom them to the alien-contact. When she enters the 'training room' to awaken the first group of humans, Nikanj has already improved her strength, memory and agility, and she is deeply bonded to it. Yet, in spite of her love for it, she encourages human resistance and never abandons her desire to escape. Her repeated advice to the humans (who are nevertheless suspicious of her relationship with the Oankali and resentful of her leadership role) is 'learn and run'. In response to aggressive human behaviour, Lilith ultimately aligns with the Oankali, but these associations remain complex, guilty and always incomplete.

Predicting the men's greater hostility to her power, Lilith waits before awakening them, choosing instead to awaken a woman because there will be 'no sexual tension' (*Dawn*, p.132). She awakens potentially dangerous men only when she is able to manipulate them into conventional heterosexual relationships, providing them with someone to 'take care of' (*Dawn*, p.140). Her match-making displaces and contains potential conflict, but it also prefaces an insistence on heterosexuality which structures the formation of the newly awakened group. At stake in this compulsory heterosexuality is an assertion of human identity as a two-sexed species. But it also signals an uneasiness in the reconstruction of intra-human sexual and gender differences.

Judith Butler argues that, 'those 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.'[36] The domain of the abject is literally represented in *Dawn* by the tri-sexual Oankali who exceed the terms of human gender and thus threaten the 'natural' practices of sexuality and reproduction. The textual overdetermination of human heterosexual coupling (which includes the attempted rape of an uncooperative woman) is a violent response to this threat of dehumanization:

> 'What the hell is she saving herself for?' Jean was demanding. 'It's her duty to get together with someone. There aren't that many of us left.'
>
> 'It's my duty to find out where I am and how to get free,' Allison shouted. 'Maybe you want to give whoever's holding us prisoner a human baby to fool around with, but I don't.'
>
> 'We pair off!' Curt bellowed, drowning her out. 'One man, one woman. Nobody has the right to hold out. It just causes trouble.'

'Trouble for who!' someone demanded. (*Dawn*, pp.186-187)

In defending Allison, Lilith subjugates several men, provoking suspicion about her strength. It is rumoured in the group that perhaps she is a man, or not really human at all. Lilith's enhanced fighting ability and strength disrupt the common-sense biology of sexual difference which identifies 'strength' as a critical difference between men and women.

This mistaken (masculine) identity reveals the threat to human identity that subtends such gender confusion, but it also has specific resonances in relation to the historical representations of black women. In 1851, Sojourner Truth declared that she could plough, plant, harvest and 'bear de lash' as well as any man. She challenged her audience: 'And ain't I a woman?'[37] Truth's questioning remains a potent metaphor in contemporary black feminist theory and is repeated in the titles of recent texts, including bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman?* (1982), and Denise Riley's *Am I That Name?* (1987). Truth's demand shows gender to be a racialized category.[38] In *Xenogenesis*, Butler explores the ways in which the intersections between racial and gender identities inflect the definitions of humanity.

Lilith tells the other humans in the room, 'Nobody here is property. Nobody has the right to the use of anyone else's body [...]. We stay human. We treat each other like people' (*Dawn*, p.188). Drawing from the rhetoric of both feminist and anti-slavery narratives in her construction of human integrity, Lilith insists that the right to bodily self-determination is fundamental to 'stay[ing] human'. Specifically, Lilith's intervention to stop this rape, when earlier in the novel the Oankali did nothing to defend her from an attempted rape, suggests that the right to sexual and reproductive self-determination is fundamental to her definition of humanity.

It is this right that the Oankali most abuse. When the Ooloi enter the training room, they each join a human couple, sedating them to subdue their xenophobic terror during bonding. The Ooloi position themselves between the human partners (so that the humans cannot touch) and stimulate their neural pathways to create a blaze of sensation, a sexual simulation that causes the humans to scream out with the intensity of their pleasure. When the Ooloi decrease their chemical control over the humans, however, this pleasure is submerged beneath feelings of humiliation and enslavement, and the 'alien perversions' are represented as the debasement of humanity (*Dawn*, p.203).

This confusion of delight and disgust is familiar from Tiptree's fiction, and is a central motif in other SF stories, such as those in the anthology *Alien Sex* (1990), which address sexuality.[39] C.L. Moore's 'Shambleau' (1933), for instance, which was one the earliest SF representations of alien sexuality, also used the Medusa myth to evoke a fascinated sexual horror, a 'perverted revulsion that clasped what it loathed [...] with unnatural delight'.[40] In *Dawn*, the unnatural delight of alien sex makes Lilith 'perversely eager' for the human-Oankali mating (*Dawn*, p.201). However, Butler's description of this intimacy explores issues of power, consent, disgust and desire, which elicit feminist debates about both pornographic (male) sexuality and the patriarchal misinterpretation of women's consent.

When Nikanj approaches Lilith's lover Joseph for a second time it offers him a choice about whether or not to touch (the first time he was drugged), Joseph repeatedly says 'No!', but Nikanj ignores Joseph's struggles and protests, telling him, 'Your body has made a different choice' (*Dawn*, p.199). In her review of *Dawn*, Rachel Pollack describes this alien seduction as rape and objects to Butler's ambivalent presentation of the difference between a verbal refusal and a bodily consent. She asks, 'isn't this precisely the fantasy of so many rapists? That the woman really wants it, and only says no because of social conditioning, that in fact she will be grateful and surrender with overwhelming passion to the man who makes the decision for her?'.[41] Frances Bonner adds that for her the most telling absence in *Dawn* is Nikanj's first seduction of Lilith, in which the power and gender structures would mirror those of rape more starkly than this Ooloi-male seduction. Lilith's positioning as a 'patient and interested' spectator (*Dawn*, p.199), watching Joseph and Nikanj, suggests a complicity that, for Bonner, ensures that 'rape more easily masquerades as seduction'.[42]

This uneasiness about the meanings of consent, where desire may be stifled by xenophobia or misplaced morality, is given an ironic twist, as Pollack notes, in that it is the human (attempted) rapists who feel most violated by this alien sex:

> 'Look at things from Curt's point of view,' Gabriel said. 'He's not in control even of what his own body does and feels. He's taken like a woman and... No, don't explain!' He held up his hand to stop her from interrupting. 'He knows the ooloi aren't male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn't matter. It doesn't fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can't let them get away with that.' (*Dawn*, p.216)

In spite of the fact that the Ooloi are not male and are known not to be, their sexual precocity positions them in a masculine role, effectively feminizing their partner(s). The defilement of 'mankind' is then interpreted as an emasculation: humanity is 'taken like a woman'.

The rape motif is reconfigured by these responses so that at issue is not so much the violation of sexual consent as the violation of sexual roles. The encounter between humanity and the alien enacts a sexual repositioning that transgresses the binary either/or of male or female, heterosexuality or homosexuality. The Oankali rape blurs the definitions of human sexuality and dissolves the vital gender distinctions between sexualized positions. In other words, the entrance of the Ooloi as a third term effectively throws the binary models of gender and sexuality into confusion.

Donna Haraway expresses disappointment that this alien sex is not imagined as more than a 'complexly mediated' heterosexuality, suggesting that 'in this critical sense, *Dawn* fails in its promise to tell another story, about another birth, a xenogenesis'.[43] The narrative insistence upon heterosexuality as the model for human-Oankali, as well as human, bonding is, however, challenged by the children of this xenogenesis, who cannot be contained within these sexual structures. The text repeatedly exposes and transgresses the limits of the model of heterosexuality, whilst at the same time ensuring its centrality.

Butler's representation of the alien-contact as a reproduction involving five parents, two male, two female and one Ooloi, cannot be contained within the 'heterosexual matrix'.[44] The erasure of the Ooloi from this group mating (the Ooloi can simulate 'touch' between the male and the female and 'disappear') is not enough to reconstitute this sexuality as heterosexual. The sexual encounter is virtual(ly) heterosexuality but it continues to be shadowed by the different sexual permutations that it only partially erases, permutations which threaten to collapse the critical (sexual) difference between humanity and the alien.

The focus on sexuality as the signifier of both human difference and human vulnerability to alien pleasure confounds the hegemonic role of heterosexuality in defining a distinctly human humanity. The alien embrace redefines gender within a non-binary, non-hierarchical pattern which, through its disruption of heterosexual roles, suggests a sexuality beyond either hetero- or homo-erotics. The alien exogamy troubles the distinction between human and alien through the loss of ontological specificity during sex.

But through its evocation of a homosexual subtext, it also troubles intra-human sexual and gender distinctions. Diana Fuss argues that homosexuality is rendered abject within a heterosexual economy because it 'concentrates and codifies the very real possibility and ever present threat of a collapse of boundaries, an effacing of limits, and a radical confusion of identities'.[45] Like the alien sex, then, homosexuality threatens to confuse the differences between men and women. But unlike this alien encounter, homosexuality is a human alternative which challenges the definition of humanity as a heterosexual, two-gendered species from within.

There are no homosexual characters in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Homosexuality cannot be recognized as a sexual possibility for the humans because it blurs the boundaries between human and alien sexual identities and practices. When Joseph is accused of being a faggot, in response to his alignment with, and potential influence over, Lilith, the evocation of such homosexual possibilities is swiftly suppressed by the text:

> 'One has decided he's something called a faggot' [...]
> 'What is a faggot?' it asked.
> She told it. (*Dawn*, pp.166-167)

The definition of homosexuality is closeted within and by the narrative. This forbidden sexuality remains unspoken in the text as a disturbing but unutterable *human* perversion (a perversion of humanity). In *Adulthood Rites* Lilith's second lover, Tino, experiences sexual anxiety not about his lover's alienness but about his maleness:

> He did not like Dichaan to touch him. It had taken Dichaan a while to realize that this was not because Dichaan was Oankali, but because he was male. He touched hands with or threw an arm around other Human males, but Dichaan's maleness disturbed him. He had finally gone to Lilith for help in understanding this.
> 'You're one of his mates,' she had told him solemnly. 'Believe me, 'Chaan, he never expected to have a male mate. Nikanj was difficult enough for him to get used to.'
> Dichaan didn't see that Tino had found it difficult to get used to Nikanj. People got used to Nikanj very quickly. And in the long unforgettable group matings, Tino had not seemed to have any difficulty with anyone. Though afterward, he did tend to avoid Dichaan. (*Rites*, p.179)

The transformations within this xenogenesis challenge the (human) exclusion of homosexuality. These sexual possibilities continually return, 'rub[bing] up against the hetero (tribadic style)' as the textual xenogenesis generates new and troubling identities.[46]

Becoming Alien: Beginning the Xenogenesis

In the training room the struggle to 'stay human' is explicitly focused on the macro- and micro-structures of human social and biological organization. The resisting humans seek to preserve both the originality of the human genome and the hegemony of human heterosexuality against the corrupting Oankali 'touch'. The Oankali interpretation of stimulated desire as consent is so devastating to human identities because it collapses these social and biological structures to privilege the body over the intellect, and effectively inverts the 'civilizing' trajectory of human 'progress'.

The genetic material gathered during these 'deep touches' is used to heal, to learn and to generate the hybrid 'construct' species. Oankali reproduction does not follow from 'sex' in any conventional (human) way, but humanity's loss of control in both processes ensures their continued, if symbolic, association. The Ooloi create children by using a special organ to combine the genetic material of four parents; a male and a female from the Oankali and humanity. One child is then inserted into the human female and one into the Oankali female in an alien revision of contemporary embryology.

At the end of *Dawn*, after Joseph has died, Nikanj tells Lilith that it has impregnated her and that Joseph is one of the parents. Lilith is destined to be the first human mother of a mixed human-Oankali child. But Lilith has not consented to this pregnancy and experiences it as an invasion of her body. The fragile surfaces that exclude the alien and identify Lilith as human have been violated. Her pregnancy is a literal absorption of the 'other' into the self, so that the child she will give birth to will be both flesh of her flesh and an alien corruption of her humanity:

> She stared down at her own body in horror. 'It's inside me and it isn't human!' [...] 'It will be a thing. A monster. [...] That's what matters. You can't understand, but that *is* what matters.'
>
> Its tentacles knotted. 'The child inside you matters.'
>
> (*Dawn*, pp.262-263)

Nikanj insists that only Lilith's words reject this pregnancy and that her body welcomes it. But the final scene creates a disturbing conclusion to this first novel. Lilith is ultimately led back to the Oankali, believing that her own humanity is 'lost'.

Butler anticipates this representation of pregnancy as a bodily invasion in an earlier short-story in which she also explored the terms of interdependency between humans and

aliens. 'Bloodchild' won the Nebula award in 1984 for its complex evocation of dependency and revulsion in a cross-species birth.[47] In the story a group of humans, who have fled persecution on Earth, have settled on an alien planet where they are used by the native Tlic as reproductive hosts for their embryos. The young hero, Gan, loves and is loved by his Tlic who feeds his family her sterile eggs, which are both intoxicating and life-enhancing. As the Tlic ambassador, T'Gator also protects the humans from the demands of other Tlic who wish to breed them purely as incubators for their young. Gan is destined to incubate T'Gator's eggs in his body, but on the eve of this implantation he witnesses the horror of this alien birth:

> His body convulsed with the first cut. [...] She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with his blood - both inside and out. [...] Paler worms oozed to visibility in Lomas's flesh. I closed my eyes. It was worse than finding something dead, rotting, and filled with tiny animal grubs.
> I had been told all my life that this was a good and necessary thing that Tlic and Terran did together - a kind of birth. I had believed it until now. I knew birth was painful and bloody, no matter what. But this was something else, something worse. (pp.45-46)

The Tlic birth follows a paradigmatic trajectory of genre horror in which there is first invasion and then resolution.[48] The abject other is first incorporated into the body and then expelled from it as the body is physically cleansed and sutured. In 'Bloodchild', the Tlic grubs are parasites within the human body, but they are also distinct from it and the boundaries between the human and the alien are re-drawn after the birth. In contrast, Lilith's pregnancy at the conclusion of *Dawn* constitutes a permanent erasure of the boundary between humanity and the alien.

Butler has argued that her exploration of power in 'Bloodchild' has been misinterpreted, causing 'some people [to] assume I'm talking about slavery when what I'm really talking about is *symbiosis*.'[49] That the relationship between the humans and the aliens has been 'misread' in terms that Butler did not intend, however, demonstrates the ambivalences in these definitions of power. The Tlic need the humans to survive and the humans need the protection of Tlic against others of their kind who want to use them as breeders. In 'Bloodchild' the distinctions between slavery and symbiosis (as relations of control and interdependency) are blurred by the demands of compromise and survival. The structures of power refuse reification, and these slippages disturb the story, as they also disturb the *Xenogenesis* trilogy.

Lilith's response to her pregnancy echoes the ambivalent feelings of those women slaves whose pregnancies were the result of forced matings or rape, and whose children represented an increase in the white man's property. The potentialities of motherhood were undoubtedly overwhelmed in slavery by the imperatives of white economic imperialism. However, Hortense Spillers has argued that the most significant distortion of black woman's maternity was not primarily economic or sexual but ontological:

> Slavery did not transform the black female into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the black woman would tend to convince us, nor, alone, the primary receptacle of a highly-rewarding generative act. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference - visually, psychologically, ontologically - as the route by which the dominant male decided the distinction between humanity and 'other'.[50]

In Butler's science fiction this sexually inflected racism, which positions black women on the borders of the human, is literalized as an alien maternity which is fraught with the progressively unnatural possibilities of the 'other'. *Dawn's* xenogenesis promises a species diversification that will construct humane beings, related to humanity, but no longer fully human. Lilith's body is figured as the symbol of this transformation which represents the interface between the two species, the place in which the designations of human and alien, kin and other will fuse.

The second novel in the trilogy, *Adulthood Rites*, begins with the birth of the first 'construct' male born to a human woman, Lilith. He is called Akin and the configurations of his name signify his relations to his parents: he is kin but no longer the same, he is akin, like. His name, like his body, also contains the memory of his heritage through which his future role is revealed; Akin is Nigerian for hero.

> He remembered much of his stay in the womb.
>
> While there, he began to be aware of sounds and tastes. They meant nothing to him, but he remembered them. When they recurred he noticed.
>
> When something touched him, he knew it to be a new thing - a new experience. The touch was first startling, then comforting. It penetrated his flesh painlessly and calmed him. When it withdrew, he felt bereft, alone for the first time. (*Rites*, p.3)

These foetal memories identify Akin's alienness even as they suggest his natural gestation within a human womb. They also redirect the reader's attention away from Lilith, who functions as the undifferentiated foetal environment, towards the child itself. This

perceptual shift was anticipated in the final pages of *Dawn* when Lilith was reminded that, in spite of her horror or sense of loss it was 'the child inside' that mattered. The movement between generations and species, from human woman to 'construct' male, drives the narrative, encouraging readers to identify with this hybrid child. But it also reflects the changing emphasis in debates about reproductive rights in the 1980s which focused cultural attention away from the mother and onto the child/foetus.[51]

For Lilith this pregnancy constitutes the loss of her bodily integrity, as her womb becomes the abjectified terrain from which an unhuman child will emerge. This alien pregnancy evokes the agonies of the historical 'breeding' of black women, in which they too were positioned on borders of the non-human. But she also prises open this rhetoric of racism and reconstructs the fear of racial impurity to engender a truly alien birth as the salvation for an over-specialized species. The structures of slavery subtend this birth, but are inadequate to describe the resonances of this new 'miscegenation', which celebrates diversity as the promise and plenitude of life. If, in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Lilith's maternity is constructed within the shadow of the slave mother, it is also cast through the iconography of the Madonna.

Analogizing History: *Xenogenesis* as a Reconstruction of the African-American Past

In the second novel in the trilogy, *Adulthood Rites*, Lilith's role as the first mother is both despised by the human resisters, who see her maternity as a confirmation of her species treachery, and also, albeit implicitly, revered. Tino, Lilith's human lover in *Adulthood Rites*, describes the image of Lilith nursing in quasi-religious terms, 'it made her look [...] saintly. A mother. Very much a mother. And something else' (*Rites*, p.37). This supplement, the 'something else', defies traditional binary categories of motherhood, which, however elevated or disdained, cannot accommodate this new maternity. When Tino arrives in the construct village, he believes Lilith to be, 'possessed of the devil, that she had first sold herself, then Humanity', that she was, in her words, 'a second Satan or Satan's wife' (*Rites*, p.48). Lilith's borderline humanity is characterized by the resister villagers in biblical terms, and, like her predecessor and namesake, Adam's rebellious first wife, Lilith is an unnatural mother whose gender, sexuality and humanity are challenged not confirmed by her children.

The construction of Lilith as a traitor to her species suggests the ways in which her science-fictional reproduction echoes the predicaments of historical/mythical female figures, such as Malintzin Tenepal, who have been used to signify the treachery of female sexuality. Malintzin Tenepal was the mistress and advisor to the Spanish conqueror of México, and is seen as the mother to the mestizo people. Cherríe Moraga writes that Malintzin is 'slandered as La Chingada, meaning the "fucked one" [...]. Upon her shoulders rests the full blame for the "bastardization" of the indigenous people of México.'[53] However, unlike Malintzin, Lilith is not despised by her children. The final two novels in the trilogy are related from the perspective of the 'constructs' for whom Lilith is not a species traitor but the mother of a new humane humanity.

Stephanie Smith also identifies Lilith with the 'agonizing space of the *mestiza*' but argues that Butler's text does not re-present this colonial history. She further challenges Donna Haraway, who labels the cross-species reproduction in *Xenogenesis* a 'miscegenation'. Smith argues that this charged naming constitutes a 'terminological slippage' that 'not only trails a violent political history in the United States but is also dependent on a eugenicist, genocidal concept of illegitimate matings'.[54] The narrative of *Xenogenesis*, however, does trail the violent history of 'miscegenation' in the United States. Haraway's provocative terminology accurately identifies these texts as both a response to the African heritage in America and as a transcendence of that history in the exploration of a progressive hybridity.[55]

'Miscegenation' is a charged category in the history of black oppression in America, evoking various violations of reproductive freedom and integrity, including rape, incest, forced sterilization, forced pregnancies, lynching and murder, human experimentation, and child abuse. The shadow of these abuses haunts the narrative of *Xenogenesis* when the Oankali forcibly sterilize humans; clone genetic copies of the survivors (so that the humans no longer 'own' their bodies); force non-consenting humans to accept intimate (sexual) contact; and impregnate Lilith with an unwanted child. The narrative representation of this inter-species reproduction is mediated by the memory of historical miscegenation, but it does not repeat its values.

When Lilith is told about the Oankali 'trade' she misinterprets its nature by attempting to equate it with humanity's own historical narratives:

> 'You are traders?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'What do you trade?'
> 'Ourselves.'
> 'You mean...each other? Slaves?'
> 'No. We've never done that.'
> 'What, then?'
> 'Ourselves.'
> 'I don't understand.' (*Dawn*, p.23)

Lilith's misunderstanding not only draws attention to several structural features in the text which have an explicit parallel in slavery, but also represents the ambivalence in their repetition. In *Dawn* the humans are the powerless group, but in *Adulthood Rites* it is the non-human 'construct' protagonist who draws upon the conventions of the slave narrative to describe his life among humans as a story of 'abduction, captivity and conversion' (*Rites*, p.226).[56] These redeployments of narrative style and historical analogy confuse simplistic identifications of the powerful and the powerless to describe a 'miscegenation' that distorts, as it repeats, history.

Samuel Delany's representation of his own writing practice in the science fiction and sword-and-sorcery genres offers a cogent model for an analysis of Butler's use of history in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. He describes his work as a textual reconfiguration of his experience as a black gay man in contemporary America:

> I'm talking about the experiential specificity of black life. If we - the black writers - are writing directly about the black situation, we use this experience directly. But if we are writing in a figurative form, as I am most of the time with SF or sword-and-sorcery, we have to tease out the structure from the situation, then replace the experimental [sic] terms with new, or sometimes opaque, terms that nevertheless keep the structure visible. The new terms change the value of the structure. Often they'll even change its form. I think the figurative approach is more difficult, but it's the best way to say something *new*.[57]

Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy draws upon the structures of African-American experience but redefines the values and the possibilities of these structures for the future. The confrontation with the alien challenges the artificial differences between human and alien, self and other. But in its recognition and repetition of the hybridity of history, the narrative also challenges and exposes the differences between and within humanity itself.

The transformation of humanity in a symbiotic relationship with the 'other', the 'alien', creates a new future through its constructive re-membering of the past.

When Lilith interprets the Oankali heritage of multiple divisions and diverse matings as a loss of history, arguing that future generations will 'remember this division as mythology if they remember it at all', she is told that 'memory of a division is passed on biologically' (*Dawn*, pp.36-37). Adele Newson points out the particular resonance of this somatic memory when read against the African heritage in America. She argues that Lilith's concern 'echoes the history or nonhistory of the African in America, who was forced to mix genes and robbed of a history'.[58] The new 'miscegenation' between humans and Oankali does not repeat the cultural (or physical) violence of that historical miscegenation but guarantees an historical consciousness by inscribing memory within the flesh.

The relationship between the body and the memory, as a representation of personal and cultural history, is a recurrent theme in the work of many African-American women writers. Butler's representation differs from other depictions of this relationship, however, in that this science-fictional body does not bear its history as a sickness or a scar as, for instance, Alice Walker's Meridian or Toni Morrison's Sethe must. The construct children are physically nourished from the time of their birth by the memory of their multiple parentage. The human-Oankali people have their history inscribed within their DNA and their promise to the future is that they will not, cannot, forget their past.

Butler represents this future transformation in a narrative replete with historical echoes, in which the relationship between the Oankali and the humans evokes the power structures of human slavery, colonization and eugenics. She is neither nostalgic about the heroism of the past nor utopian about the possibilities of rewriting history in the future. She identifies a relationship between present, past and future which is fraught with complexity. In her earlier novel, *Kindred* (1979), she used the motif of time-travel to explore this complexity and to place her heroine, Dana, in direct confrontation with the reality of historical slavery.[59] The use of this motif meant that *Kindred*, of all Butler's novels, was not given the label 'science fiction'. Butler was forced to publish the book as mainstream fiction and did not receive the publicity she had expected *Kindred* to generate within the science fiction world.[60] Although not classified as a science-fiction device, the narrative strategy which geographically and temporally uprooted Dana to move her from

1970s Los Angeles to nineteenth-century Maryland, paralleled the displacements of slavery itself. Time-travel also features in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy where the suspended animation pods aboard the alien vessel disrupt the humans' sense of time so that they awaken in a new historical moment.

The sense of temporal distortion in both texts mirrors that of the 'Middle Passage' which transported Africans from their indigenous conceptions of time into Western Christian history. In *Dawn* the humans are similarly shipped from Earth. Their bodies are chemically marked by individual Oankali Ooloi (who in this way claim the humans as their family) and they are delivered to the 'New World' (which the Oankali have reconstructed from the nuclear wasteland of old Earth, and which they will finally strip to rock when they leave). The humans' journey therefore traces the movement (if not the brutality) of the 'Middle Passage' and reflects the cultural trauma of the transition from 'human' to 'slave'. Hortense Spillers suggests that this historical transition constituted a loss of both spatial and temporal specificity that 'culturally "unmade"' the captives. She argues that:

> Those African persons in the 'Middle Passage' were literally suspended in the 'oceanic' [...] but they were also *nowhere* at all. Inasmuch as, on any given day, we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally 'unmade', thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that 'exposed' their destinies to an unknown course.[61]

The cultural 'unmaking' within *Dawn* does not, as slavery did, deny individuality to render people as property, but works to transform human identity through the xenogenesis. Butler's narrative retraces the passage of the historical diaspora to describe humanity's deconstruction as a progressive stage in the creation of a hybrid species to whom the brutality and racism that supported historical slavery will be utterly alien.

In *Kindred*, this 'cultural unmaking' draws out the continual fusion of, as well as the distinctions between, the past and the present. Dana is transported through time so that she can save the life of her white, slave-owning ancestor. The genetic and historical relationships between this black woman and this white man, as well as their shared ambivalent expressions of love, power and hatred, demonstrate the complex inter-connectedness of gendered and racial experience in the United States. Dana saves Rufus as a child, but kills him as a man when he tries to rape her. Through her time-travel, she experiences a glimpse of an oppositional history of everyday survival which is otherwise

submerged beneath the official (mainly white) documentation of slavery. But Dana can never be more than a twentieth-century alien in that past. Missy Dehn Kubitschek identifies the confrontation with history in *Kindred* as paradigmatic of African-American women's writing, which represents a 'tripartite pattern of deciding to excavate history, then accumulating knowledge, and finally reinterpreting it for a forward-looking perspective'.[62]

Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy evokes a similar 'tripartite pattern', drawing upon historical narratives and reinterpreting them within a future context. More specifically, the narrative invocations of African-American history present a potentially homeopathic reworking that imbibes the violent structures of the past to create something new. The homeopathic principle of 'same suffering', in which a dilution of the causes of illness is administered to remedy the disease, is transcribed in these texts as the wounds of history are relieved by their diluted re-presentation as SF.[63] Butler's reiteration of contemporary discourses, especially those of genetic and reproductive science and politics, similarly interrogates and teases out the structures of these ideologies, to present them as a modern history which shadows this future 'miscegenation'.

However, by situating these terms within the purely organic environment of the Oankali ship, Butler erases the (venture) capitalist orientation of today's decidedly inorganic technology. In this way she might be seen to effect an opposite transformation from the one which Andrew Ross attributes to the cyberpunks of the same period. Rather than making 'the ecosphere becom[e] technosphere' as Ross claims William Gibson does, Butler's trilogy envisages an alternative world in which the technosphere becomes ecosphere.[64]

This is not to suggest that these texts present an environmentalist utopia which denies the hegemony of late capitalism. Butler has disparaged utopias as 'ridiculous', arguing that 'we're not going to have a perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely'.[65] The *Xenogenesis* trilogy biologically constructs 'perfect humans' through a progressive hybridity which values diversity and 'miscegenation' rather than purity and stasis. But the process of this transformation engages in a non-utopian struggle in which the relations of power and powerlessness, consent and coercion, resistance and compromise are all negotiated within the substitute world of the alien ship.

Polymorphous Futures: The Problems and Possibilities of the Final Transformation

The final novel in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, *Imago*, represents a different passage, a metamorphosis from 'construct' to Ooloi that signals the consummation of this new species. Hoda Zaki has expressed disappointment that this concluding novel does not fulfil its promise to describe the struggles of the all-human community established on Mars in *Adulthood Rites*. She suggests that this narrative absence reveals the limitations of what she sees as Butler's essentialist position which, she asserts, cannot conceive of an autonomous and progressive human society.[66] But the narrative of *Imago* does not avoid the tensions that rupture this xenogenesis. The creation of the 'construct' Ooloi challenges the imaginative constraints upon the text, pushing against the premises that define its limits. The narrative assumptions behind the deployment of essentialisms, and the continued domination of heterosexuality within this xenogenesis, are ultimately contradicted by the fantastical figure which it generates.

Imago, unlike the previous novels, is a first person narrative in which Jodahs, the 'construct' Ooloi, relates its quest for identity and self-knowledge directly to the reader. This textual intimacy invites the reader to identify directly with this new subjectivity, and establishes an empathetic bond with the ultimate 'other'. Jodahs is an accidental Ooloi. As a child (eka) it was accorded a nominal sexual status as male, an identity that subtends and belies its androgynous status even after metamorphosis. The convention of 'sexing' children in construct families is a contrivance intended to appease human expectations of sex (in reality the eka does not know its sex until metamorphosis). But it is a cultural residue that infects the narrative, resisting its representation of a new gender by echoing familiar codes. The dynamics of 'construct' sexual identification are performed within a rigidly heterosexual model which is woefully inadequate to 'gender' this extraordinary creature.

This inadequacy is dramatized when Jodahs begins to make sexual contact with humans. When it is with a woman it changes its shape in response to her desires, transforming itself into 'a male version of her' (*Imago*, p.79). Conversely, when it is with a human male it grows breasts, developing a 'distinctly Human female appearance' (*Imago*, p.95). However, this polymorphous response to human heterosexuality cannot be sustained. Jodahs presents a narrative dilemma that this text cannot answer, 'What would happen to me when I had two or more mates?' (*Imago*, p.92).

When Jodahs begins 'his' metamorphosis into an Ooloi, 'his' Ooloi parent explains the processes of sex:

> 'I should have noticed this,' it said aloud. 'I should have ... I constructed you to look very male - so male that the females would be attracted to you and help convince you that you *were* male. Until today, I thought they had.' (*Imago*, p.18)

For the construct children, sex is not biologically predetermined. They achieve a sexual 'essence' initially through a biological 'construction' which simulates a male or female appearance. This superficial sexual identity is then confirmed through the play of heterosexual desire. Heterosexuality regulates gender which in turn produces the appropriate sexual features in metamorphosis. Jodahs's male appearance was intended to effect an economy of heterosexual desire that would then prompt a congruous sexual metamorphosis, but this did not happen. 'His' identification with Nikanj overrode this social imperative.

Physical sex does not constitute the natural ground upon which appropriately gendered behaviour is based, but a latterday construction that follows heterosexual socialization.[67] This inversion challenges the previous textual essentialisms (both the Oankali's biologism and the human's naturalism) to suggest that the relationship between essentialist and constructionist models is itself potentially symbiotic. The explicit focus upon the processes of sexual acquisition in *Imago* points towards a textual deployment of essentialisms which explores rather than precludes the role of construction. As biotechnologies claim greater powers to shape our genetic essence, Butler's narrative suggests the ways in which 'essence' might itself constitute a retrospective cultural construction.

Jodahs's 'essence', the single organelle that constitutes its Oankali heritage, stimulates desire for reconstruction, knowledge and change. This essence is not inert but, like the 'Human Contradiction', indicates the material conditions which enable and constrict its transformation. Like the humans, Jodahs must achieve self-knowledge and self-control to prevent its own destruction. Its polygenetic body has the power to heal or to harm and often injures the things it instinctively desires to touch. Jodahs must continually observe its own actions, enacting a self-awareness that the 'Contradiction' necessitates for the humans on Mars.

In interview, Butler argues that for human beings, 'it's less a matter of being programmed for self-destruction than it is that self-destruction occurs because we're not willing to go beyond that principle [...]. We can, in fact we do, individually. And if we know we are like that, we ought to be able to go beyond it'.[68] This frustration with recurrent self-destructive behaviour (whether or not that behaviour is characterized in biologist or naturalist terms) reformulates the dilemma that Tiptree posed for feminism in 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?': if an intellectual recognition of the structures (of sexism, racism, or hierarchicalism) is not enough, then how might a progressive politics challenge the investment that sustains the status quo? Butler's science fiction begins by teasing out the structures that support sexism and racism (in and beyond SF) and then, paralleling the model suggested by Samuel Delany, reformulates the values and forms of these structures to allow new relationships and possibilities.

Jodahs is a healer who is able to re-generate limbs, change shape, sustain life and give pleasure. This transformative power has been generated by the Oankali manipulation of cancer cells, a human disease which they value as a special gift and a treasured tool. In *Imago* the alien reconfiguration of the structures of cancer presents a progressive alternative to the human fear of mutation and refusal to risk change. Jodahs's mates, Jesusa and Tomas, are deformed by the growths of malignant cancers which are both disabling and deadly. Their disease is the result of incestuous breeding which marks humanity's desperate desire to conceive 'pure' children, free from the taint of inter-species 'miscegenation'.

Butler's manipulation of the metaphorics of pathology in *Xenogenesis* can be read against Susan Sontag's identification of the science-fictional metaphors of cancer. Sontag argues that:

> One standard science-fiction plot is mutation, either mutants arriving from outer space or accidental mutations among humans. Cancer could be described as a triumphant mutation, and mutation is now mainly an image for cancer.[69]

The Oankali and the xenogenesis are perceived precisely as cancerous mutations by the human resisters. But in *Xenogenesis* humanity's aggressive resistance is identified as the more dangerous pathology. The resister communities' destructive over-specialization is contrasted with the multiple mixings of the Oankali heritage. In their celebration of

difference and change, the Oankali have found beauty and possibility in the patterns of the tumours. For Lilith, cancer is a disease that has killed her foremothers and represents her deadly genetic heritage (a genetic memory within her body). But the Oankali reconstruct this genetic memory, reconfiguring its codes to realize its potential as a source of transformation, empathy and healing.

The Oankali orchestration of the structures of cancer provides a potent metaphor for Butler's writing practice in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. By drawing from the structures of the American past, in which slavery represents the cancer shadowing the present, Butler transforms the cultural memories of atrocity and brutality into an exploration of difference and xenophobia. She invokes African-American history, but her re-presentations of these experiences are curative, a homeopathic response to a painful past. Audre Lorde connects the experiences of illness and racial oppression as horrors which must be confronted and overcome: 'Racism. Cancer. In both cases, to win the aggressor must conquer, but the resisters need only survive.'[70]

Butler's reworking of the past does not constitute an utopian recycling of history that suppresses the dangers or the horrors of the structures it draws from. The short-story, 'The Evening and the Morning and the Night' (1987), which is contemporaneous with the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, describes a reconstruction of cancer which has violently inverse effects.[71] The narrative describes Druyea-Gode disease (a condition that Butler has extrapolated from a number of already existing illnesses) which is the tragic side-effect of a miraculous cure for cancer. 'DGD' causes its victims to transform themselves, not through new abilities, but by pulling out their fingers, toes and eyes, and tearing off their skin. The wonder drug, referred to as 'the magic bullet', attacked the cancer cells in the body but, in this offensive, generated new horrors. This allopathic confrontation between the disease and the cure did not attempt to transform the structures of the illness, but simply to obliterate them. In contrast, the Oankali rewriting of cancer, like Butler's rewriting of slavery and miscegenation, acknowledges the complexities of those structures and aims to redirect them rather than erase them, either from the body or the memory.

Fredric Jameson argues that a distinctive feature of science fiction is that it potentially allows narratives to break through to history in a new way, 'achieving a distinctive historical consciousness by way of the future rather than the past; and becoming conscious of our present as the past of some unexpected future, rather than as the future of

a heroic national past'.[72] In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, as Donna Haraway argues, the narrative foregrounds stories of 'captivity and conquest and non-originality' in order to create a 'New World' which has 'a different set of stories attached to it'.[73] These different stories not only reshape history, which is shown to be a polymorphous narrative, but, by doing so, allow for different configurations of the present and the future.

Jodahs's permanent self-fashioning suggests its transcendence of the gendered and racial terms of human 'otherness'. But its performative morphology also locates this dissident identity within an African cultural heritage. Jodahs's shape-shifting talents are evocative of Anyanwu, the immortal, black heroine of Butler's *Wild Seed*, who is based on the Ibo legend of Atagbusi.[74] In this way, the ultimate incarnation of this new humanity reaches through history and myth to promise a polymorphous future.

1. For an analysis of the ways in which SF mediates and also challenges racist assumptions, see Edward James, 'Yellow, Black, Metal and Tentacled: The Race Question in American Science Fiction', in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War*, ed. by Phillip John Davies (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.26-49.

2. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', in *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers*, ed. by Larry McCaffery (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp.54-70 (p.54).

3. Adele Newson, 'Review of Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*', *Black American Literature Forum*, 23 (1989), 389-396 (p.389).

4. Dorothy Allison, 'The Future of Female: Octavia Butler's Mother Lode', in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (London: Meridian, 1990), pp.471-478 (p.472).

5. Cited in Sandra Y. Govan, 'Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler's Science Fiction', *Black American Literature Forum*, 18 (1984), 82-87 (p.84).

6. Frances Smith Foster, 'Octavia Butler's Black Future Fiction', *Extrapolation,* 23 (1982), 37-49 (p.45).

7. Frances Foster, 'Octavia Butler's Black Future Fiction', p.45.

8. Frances Beale, 'Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre', *Black Scholar*, March/April (1986), 14-18 (p.15).

9. Alice Sheldon in Charles Platt, 'Profile: James Tiptree, Jr', *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, April 1983, p.46.

10. Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Warner, 1993), p.3.

11. Sandra Govan, 'Connections, Links and Extended Networks', p.84.

12. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.64.

13. Octavia Butler, *Clay's Ark* (New York: Warner, 1984; repr. London: VGSF, 1991); *Dawn* (New York: Warner, 1987; repr. London: VGSF, 1988); *Adulthood Rites* (New York: Warner, 1988; repr. London: VGSF, 1989); *Imago* (New York: Warner, 1989; repr. London: VGSF, 1990). Further references to these novels are given after quotations in the text.

14. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.63.

15. Daniel Koshland, 'Sequences and Consequences of the Human Genome', *Science*, 146 (1989), p.189.

16. Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Nature, Nurture, and the Human Genome Project', in *The Code of Codes: Scientific and Social Issues in the Human Genome Project*, ed. by Daniel J. Kevles and LeRoi Hood (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.281-299 (p.282, p.288).

17. James Watson asserts that, 'the objective [of the Human Genome Project] is, to say the least, heroic [...]. It's to find out what being human is'. Cited in Pamela Zurer, 'Panel Plots Strategy for Human Genome Studies', *Chemical and Engineering News*, 9 January 1989, p.5. However, feminist scientists object to this singular interpretation of *the* human genome, which does not account for human diversity or acknowledge that 'we seem to share ninety-nine percent of our genes with the chimpanzees'. See Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Nature, Nurture and the Human Genome Project', p.297; and Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p.83.

18. This phrase is from Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) which draws upon economic and well as genetic concepts to promote and naturalize an inherently reductionist model of society. For a critique of this position see Steven Rose, R.C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, *Not In Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (London: Pantheon, 1984; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

19. Stanislaw Lem, cited in Carl D. Malmgren, *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.58.

20. Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.31.

21. See Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's Head', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), XVIII, pp.273-274. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' is taken from Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. by James Donald (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp.63-89 (p.63).

22. Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 263-264.

23. Frances Beale, 'Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre', p.17.

24. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.54.

25. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.69.

26. Cited in Sandra Govan, 'Connections, Links and Extended Networks', p.87.

27. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Verso, 1992), p.381.

28. Stephanie Smith, 'Morphing, Materialism, and the Marketing of *Xenogenesis*', *Genders*, 18 (1993), 67-86 (p.79).

29. Frances Beale, 'Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre', p.18.

30. Barbara Johnson argues that black women are 'other to the other' in that they are other to both black men and white women who are themselves other to the privileged white male. Cited in Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 1990), p.227.

31. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.67.

32. Hoda Zaki, 'Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler', *Science Fiction Studies*, 17 (1990), 239-251 (p.242).

33. Elizabeth Grosz defines essentialism as a collation of biologism and naturalism, where biologism indicates that 'biology is assumed to constitute an unalterable bedrock of identity', and where naturalism indicates 'theological or ontological rather than [just] biological grounds' for identity. She summarizes the meanings of essentialism thus: 'Essentialism [...] refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions which limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization.' See 'Conclusion: A Note on Essentialism and Difference', in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, ed. by Sneja Gunew (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.332-344 (p.334).

34. Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.xi.

35. The way in which the body is signified as a genetic text in *Xenogenesis* reflects the contemporary discourses about the sequencing of DNA. Hilary Rose argues that because 'one gene [...] can be made up of a sequence of ten thousand nucleotides stuttering its AACTGCCTATTG along its length [...] the new genetics mirrors the postmodernist discourse and reduces the complexity of nature to text'. Hilary Rose, *Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), p.199.

36. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.111.

37. Cited in bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), p.160.

38. Hazel Carby argues that in the nineteenth century black women were 'relegated to a place outside the ideological constitution of "womanhood". That term included only white women [...].' Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.308.

39. See, for instance, the collection of stories in *Alien Sex*, ed. by Ellen Datlow (New York: Dutton, 1990). For critical analysis of sexuality in SF see, *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, 18 (London: Greenwood Press, 1986).

40. C.L. Moore, 'Shambleau', in *Shambleau* (London: Sphere Books, 1976), pp. 33-61, (p.51).

41. Rachel Pollack, review of *Dawn*, *Foundation*, 44 (1988/9), 68-71 (pp.69-70).

42. Frances Bonner, 'Difference and Desire, Slavery and Seduction: Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*', *Foundation*, 48 (1990), 50-62 (p.58).

43. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p.380. Interestingly, when this short critique reappeared in *Cyborgs, Simians and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), this criticism had been erased.

44. This phrase is used by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* to denote the specific economy of hegemonic heterosexuality.

45. Diana Fuss, 'Inside/Out', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.1-10 (p.6).

46. Diana Fuss, 'Inside/Out', p.6.

47. Octavia E. Butler, 'Bloodchild', *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, June 1984. Further references to this story will be given after quotations in the text.

48. Barbara Creed argues that 'the horror film brings about a confrontation with the abject [...], in order, finally, to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between the human and the non-human'. See 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine', p.72.

49. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.56.

50. Hortense Spillers, 'Interstices: A Small Drama of Words', in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. by Carole S. Vance (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp.73-100 (p.76).

51. Akin's memories suggest an ostensibly controversial, if ultimately ambivalent, engagement of the contemporary rhetoric that surrounds reproductive technologies. His experiences attest to a foetal personhood, an identity that anti-abortionists pursue in their characterization of the foetus as 'this little guy' or 'the little aquanaut'. But these 'humanizing' constructions do anything but humanize this child. The pre-natal personality identifies Akin's difference, his non-human otherness. For a discussion of the anti-abortion movement see Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992).

53. Cherríe Moraga, 'From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism', in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (London: MacMillan Press, 1988), pp.173-190 (p.174).

54. Stephanie Smith, 'Morphing, Materialism, and the Marketing of *Xenogenesis*', p.75.

55. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p.378.

56. Stephanie Smith also draws attention to this reiteration of slave narrative motifs. See 'Morphing, Materialism, and the Marketing of *Xenogenesis*', p.76.

57. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Samuel Delany', in *Across the Wounded Galaxies*, pp.71-129 (p.76).

58. Adele Newson, 'Review of Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*', p.393.

59. Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (New York: Doubleday, 1979; repr.: London: The Women's Press, 1988).

60. Frances Beale, 'Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre', pp.14-15.

61. Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, Summer (1987), 65-81 (p.72).

62. Missy Dehn Kubitschek, *Claiming the Heritage: African-American Women Novelists and History* (London: University of Mississippi, 1991), p.51.

63. I am indebted to Michèle Aaron for explaining to me the processes of homeopathic medicine.

64. Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London: Verso, 1991), p.155.

65. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.69.

66. Hoda Zaki, 'Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology', p.249.

67. Judith Butler similarly argues against the dominant construction of the relation between sex and gender as one in which gender follows from the sexed body. She asserts an inverted model: 'the tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible "sex" ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations'. See *Gender Trouble*, p.147.

68. Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.63.

69. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor: AIDS and its Metaphors* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.69.

70. Audre Lorde, 'A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer', in *A Burst of Light* (London: Sheba, 1988), pp.49-134 (p.111).

71. Octavia E. Butler, 'The Evening and the Morning and the Night' (Eugene, OR: Pulphouse, 1991) (first publ. in *Omni*, May 1987).

72. Anders Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism - A Conversation with Fredric Jameson', in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. by Andrew Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp.3-30 (p.18).

73. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, 'Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway', in *Technoculture* (Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.1-20 (p.16).

74. Butler describes Atagbusi as an Onitsha Ibo woman who was 'a shape-shifter who had spent her whole life helping her people, and when she died, a market gate was dedicated to her and later became a symbol of protection'. See Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler', p.67.

6. The Futures of Feminist Science Fiction

> You've got to the point where you see the end, where everything collapses on you. You say, 'we're going to destroy patriarchy' - and then, no more stories. You say, 'we're going to become ungendered' - and then, no more stories. That's where all the stories end. [...] And to me, the problem is that the project [of feminist science fiction] comes to an end, and yet the problems go on.
> Gwyneth Jones, May 1995.[1]

In April 1985, The Women's Press became the first and only publisher in Britain or America to introduce a specifically feminist science fiction series to its list. Under the editorship of Sarah Lefanu, the Press signalled its aim to 'publish science fiction by women and about women; to present exciting and provocative feminist images of the future that will offer an alternative vision of science and technology, and challenge the male domination of the science fiction tradition itself'. The Press envisaged that the series would challenge the gender associations of the genre by encouraging, 'more women both to read and to write science fiction, and give the traditional science fiction readership a new and stimulating perspective'.[2]

This agenda highlighted the feminist possibilities of the science fiction genre, as it also acknowledged its entrenchment within a perceived masculinist aesthetic. The Press sought to challenge this misconstruction of the genre by publishing women's science fiction texts that had been allowed to go out of print. By reprinting major works of feminist science fiction, for instance, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), which had never before appeared in novel form, and Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), which had not previously been published in Britain, the Press aimed to establish a feminist tradition in the genre.[3] They also sought to develop the field by publishing the work of new writers (for instance Margaret Elphinstone and Jane Palmer) and by printing works by established authors who were not always associated with science fiction (for instance Josephine Saxton and Rhoda Lerman).[4] This intervention into the field effectively produced a body of texts which were identified as feminist science fiction. It also arguably fulfilled its aim to introduce SF to more women readers, and to introduce feminist SF to more science fiction readers.[5] However, this success was not sustained, and in 1994, less than ten years after it was introduced, the feminist science fiction series was dissolved.[6]

Kathy Gale, the present publishing director of The Women's Press, argues that the main challenge the series faced was in identifying and sustaining its potential readership. Critical response, she maintains, was excellent, 'but good sales were difficult to achieve because many women felt alienated from the concept of sf and many sf readers didn't expect to find sf books at The Women's Press'.[7] For Gale then, the feminist science fiction series failed both commercially and politically in its aim to disrupt the gendered associations of the genre. She suggests that for readers of The Women's Press 'the concept of sf' still evokes a stereotypical image of masculinized space opera that the intervention of feminist writers and feminist publishers has not sufficiently dislodged.

The Women's Press still publishes women writers who, in Gale's words 'could be classified that way' (as science fiction writers), but she adds 'we find it a much more successful policy to publish them as literary writers [...] so we don't signal sf on copy or covers and we aim at very strong mainstream, women's, feminist, as well as specialist sf publicity'. Citing Octavia Butler and Suzy McKee Charnas as two writers who have benefitted from the erasure of the letters 'sf' from their books, she states that 'we achieve much higher sales for them and break them out to a much broader readership'. This erasure of genre specificity, which effectively side-steps the resistance to 'the concept of sf', is presented as an advantage for both the writer and the readers of feminist science fiction. This does not mean that The Women's Press does not promote genre fiction: they were, when Gale wrote to me in January 1995, 'heavily promoting [their] crime fiction'. They also retain various other categories on their list, including biography and autobiography, lesbian fiction and non-fiction, and fiction and non-fiction by black women and women of colour. Only science fiction has been absorbed into the general category of 'literary fiction'.

The problems that The Women's Press faced in identifying a readership for their SF series may reflect specifically upon their own editorial and marketing policies, which had been criticized in 1989 as 'ideologically sound but, aesthetically speaking, deeply naive'.[8] However, the genre's decided unpopularity among the Press's feminist readers does raise certain questions about the interaction of feminism and science fiction, and the future identification of feminist SF within the genre. If feminist writers, critics and publishers have not succeeded in their aim to 'challenge male domination of the science fiction tradition' does this force a revision of the relationship between feminism and SF; perhaps even divorce? Should critics follow The Women's Press in categorising feminist SF primarily as

feminist writing and overlook its generic associations? And if so, what are the consequences of this strategy, not only for textual practice but also for feminist articulations and critiques of science and technology?[9] In other words, what are the wider implications, if, in the 'technoculture' of the fin de siècle, women feel 'alienated' from a fiction which represents feminist speculation about humanity's technologized future?

Since what we might ironically term the 'Golden Age' of the 1970s, feminist SF has retained a problematic status. Critics have argued that in the 1980s the mode became nostalgic and exhausted. Josephine Saxton, for instance, claims that 'anything of importance that women have to say about being women, through SF, has already been said by Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, Tiptree Junior, Marge Piercy and a few others'.[10] This final chapter addresses these concerns to explore the ways in which contemporary feminist writers are engaging the science fiction genre. A number of significant women writers have become prominent in the field in recent years, including Octavia Butler (although her writing career began in the 1970s), Gwyneth Jones, Pat Cadigan and Melissa Scott. These writers draw from and develop the project of feminist SF to continue, but also to critique, earlier representations of gender politics. Their fiction constructs gender as a political category which cannot be disentangled from other technological and social aspects of embodiment. In this way their work implicitly reflects and enriches the development of feminist theory as, in Donna Haraway's words, a 'cyborg politics'.

Haraway's metaphor, which articulates the potentiality of feminist theory through a science-fictional image, constitutes a structuring motif for this concluding chapter. The cyborg figures a transgression of the boundaries which sustain gendered and racial categories, but it also threatens the frontier between the human and its others. Feminist SF has persistently deconstructed the distinctions between humans and animals, humans and aliens, and humans and machines. Russ, Tiptree and Butler all questioned the stability of these constructions, and I would suggest that these explorations ground the more recent work of Jones, Cadigan and Scott.

The relationships between feminist SF in the 1970s and the more recent fictions of the 1980s and '90s also need to be contextualized within the theoretical debates about the generic position of feminist SF. Feminist critics have challenged the genre status of this work, to question its identification as either science fiction or feminist. Marleen Barr, for instance, has argued that 'SF is not feminist', and she attempts to eradicate the taint of

genre from these works.[11] Joan Gordon, on the other hand, asserts that the difficulty for the feminist movement in SF lies not so much in the masculinism of the genre, as in the unadventurousness of its feminist politics.[12] Read against each other, these contradictory critical positions might generate new ways in which to approach the interface between feminism and science fiction which characterizes this literature.

Feminist Science Fiction as Feminist Fabulation

The Women's Press's reclassification of feminist SF was prompted by commercial considerations, but it also reflects a critical trend within academic studies, in which the boundaries between popular and literary genres are being contested. Mainstream critics of postmodernist fiction, such as Brian McHale and Fred Pfeil, have represented the interactions between postmodern and science fiction as indicative of a collapse in those generic distinctions.[13] However, as Roger Luckhurst points out, the postmodern integration of 'high' and 'low' cultures implicitly reinforces that categorization by evading, rather than erasing, those boundaries, 'and by evading [them], reinscrib[ing] their effects'.[14] McHale, for instance, characterizes science fiction as 'postmodernism's non-canonized or "low-art" double, its sister genre'.[15] The feminized metaphor signals the intimacy of this relationship whilst also invoking a gendered equation to imply science fiction's literary inferiority. The theorization of the relationship between SF and the mainstream, and specifically canonized postmodernism, is also, though, a significant feature of recent work by critics within the science fiction field. The invention of new terms, such as Veronica Hollinger's 'specular SF' or Bruce Sterling's 'slipstream', testifies to the need to articulate the similarities and convergences, as well as the differences, between marginalized and mainstream literatures.[16]

Marleen Barr has approached this debate from a feminist critical perspective to suggest that feminist SF in particular should be distanced from the connotations of literary inferiority inherent in this genre identification. She argues that feminist SF should be redefined within a 'supergenre of women's writing' that she names 'feminist fabulation'.[17] In the introduction to this thesis I outlined some of the problematic consequences of this erasure of genre specificity, including the way in which, to distinguish her field, Barr reduces science fiction to its lowest (pre-feminist) common denominator: unreconstructed

space opera. Barr's proposal can thus be positioned as the academic counterpart to The Women's Press's abdication of genre.

Barr's argument is also concerned with issues of readership, but she focuses her attention exclusively upon feminist academia. It is this audience that she hopes to introduce to the texts of feminist fabulation. In her essay 'Positioning Feminist Science Fiction within Feminist Fabulation: Octavia Butler and James Tiptree Do Not Write About Zap Guns' (which perhaps in Tiptree's case is debatable), Barr outlines the effectiveness of revising the classification of these authors:

> When Butler, Tiptree, and their colleagues are no longer stigmatized by the label *science fiction* they will no longer be literary aliens. [...] Isolation as a subgenre, not absorption into a larger literary whole, has been and will continue to be fatal to feminist science fiction.[18]

Barr's lack of theoretical rigour means that the terms of this absorption remain problematic within her thesis. Her claim, for example, that all feminist SF, newly defined as feminist fabulation, should be recognized as part of the postmodern canon, is a palpable distortion of the field. And, although certainly polemical, is it not misleading to suggest that a continued association with its generic roots will be 'fatal' to feminist science fiction? Does this genre status inevitably lead to the suppression or trivialization of these texts in academic scholarship? One American reviewer, commenting on Barr's *Lost in Space*, suggested that, 'the very works Barr examines are, for the most part, still in print, still being taught on plenty of university courses, and consequently are far from languishing in oblivion'.[19] Even within a British context, in which universities have not traditionally recognised science fiction studies, there are signs of change.

The *Foundation* survey of 1993, which the editors observed was 'unlikely to contain a full list of all science fiction courses in the UK' listed eighteen institutions teaching science fiction texts.[20] Feminist science fiction was included in many of the courses, at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels. Significantly, however, feminist science fiction was also taught on courses entitled, 'Women's Writing' and 'Women in Literature' which would suggest that at least some texts are achieving academic recognition outside the genre. The inclusion of feminist science fiction in such courses is, I would suggest, becoming more, and not less, common as literary studies is itself redefined by the expansion of cultural studies in the field.

Barr's claim that, within the academy, the label science fiction is especially misrepresentative and damaging to feminist or women's writing seems to be unsubstantiated. But the implications of this assertion surely demand that feminists should focus critical attention upon the gendered discrepancies of such exclusion, rather than abandoning (space)ship, women and children first.

Barr either does not recognise the increased visibility of feminist SF in academia or (quite rightly) judges such change to be insufficiently radical. However, her own critique of the suppression of feminist SF ironically perpetuates this marginalization. Barr asserts that 'feminist theory (where it does not ignore feminist SF) very often views feminist SF as an unknown, terrifying, monstrous space and considers it to be mad, improper, unclean'.[21] This hyperbolic characterization repeatedly references the work of 'mainstream' feminist critics, but Barr neither addresses, nor acknowledges, the work of feminist science fiction critics to nearly the same degree. Nan Albinski, Angelika Bammer, Sarah Lefanu, Natalie Rosinsky and Thelma Shinn, all of whom have written books about feminist science fiction, feminist speculative fiction or feminist utopias, are noticeably absent from the bibliographies of *Feminist Fabulation* and *Lost in Space* - as are the number of women who regularly contribute to *Science Fiction Studies* (including the co-editor Veronica Hollinger), *Extrapolation* and *Foundation.*

This lack of acknowledgement may be strategic, potentially reinforcing Barr's polemic that feminist SF has not received scholarly attention because its generic identification connotes literary inferiority. The category 'feminist fabulation' would evade this censure by asserting the affinity between mainstream and science fiction feminisms. It effectively inverts the arguments for genre specificity, asserted by SF critics. Samuel Delany, for instance, claims that the generic inter-textuality of science fiction necessitates that individual texts be read within and against the genre, and that a reader's familiarity with other SF narratives will affect their interpretation of the individual text.[22]

Barr, in contrast, implicitly asserts that the primary identification is determined not by genre, but by gender, or at least gender politics. She argues that feminist SF must be read within and against the larger fields of feminist and women's writing, rather than against non-feminist works. This promotion of inter- as opposed to intra-generic associations is a provocative articulation of the need to transgress the restrictions of literary categorization. Barr's identification of feminist SF's heritage (the 'modernist

mothers' of 'postmodernist daughters') beyond the genre, suggests how this extended context influences the feminist movement in science fiction. Feminist fabulation also connects those writers whose work borders on science fiction, or draws from its motifs, to those working in the genre itself.

One writer whose oeuvre transgresses genre definitions is Marge Piercy, whose writing includes poetry, political essays, and historical, romantic and confessional novels, as well as science fiction. Piercy's most recent SF novel, *Body of Glass* (1992) - published as *He, She and It* (1991) in the USA - exemplifies feminist science fiction's engagement with other theoretical and literary texts.[23] In *Body of Glass* the science fiction text is drawn into dialogue with the Jewish legend of the Golem. These historical and SF narratives are thus interwoven to suggest a relationship between the religio-mystical figure of the Golem and the techno-metaphorical figure of the cyborg. This association identifies the cyborg with, and contextualizes it within, an historical struggle for freedom against ethnic intolerance and sexual oppression. It also demonstrates the feminist reinscription of discourses which Barr sees as characterizing feminist fabulation.

Piercy directly supports this categorization and describes Barr's project as a 'mission of rescue' for stigmatized texts. In the foreword to Barr's *Lost in Space* she describes the negative implications of the label science fiction upon both the commercial and critical reception of her own work:

> If you doubt the fear of that label, when my novel *He, She and It* won the Arthur C. Clark award for the best work of science fiction published in the United Kingdom, my American publisher would not sticker the books for fear winning this prize would actually hurt sales. You don't want it shelved among science fiction, she said. Indeed, of all my novels this one - one of the most ambitious and complex - received the fewest reviews in the feminist press, because of its genre.[24]

These arguments suggest that, as The Women's Press concluded, the label science fiction reduces the potential audience for these works. In spite of its status as a popular form, it would seem that in the publishing market, the genre confers neither popularity nor respectability onto women's writing. Barr's definition of feminist fabulation might overcome this commercial stigma, but as an academic category its all-inclusiveness renders it overly diffuse.

As a critical category, feminist fabulation might enable an analysis of the interactions between feminist theory and feminist fiction, which I would suggest are intrinsic to the movement of feminism in SF. The category of feminist fabulation, as Barr presents it, initiates a trans-genre critical practice by evading feminist SF's own generic history. But generic specificity need not be lost in the formation of connections between feminist SF and other feminist fictions which draw from the motifs of horror, fantasy, science fiction, utopia or dystopia to represent the potentialities or actualities of women's lives. As a critical category, feminist fabulation might constitute a mosaic of feminist imaginative writing, which acknowledges the relationships between and within different generic forms.

Just as the critical designation of fabulation transgresses the limitations of particular genres, so the articulations of feminism should also address the multiple perspectives within its radical discourses. As black feminists and (in response) white postmodern feminists have asserted, expressions of gender are inevitably inflected by a network of other identificatory practices and positions. Feminist theory must, like fabulation, also risk a proliferation of voices if it is to recognize the provocative interconnections between diverse progressive movements.

The fiction of Russ, Tiptree and Butler challenges conventional genre codings, but it also challenges the discourses of contemporary 1970s and 1980s feminist theory. Feminism does not just inform these works, it is actively constituted as the raw material for their fabulations. These writers precipitate and anticipate feminist theory, presenting in Donna Haraway's terms a 'potent fusion' that deconstructs the generic distinction between theory and fiction.[25] This interaction generates new discursive possibilities for the theorizations of feminist science fiction, and the science-fictionalization of feminist theory.

The Science Fictionalization of Theory

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr describes the collapse of the theory/fiction divide in science fiction as an expression of postmodernism. He argues that:

> SF has ceased to be a genre of fiction *per se*, becoming instead a mode of awareness about the world, a complex, hesitating orientation toward the future. The SF condition requires a form of theoretical reflection that breaks down the boundaries between theoretical discourse and SF.[26]

As the proliferation of technologies transforms the present into a science-fictional hyperreality, unable to envisage its own future, SF is increasingly represented as a contemporary zeitgeist. Csicsery-Ronay asserts that SF is a privileged discourse in postmodernism because, after the 'catastrophic failure of traditional humanistic thought', SF is the only form of literature capable of 'mirroring reality'.[27] Drawing upon the work of Baudrillard and Haraway he demonstrates that their theoretical discourses reflect what he terms the 'science fictionalization of theory'. He argues that Donna Haraway's work, especially the 'Manifesto for Cyborgs':

> [...] describes a context that is so radically transformed and alien to the comforting essentialist categories of the dominant form of theoretical discourse, or the hyper-abstract categories of most post-structuralist theory, that it fulfils the most rigorous conditions of cognitive estrangement, while attempting rigorously to describe the real. [...] 'Manifesto' is, to my mind, a work of SF.[28]

Csicsery-Ronay's incisive analysis deliberately ignores the 'feminist aspect[s]' of Haraway's 'Manifesto'. Justifying this exclusion, he quotes Haraway's comment that, for the cyborg, 'gender is incredibly problematic', adding, 'it seems certain to me that the cyborg's future is inconceivable in terms of contemporary feminist discourse - or indeed *any* political or disciplinary discourse - no matter what its initial conditions of construction may have been'.[29] Although he recognizes that the cyborg represents a playful, blasphemous refiguring of socialist feminism, Csicsery-Ronay abandons these (humble?) origins and positions the cyborg within the heady heights of post(gender)modernism. The cyborg (as a transgressor of zones) inevitably engages a multiplicity of discourses. But its problematic gender, its transgression of all gender identification, signifies its engagement with, and challenge to, feminism - not its transcendence of those politics.

Haraway's 'Manifesto' generates a science-fictional metaphor to signify the future of socialist feminism, a cross-fertilization (between theory and science fiction) that is explicitly evoked in her analysis of several feminist SF texts which 'underl[ie]' the themes of the essay. In 1991, Haraway focused directly upon this intersection as a potentially generative site for new theorizations of the problems of postmodernism:

> Much work needs to be done in the cultural space hinted by the intersections of science fiction, speculative futures, feminist and antiracist theory, and fictions of science. For me, the best place to locate this work remains 'in the belly of the monster,' that is, in the fictional and technical

> constructions of late-twentieth-century cyborgs, site of the potent fusions of the technical, textual, organic, mythic, and political.[30]

Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg symbolizes the crossing of boundaries between the human and its other. Literally a cybernetic organism, the cyborg suggests the problematization of the meanings of human embodiment, and the meanings of human identity, as an effect of both materiality and positionality. Feminist and non-feminist science fiction has repeatedly drawn upon, and subverted, these images of otherness to represent women's identification as the other in patriarchy.

During the 1980s, as we saw in Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, some feminist SF writers began to contextualize the exploration of gender within a more urgent questioning of the meanings of humanity, a movement which is highlighted in the differences between Piercy's two SF novels. *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) uses the science fiction mode to represent the utopian possibilities of Shulamith Firestone's 'Revolutionary Demands' in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) - primarily 'the freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction' and 'the diffusion of the child-rearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women.'[31] Piercy's novel, like Samuel Delany's *Triton* published in the same year, attempts to erode the meanings of sexual difference to present a post-capitalist, post-racialist, post-gender utopia.[32]

Body of Glass (1992) on the other hand takes up Donna Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg to explore the blurring of the distinctions between the human and the non-human, as gender politics are subsumed beneath the corporate battles for technological supremacy.[33] This later text suggests that it is within the cyborg identities of Yod and Nili, rather than the androgynous identities of Bee or Luciente, that feminism must negotiate the contested meanings of sexual difference. Both these novels, with their different emphases, seize the radical indeterminacy of technology and offer a feminist response to Haraway's assertion that 'the things many feminists have feared most can and must be refigured and put back to work for life not death.'[34] Feminist science fiction, in its exploration of those things that exist on the borders of the human - the animal, the alien, the machine - is a promising, if 'monstrous', forum for this necessary reconfiguration.

The Cyborg Politics of Feminist Science Fiction: Animals

> 'It was a lie: the bridge wasn't broken'
> Maureen Duffy, *Gor Saga* (1981)

Donna Haraway argues that the cyborg is constituted within the 'leaky distinction[s] [...] between human-animal (organism) and machine'.[35] Of the first transgression, between human and animal, Haraway maintains that biology and evolutionary science, as well as ecological and feminist theory, 'have reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace'.[36] The fantastic and mythical representations of transformations between humans and animals in native and ancient cultures are, she suggests, newly inflected by Western technologies, so that in the late twentieth century this boundary has been 'thoroughly breached'.[37] Lisa Tuttle argues that these transformations, especially between women and animals, have emerged as a significant theme in feminist SF.[38] The feminist re-visionings of traditional fairy tales, especially in the work of a writer such as Angela Carter, who occupies the borderlands between science fiction and the fantastic, reconceive the cyborg figures of the werewolf and the vampire to express female agency.[39] In the ironic voice of the 'Sisters Grimmer', these feminist fabulators challenge the gender stereotypes and feudal codes of these patriarchal narratives.[40]

Suzy McKee Charnas also re-presents the werewolf in her short-story 'Boobs' (1989, 1990) which draws from horror and fantasy rather than SF motifs.[40] The story is told in the teenage voice of its heroine who describes her first menstruation as a process of transformation, not into 'a young woman', but into a wolf. 'That time of the month' takes on a new implication as the she-wolf roams the night wreaking bloody retribution on the boys who torment her about her adolescent body. Charnas experienced difficulties publishing this story. She explains:

> *Seventeen* wouldn't touch it, and *Ms.* told me they weren't taking fiction [...]. I kept getting answers from female editors that went like this: "God, I really *loved* this story - how well I remember - but it just isn't right for our readership." In the end Gardner Dozois bought "Boobs" for *Asimov's*.[41]

Charnas's story was eventually published in a SF magazine, even though Dozois requested a 'minor' rewrite to make the heroine less 'unsympathetic'. But was it the genre

identification or the feminist anger which made this story unacceptable in mainstream magazines?

In contrast to Charnas's angry and ironic story, Pat Murphy's 'Rachel in Love' (1987) is a gentler tale which won the Nebula award.[42] Murphy's story, in which a scientist technically re-incarnates his dead daughter, Rachel, in the body of a young chimpanzee, is more conventionally science-fictional than Charnas's violent fantasy. When her 'father' dies, Rachel embarks upon a voyage of self-discovery and sexual awakening within a human culture which despises her as an animal. As well as confusing traditional humanist categories, the narrative contains a powerful critique of vivisection.

Captured and caged in a laboratory, Rachel develops a relationship with the deaf janitor, a relationship which she attempts to interpret sexually in terms of his pornographic magazines and the stories she reads in abandoned copies of *True Romance* and *Love Confessions*. Murphy's story in many ways constitutes a critique of the hegemonic 'rite of passage' into conventional femininity, but the suggestions of a disturbing confusion between human and animal sexualities are ultimately diffused. Rachel does not have sex with the janitor, but elopes with a male chimp. In the final scene Rachel rejects the magazines' empty stereotypes of white femininity and celebrates her animality:

> In the dream, she has long blond hair and pale white skin. Her eyes are red from crying and she wanders the house restlessly, searching for something that she has lost. When she hears coyotes howling, she looks through a window at the darkness outside. The face that looks in at her has jug-handle ears and shaggy hair. When she sees the face, she cries out in recognition and opens the window to let herself in. (p.46)

This ending potentially evades the dangerous couplings of Rachel's cyborg identity by transforming the text into a comfortable allegory of self-acceptance. The romance conventions echo Maureen Duffy's *Gor Saga*, but are not contextualized within a collective resistance to malevolent science, as they are in that text.[43] Lisa Tuttle argues that Murphy's narrative resolution suggests a backlash against the collective politics of the 1960s and '70s: 'of course it is popular; it tells us, men and women both, what we want to hear, that we don't have to struggle to change the world, it's enough to accept ourselves - and our places - in it.'[44]

Murphy's text reflects what is critically held to be the predominant mood of feminist SF in the 1980s. Maria Lauret argues that 'in 1980s fiction the problem of writing

in an environment increasingly hostile to feminism comes to the fore in [...] fantasy modes of writing'. She continues 'the central question for feminist critics in reading 1980s women's fiction is precisely the often masked influence of [in Cora Kaplan's phrase] "the massive hegemony of the Right"'.[45] This influence has been repeatedly remarked in studies of feminist science fiction: Lauret detects 'a hostility to feminism' in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)[46]; Peter Fitting argues that Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986) reasserts heterosexism[47]; Joan Gordon regrets the gender politics of Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* (1986) 'where a good woman nurtures, shares and shuns violence'[48]; and Nicola Nixon suggests that the 'uncontrasted dystopias' of the 1980s represent 'barely concealed allegories of feminism's complacency and failure [...] a form of quasi-didactic (fictional) finger-shaking'.[49]

The Cyborg Politics of Feminist Science Fiction: Aliens

Lisa Tuttle's own dystopian short-story 'Wives' (1979), in which a planet's population is coerced into servitude by a group of male colonizers, anticipates this retreat from collective and confrontational feminist politics. When one 'wife' rebels against the men, her resistance is perceived by the others, who remember the violence of their subjection, as dangerous and doomed: 'It was as Maggie had said: one renegade endangered them all.'[50] Tuttle engages the science-fictional motif of alien contact to deliver, through the simple metaphor of an alienated femininity, an allegory of feminism's retreat from the ideological power of the Right. Feminist critics have suggested that this affinity between women and aliens is a characteristic of women's science fiction, traceable to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.[51] But this relationship offers feminist writers opportunities for more complex articulations of women's otherness in patriarchy.

Since Stanley Weinbaum's 'A Martian Odyssey' (1934) the relationship between humans and aliens has been constituted within a dialectic: the alien figures difference, the strangeness of the other, but it also suggests familiarity.[52] This ambivalent relationship challenges human behaviour and identity to question (or reinforce) dominant values and assumptions. In Tiptree's and Butler's work, the alien figures the alienation between human beings, and specifically between men and women, forcing humanity to review the meanings of our intra-species differences as well as our species integrity.

More recently the British writer Gwyneth Jones has employed the theme of alien-contact to explore not only the constructions of gender but also the role of feminism in science fiction. Jones's two recent novels *White Queen* (1991) and *North Wind* (1994) are set in a near future in which the world has been ravaged by an ecological catastrophe, 'the 04', which has ultimately had less impact than the economic implications of the alliance between China and Japan.[53] This future, as Jenny Wolmark observes, has a 'weary familiarity', a 'same-but-different' feel.[54] Microchip technology has been replaced by an organic compound called 'coralin', and new viruses, such as QV, a mutation of the AIDS virus, are infectious across the human/technological interface.

When the aliens arrive they are assumed to be superior beings, or, as the science-fictional logic goes, 'we'd be visiting them' (*White Queen*, p.69). The humans' naive misconstruction of alien power contrasts with the more cynical view of the aliens themselves who exploit this advantage for capital gain. The irony is familiar in science fiction comedy, and suggests the way in which Jones is placing her text within and against the conventions of the genre, as an example of, and a critique upon, science fiction. More specifically, Jones's texts engage the thematic concerns of feminist SF (gender-free societies; the war of the sexes; androgyny; the deconstruction of the sex-gender system) to expose the dangers, as well as the necessity of this focus.

The aliens' sudden appearance overshadows news of the socialist revolution in the USA, but does not provoke exceptional alarm. Neither, in *White Queen*, does their presence effect much disruption within human societies. The physical differences between the aliens and the humans are not pronounced, and Clavel, the alien protagonist of *White Queen*, manages to 'pass' as human when he/she needs to. But there are differences, and the discrepancies between the human and alien perspectives have devastating consequences in the sequel novel, *North Wind*. At the conclusion of *White Queen* one character observes the nature of these differences: 'humans and aliens were so alike. They were two almost identical surfaces, at first glance seamlessly meeting: at a closer look hopelessly just out of synch, in every tiny cog of detail' (*White Queen*, p.309).

Michael Beekler argues that this ambiguity is characteristic of the role the alien plays in science fiction. He argues that:

> [The alien] always positions itself somewhere between pure familiarity and pure otherness [...]. Taking its place on the border between identity and

> difference, it makes that border articulating it while at the same time disarticulating it and confusing the distinctions the border stands for.[55]

The aliens represent humanity's other, but they also present a model for human transformation. *North Wind*, for example, describes the human cults of 'halfcastes' who surgically alter their bodies and adopt alien practices to escape the limitations of humanity. The alien presence suggests alternative identities, but, in addition, their perception of the human condition constitutes a cognitive estrangement which disturbs the 'naturalness' of human self-representations, and especially the constructions of gender.

The aliens are hermaphroditic and perceive sexual difference to be a fundamental division within the human species. However, their interpretation of sex is radically discontinuous from their conception of gender. The human obsession with gender characteristics is 'a huge joke' for the aliens, but 'the funniest thing about it was that the locals', their term for humans, '*didn't seem to know the difference*' (*White Queen*, p.117). The aliens understand gender as a spectrum of personality traits within any one individual which is unconnected to physiognomy, even in humans. The aliens' effective deconstruction of the sex-gender system ostensibly precipitates the human 'Gender Wars' in *North Wind*, but this simple cause-effect model is complicated in Jones's texts by an exploration of the slippages between human and alien perceptions.

Sidney Carton, the 'halfcaste' protagonist of *North Wind*, explains that the motivation for the war lies within the intersection of gender and economics:

> 'It was the Aleutians,' said the halfcaste, forgetting to protest that the war wasn't really about gender. '[...] The women saw the aliens: with no one forcing sex on them; having children and not getting their pay docked for the privilege; and so on. The men saw the same aliens doing what comes naturally with no thought for the consequences, and nobody having unrealistic expectations or nagging them to behave. They both said to themselves: if the Aleutians don't have to put up with that shit, why do we? The superbeings made it valid for everybody to be a person. But - cut it any way you like - that means there's twice as many fullsized humans in any given area than there used to be: and still only one planet. Naturally, there's a war.' (*North Wind*, p.93)

This battle of the sexes evokes a familiar theme in SF, and especially the feminist and anti-feminist SF of the 1970s and 1980s. In Jones's texts, however, the interaction between the alien-contact and the sex-war motifs complicates the articulation of differences. The aliens are generically other to the human race, and yet they also represent the potential for a

reconfiguration of humanity. The radical differences between species others have been transposed onto the more familiar human differences between gendered others in a displacement which both evades and emphasizes the implications of the aliens' presence.

The ambivalence of this response to the aliens, as a confusion about the terms of this inter-species relationship, is already suggested by the aliens' own ambiguous adoption of the name 'Aleutian'. The humans are unsure of its origin, 'they spoke in proverbs, sometimes they made no sense whatever. The term "Aleutian" was a case in point' (*White Queen*, pp.98-99). Perhaps it is a simple reference to one of the places where they landed, but the name remains suggestive of the discursive position they occupy both within the text and in relation to humanity. The Aleutian Islands once marked the division between the enemies of the twentieth-century Cold War, but in this near-future they now signal the point of connection between Russia and the newly socialist USSA. This contested location indicates the fluidity of borders, and represents the ways in which the aliens, in Beekler's words, 'confus[e] the distinctions the border stands for'. Similarly the 'Gender Wars' do not constitute an absolute division between sexes (or species), but represent a series of shifting political and economic positions. The signifiers 'Men' and 'Women' have become largely metaphorical: 'the humans hated the terms "Men" and "Women" to be used for their political division. They preferred "traditionalists" and "reformers". But here in the enclaves, alien and human usage of the gender-words blurred together' (*North Wind,* p.107).

The allusions to the feminist articulations of Womanland and Manland, in texts by, for instance, Russ, Charnas, Tiptree or Gearhart, place Jones's narrative in dialogue with this tradition of feminist SF. Phonetically, the aliens' name might also signal the thematic redeployment of familiar feminist motifs (Aleutian echoes allusion). Aleutian society is, for instance, androgynous, presenting a utopian image of a post-gender world to the human race. Moreover, the alien protagonists - Clavel in *White Queen* and Bella in *North Wind* - are falsely feminized by the humans, and this misrepresentation implicitly disrupts conventional notions of gender.

The echoes of the issues of feminist science fiction are central to these texts, but like the eponymous 'white queen', which does not appear until late in the narrative, their representation is caught within a series of displacements. Jones's texts interrogate the constructions of gender, but they also critique the discourses of feminism. The

identification of 'gender' as the focus of the war belies the real political differences which characterize the factions. It implies that feminist politics has achieved a significant role, but obscures the ways in which this status is hollow. Jones's texts suggest that sexual politics can be manipulated to distract from, rather than direct, the urgency of change.

This political slippage is articulated and ironized in *White Queen* when the Aleutians propose the World Conference of Women's Affairs (WOCWOM) in Krung Thep, Thailand, to be the official forum for human/alien contact. The WOCWOM is discussing the 'Eve Riots' in which women around the world have been rebelling against economic exploitation. The British delegate, the 'stern, elderly, socialist-feminist', Ellen Kershaw, characterizes the whole affair as an exercise in evasion (*White Queen*, p.60):

> The WOCWOM annoyed her because, lifelong feminist as she was, she knew how that sexual-politics label obscures the real issues, to the advantage of the enemy. This was basically a conference about global labour conditions, which the employer nations did not feel obliged to attend. (*White Queen*, p.62)

The aliens mistakenly believe this marginalized assembly to be the government of the world. This alien misconstruction of human politics has the effect of propelling feminism to the centre of the world stage (and the centre of the text). But it also effectively marginalizes those issues (the Eve Riots) even further, as the alien presence dominates the conference. The alien invasion thus prioritizes and displaces the role of feminism in the text in a way that mirrors the privileging and evasion of economic issues in the manipulation of the sign of feminism.

Kershaw's socialist-feminist politics interpret 'women's affairs' as a strategic misnaming of economic oppression. She thus signals the way in which 'sexual politics' and even 'feminism' must be recognised as ambivalent terms, or as Jones suggested in interview, terms 'that you can no longer trust'.[56] This polemic is contrasted in the text by two other feminist discourses: the essentialist interpretations of the Aleutians who characterize men and women as 'two nations', the child-bearers and the 'obligate-parasites' (*White Queen*, p.117); and the liberal-feminist arguments of Sidney Carton, which draw upon the utopian model of the Aleutians to assert that 'everybody [is] a person' (*North Wind*, p.93).

These competing definitions acknowledge that feminism is a contested politics, and that its future role is far from certain. The arrival of the aliens demands a more urgent

questioning of human identity, but the differences between humans and aliens are misrecognized (by Aleutians as well as humans) as their systems of reference remain 'hopelessly just out of synch' (*White Queen*, p.309). Sexual difference is rendered as the essential divide, but an analysis of the construction or maintenance of human sex and gender is evaded by the estranging simplicity of the aliens' perspective. Jones's critique of feminism in science fiction, and her recontextualization of gender as, not only a difference that makes a difference, but also a difference that is repeatedly *remade* by its interaction within a network of other political, economic and ideological discourses, opens new possibilities for feminist SF. Her texts interrogate the role of feminism in science fiction, and conversely, the role of science fiction in feminism. *White Queen* and *North Wind* do not abandon the 'project' of feminist SF, but challenge the ways in which it has been absorbed into the genre. Jones describes the encroachment of feminist ideas in science fiction as 'a predator/prey situation' in which 'each new development is coopted. You have to hope that it's been coopted some of the time in ways you would want'.[57]

To escape this impasse feminist writers must examine the themes of feminist SF to explore the ways in which SF (or indeed fabulation) accommodates feminism by evading the implications of its discourse, in the wake of the New Right. But they must also recognize the limitations, as well as the necessity, of feminist discourses in the exploration of human futures (or future humans). If Jones evades the label feminist SF, this exploration suggests that her texts might constitute a meta-feminist-SF.

The Cyborg Politics of Feminist Science Fiction: Machines

Jones's critique of feminist SF, as a significant but necessarily limited project within science fiction, parallels Joan Gordon's critical dissatisfaction with the movement. Gordon claims that feminist SF has failed to address the urgent challenges of our technological postmodern age and needs to find new directions. She categorizes feminist SF as either 'overt' or 'covert', a hierarchicalized opposition which privileges a covert feminism. Her essay describes *overt* feminist science fiction as a narrative which 'always grapples with the definition of femaleness and at least implies the possibility of a world whose values support a feminist definition of female identity'. In contrast, *covert* feminist science fiction 'ignores the definition [of female identity], showing a sexually egalitarian world; furthermore, its

values often ignore specifically feminist issues, making its morality a more generally applied one'.[58]

Whereas the politics of overt feminist SF are circumscribed by the parameters of female identity, the feminist polemic in the second definition appears so covert as to have all but disappeared. In its focus upon the role of feminism in science fiction, Gordon's critique contrasts with Marleen Barr's attempted erasure of science fiction from feminist SF, even as it shares the conservative retreat into more covert identifications. But, with Barr, Gordon's work emphasizes the need to revise the 'project' of feminist science fiction.

The problematic intersection of overt gender politics and overt genre affiliation has proved to be commercially disadvantageous for feminist SF writers. It has also, according to Barr, deprived their work of scholarly recognition. Recategorization may regenerate the commercial audience, but it obscures the complex interactions of gender and genre in this fiction. Writers and critics of feminist science fiction should engage rather than evade its problematic status, because it is only through such confrontations that feminist SF will, in Joan Gordon's words, 'allow us to shape and manage our futures rather than escape them' (p.199).

Gordon gives only one example of covert feminist SF, the 1980's cyberpunk movement. Cyberpunk, she argues, feels no need to be 'good', or present positive images, as overt feminist SF must, but represents an imperfect future world in which women writers may explore 'the underside of female identity' (p.201). She cites Pat Cadigan's *Mindplayers* (1987) as an illustration of feminist cyberpunk, although in response to Gordon's article, Cadigan protested that there was nothing covert about her feminism. She argued that '[her] work is overtly feminist'.[59]

Veronica Hollinger's contention that cyberpunk constitutes 'an analysis of the postmodern *identification* of human and machine' suggests an alternative configuration of the relationship between this writing and feminist politics.[60] The cybernetic interface is the leitmotif of cyberpunk, and in this sense the movement might be seen to replicate the conditions of Haraway's cyborg as a potent image for feminists. As Mary Ann Doane points out, 'when technology intersects with the body in the realm of representation, the question of sexual difference is inevitably involved'.[61]

Candas Jane Dorsey's short-story '(Learning About) Machine Sex' (1988) makes an explicit identification between technology and the feminized body.[62] The narrative

confronts the reader, demanding a response: 'A naked woman working at a computer. Which attracts you most?' (p.76) This interrogation which echoes the aggressive narratorial voice in Tiptree's 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973), highlights the way in which both women and technology are commodified as objects of (male) desire. It is this identification which motivates the female protagonist, Angel, to develop a new computer game, 'Machine Sex'. Angel programmes the stages of orgasm onto software as a sardonic comment upon the relations of man and machine. The narrative concludes by asserting: 'Now you don't have to choose. Angel has made the choice irrelevant' (p.97).

Dorsey's parodic rearticulation of cyberpunk's implicit gendering and sexualizing of the cybernetic interface anticipates the concerns of feminist critics. Nicola Nixon has demonstrated the gendered permutations of William Gibson's cyberspace. She draws attention to the ways in which the activities of the hacker are shadowed by those of the rapist: cyberspace is a feminized space that must be 'penetrated' by the hacker who 'sleazes up to the target'.[63] Nixon suggests that:

> Whether or not we choose to see Gibson's configuration of the frightening feminine matrix as an extension of particular anti-feminist politics of the '80s, we are still left with the fact that his male heroes play out their masculinity within that specific locus of femininity; their very masculinity is constituted by their success within and against it.[64]

Dorsey's story ironizes the construction of the gendered interface, but it does not present a feminist alternative. For although Dorsey's protagonist is female, both the software and the narrative are ostensibly directed at a male user/reader (although of course the true implied reader is the feminist who reads between the lines). The story thus exposes but does not escape the sexualization of the technological interface.

If this sexualization represents, as Nixon argues, an anti-feminist construction of the interface, Gordon's claim that 'cyberpunk may be feminism's SF salvation' appears over-optimistic (p.197). But cyberpunk must be contextualized, not only within the postmodern cultural politics of the 1980s, but also as part of the historical development of the science fiction genre. The movement of cyberpunk has generated much critical debate over the last decade, and much of this writing has centred on the question of its science-fiction heritage. Samuel Delany has characterized this as an 'endless, anxious search for fathers' which strives for paternal legitimation.[65]

In his introduction to *Mirrorshades* (1986), Bruce Sterling characterizes cyberpunk as, 'steeped in the lore and tradition of the SF field'. He identifies 'ancestral cyberpunks' from the 'New Wave', the 'harder tradition' and from 'SF's native visionaries': all of the writers he mentions are men.[66] But Sterling has been much criticized for his exclusion of feminist writers from this inheritance. Nicola Nixon argues that the movement is 'riding on the heels of seventies feminist SF writers', and Samuel Delany suggests that without feminist science fiction 'there wouldn't *be* any cyberpunk'.[67] Gibson especially, he contends, would not have been able to create 'his particular kind of female characters [..] without the feminist science fiction from the Seventies'.[68]

Gordon's identification of cyberpunk as covert feminist SF develops her claim that 'the movement has been and continues to be strongly influenced by feminist SF writers' (p.197). This literary heritage, she suggests, destabilizes the 'overt[ly] masculinist' surface of cyberpunk, and empowers a feminist revision of the movement (p.196). But, in spite of the influence of feminist science fiction, she acknowledges that women writers have to (literally) 'break into the boys' club' (p.197). Pat Cadigan, the only woman writer associated with the movement in the 1980s, reports in interview that her status as a cyberpunk was often contested. She comments that one fanzine writer attempted to oust her from the movement by systematically rubbishing her published writing and arguing that the cyberpunks should be 'choosier' about who they accepted as part of the group. Cadigan claims that this attack was motivated by the fact that she was a woman writer, suggesting that 'he picked the one person who he thought was least likely to meet him in a dark alley with a piece of pipe. But in fact he was wrong!'[69]

Cadigan is no longer the only woman writer whose works engage the motifs of cyberpunk. Other feminist texts that draw from cyberpunk include Gwyneth Jones's *Escape Plans* (1986), Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), and Melissa Scott's *Burning Bright* (1993), *Dreamships* (1992), and *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994).[70] These feminist writers reconfigure the cybernetic interface to address, what Jenny Wolmark terms cyberpunk's 'fundamental ambivalence towards the body'.[71] Pat Cadigan and Melissa Scott both critique the way in which the cyberpunk body (as 'meat') is inevitably figured as the white-straight-male universal. In their work they recontextualize the body within social- as well as cyber-space to rearticulate the interactions of the material and the virtual body.

Feminist Cyberpunk: Pat Cadigan and Melissa Scott

> They say a hacker's burned out before he's twenty-one - note the pronoun.
> Candas Jane Dorsey, '(Learning About) Machine Sex'

In *Synners* (1991), Cadigan reverses the conventional gendered paradigms of cyberpunk.[72] In this text cyberspace is a masculine matrix, dominated by 'Art Fish', the viral/virtual ghost in the machine. The hacker is female, a young woman called Sam who uses her body's internal energy (via thin wires) to power her interface with the 'System'. This initial reversal of gendered positions signals Cadigan's concern not only with the masculinist metaphors of cyberspace, but also with the meanings of technological and material embodiment. The four protagonists of *Synners* all represent, as Anne Balsamo observes, different forms of embodiment. Balsamo argues that these different experiences of the body express a sexual difference between the female 'body-in-connection' and the male 'body-in-isolation'.[73] But these static characterizations, although astute, elide the various slippages between social- and techno-bodies in the text. These bodies are marked in various ways by their construction within both the technological and urban environments of the city.

Gina, Cadigan's strong, physically tough heroine is one of the few black women in cyberpunk, and represents an embodied physicality that is marked by race and gender (Balsamo positions Gina as 'the marked body').[74] The male characters, Visual Mark and Gabe, are both 'marked' by their relationships with Gina.[75] She represents an embodiedness that, in spite of her status as a synner (a synthesizer of music and images, who creates virtual reality rock videos), is opposed to the virtuality of the matrix. Visual Mark, as Gina's ex-lover and fellow synner, reinscribes cyberpunk's celebrated abhorrence of the flesh. He describes his body as a 'meat-jail' (p.232) that limits his interaction with the system. His fantasy of disembodiment is realized towards the end of the text when he has a stroke whilst jacked in. Mark becomes part of the matrix but his stroke is transformed into a virus that simultaneously causes the death of thousands of others who are on-line. Cadigan thus shows the cyberpunk fantasy of technological transcendence to have potentially devastating consequences. The virus is only destroyed when Gabe and Gina re-enter the matrix using power from Sam's body.

As Mark relinquishes his body to the machine, so Gabe finally discovers his own embodiment in cyberspace as he learns to synthesize his experiences of the virtual and the physical. His body is also a marked body, marked by his sexual/violent relationship with Gina, and marked by the prosthetic virtual reality hotsuit: 'his skin bore the impression of a baroque pattern of snaky lines punctuated by the sharp geometric variations of the numerous sensors' (p.42). The technological interface leaves its marks upon the body as an inscription that potentially transforms the meanings of embodiment, of pleasure, sexuality and pain.

Cadigan's exploration of the interface between body and machine in *Synners* is focused by the repetition of the question 'change for the machines?'. The ambiguity of this refrain (at once an innocent request and a technological dilemma) prompts an analysis of how embodied identity will be reconfigured by technology, without determining which agency will shape those changes. To be agents of our own future we need to direct the cultural, bodily and economic implications of society's change for the machines. Cyberpunk may well, as Joan Gordon proposed, be one forum for such feminist inquiry.

Like Cadigan, Melissa Scott rewrites cyberpunk to explore the promise as well as the dangers of cyberspace technology. Her texts also engage the problematic issues of the ways in which our technological embodiment will redefine the nature and meanings of human identity: in Cadigan's terms the difference between synthesizing or synthesized entities. In *The Kindly Ones*, Scott explores the distinction between the actor and the image; in *Burning Bright* she develops this exploration through the motif of virtual gaming; and in *Dreamships* she represents the social and moral dilemmas created by the achievement of artificial intelligence.[76] In her latest novel, *Trouble and Her Friends*, Scott reconfigures the themes of cyberpunk to engage the *politics* of the postmodern challenge to liberal humanism. Her work addresses the marginalized and oppositional identities that Andrew Ross finds significantly absent from 1980s cyberpunk:

> Cyberpunk's idea of counterpolitics - youthful male heroes with working class chips on their shoulders and postmodern biochips in their brains - seems to have little to do with the burgeoning power of the great social movements of our day: feminism, ecology, peace, sexual liberation, and civil rights.[77]

Trouble and her friends are a 'queer family', connected through their sexuality, who function as an alternative family within the borders of the hacker 'community'. They are

constituted as outsiders, as queer, because of their sexuality and also because they have all undergone cranial surgery to implant the 'brainworm'. The brainworm is similar to the internal socket in Cadigan's *Synners*, and allows a full-sense interaction with cyberspace, which enables the user to 'experience virtuality as though it were real' (p.14). This illegal surgery represents the interface between body and machine as a dangerous fusion, a mutilation that acknowledges and confronts the risks of technological embodiment. As Trouble reflects: 'it was almost always the underclass, 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' (pp.128-129).

In Scott's text, the material body is not transcended within cyberspace, but is intimately connected to the virtual world. This cyber-becoming is contextualized within a feminist negotiation of meanings of gender, race and sexuality. Scott's visualization of cyberspace does not engage the metaphors of an escape from physicality which reappear in Cadigan's work. She constitutes cyberspace as an alternative space, a supplement that is both within and without the material world. It is bound to the social (there are virtual towns on the nets where business is done), and those bodies who are stigmatized in the 'real world' do not evade hostility because they occupy a virtual field. Cyberspace offers a potential reinscription of bodily identities, but not as a form of transcendence. Scott's characters do not seek the temporary liberation of virtual disembodiment and do not attempt to disguise their sexual, gender or racial identities on the nets. Her cyberpunks are persistently embodied, even as they die of AIDS and suffer the effects of environmental pollution. For as Sandy Stone asserts: 'no refigured virtual body, no matter how beautiful, will slow the death of a cyberpunk with AIDS. Even in the age of the technosocial subject, life is lived through bodies'.[78]

Scott's text, like Cadigan's, marks an intervention into the cyberpunk movement which disrupts the masculinist aesthetics of white male transcendence. She draws from cyberpunk's 'credible futures' and collapses the distance between the novum and the zero world by evoking contemporary debates about the Internet and the Worldwide Web within a future that 'reflects' the present. The issues of privacy; global network autonomy; personal and social identities; and accountability, structure Trouble's quest to find the imposter who assumes her name.[79] The narrative explicitly challenges the conventional representation of the hacker (as a white, straight male) through the interactions of the

queer family and Trouble's insistence that women have the right to access technology, even if they have to fight to enact it. In this near-future society prejudices persist and marginalized people must assert their presence in these future worlds: 'too many men assumed that the nets were exclusively their province, and were startled and angry to find out that it wasn't' (p.120).

Cyberpunk, and science fiction more generally, are no longer masculinist 'provinces', but nevertheless women and men must continue to assert radical and feminist identities in the genre. The feminist reconfigurations of the genre codings of conventional science fiction narratives have generated provocative, alternative spaces for explorations of our futures. The ground-breaking interventions of Russ, Le Guin, Charnas, McIntyre and Tiptree in the 1970s were formative of what later became identified as the subgenre of feminist science fiction. But feminist SF did not 'crawl under a stone' in the 1980s and '90s, as Jones claims.[80] Writers such as Butler, Cadigan, Scott and Jones herself continued to question both the generic and political possibilities of the genre.

I have traced the feminist movement in SF from the late-1960s to the present to elucidate the ways in which feminist SF texts have responded to the changing political and theoretical issues in feminism. From a questioning of female agency, the texts discussed in the thesis have explored what it means to 'be' a woman (or a man), what it means to write as a man (or a woman), and what it means to 'be' human. I have highlighted the questions these texts raise for feminist theory to demonstrate the ways in which this fiction not only interprets but actively contributes to the discourses of feminism. Feminist SF critics have frequently remarked that feminist SF is informed by feminist theory, but the ways in which feminist SF extrapolates from feminist arguments to confront new or difficult questions (which at times anticipate later debates) is often overlooked. I wanted to identify feminist science-fictions as indeed examples of 'speculative feminisms'.

As a generic classification, the term 'feminist SF' may have become commercially unviable and critically restrictive. Feminism can no longer be identified as a coherent movement in SF. But as an oppositional politics, the influence of feminist thinking still resonates in SF, even if, as was the case with cyberpunk, the influence of feminist SF remains unacknowledged. Rather than being exhausted, the critical intersections between feminism and science fiction are still generating progressive texts. Feminists are still writing SF, and their presence in the margins of the literary mainstream needs to be

recognized. As our 'zero world' hurtles towards the techno-sprawls of cyberpunk, perhaps our future fictions might be truly on-line, circumventing the repressive grip of corporate publishing through networked feminist alternatives. As readers, we might be about to experience our own cyber-becoming. But as Alyx would say, 'that's another story'.

1. Gwyneth Jones in interview with Amanda Boulter, 27 May 1995.

2. This explanatory statement features on all The Women's Press science fiction texts.

3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (London: The Women's Press, 1979); Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (New York: Bantam, 1975; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1985).

4. See Margaret Elphinstone, *The Incomer* (London: The Women's Press, 1987); Jane Palmer, *The Planet Dweller* (London: The Women's Press, 1985); Josephine Saxton, *The Queen of States* (London: The Women's Press, 1986); and Rhoda Lerman, *The Book of the Night* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1986).

5. I would suggest that The Women's Press series did introduce science fiction to new readers, although my evidence for this, based upon my experience working in a radical bookshop, is anecdotal and impressionistic.

6. The collapse of The Women's Press series has implications for the publishing of feminist SF. Christina Sedgewick suggests that the small presses have a major role to play in sustaining feminist and other radical science fiction. Joanna Russ argues that such presses enable writers such as herself more creative freedom. She argues, 'I was able to write *Kittanny* because when I first thought of it I also thought of a market, which was one of the small feminist presses, Daughters, Inc.' Sedgewick argues that even for figures such as Russ 'self-censorship remains a problem as long as writers have reason to believe that non-standard work will not be considered publishable'. She illustrates this situation by describing Samuel Delany's treatment by Bantam Books. Apparently after hearing about the 'gay content' of Delany's Neveryon series, the corporate bookstore Barnes and Noble slashed their order of the third volume. In response, Bantam reduced the print-run of that volume and subsequently rejected the fourth without reading it. Tor Books later rejected the same manuscript when these retailers refused to stock *any* Delany book. Although Sedgewick does not include this in her account, it is interesting to note that the Neveryon series was eventually published by a university press. See Christina Sedgewick, 'The Fork in the Road: Can Science Fiction Survive in Postmodern, Megacorporate America?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (1991), 11-52.

7. Kathy Gale, personal correspondence, 23 January 1995. Further references to Gale's comments are taken from this correspondence.

8. Roz Kaveney, 'The Science Fictiveness of Women's Science Fiction', in *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Helen Carr (London: Pandora Press), pp.78-97 (p.96).

9. Donna Haraway notes in 1991 that according to the National Science Foundation statistics, 'fewer women are getting engineering degrees, fewer women are entering science programs than was true ten and fifteen years ago. The gains of women, in the sixties and seventies, as practitioners of science and engineering have been eroded, and the same thing is true for people of color, men and women alike'. See Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, 'Cyborgs at Large:

Interview with Donna Haraway', in *Technoculture*, ed. by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Oxford, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.1-20 (pp.14-15).

10. Josephine Saxton, 'Goodbye to all that...', in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction*, ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.205-217 (p.214).

11. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1992), p.4.

12. Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke It Out', in *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction*, ed. by Larry McCaffery (London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 196-202 (first publ. in *Science Fiction Eye*, 2 (1990) 37-40).

13. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) and Fred Pfeil, *Another Tale to Tell: Politics and Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London: Verso, 1990).

14. Roger Luckhurst, '"Border Policing": Postmodernism and SF', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (1991), 358-366 (p.365).

15. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p.59.

16. Veronica Hollinger, 'Specular SF: Postmodern Allegory' in *State of the Fantastic: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Fantastic Literature and Film,* ed. by Nicholas Ruddick (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp.29-39; and Bruce Sterling cited in Larry McCaffery, 'Introduction: The Desert of the Real', in *Storming the Reality Studio*, pp.1-16 (p.10).

17. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation*, p.xiii.

18. Marleen Barr, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 97-107 (pp.101-103).

19. Nicola Nixon, 'The Rebel's Progress', *Science Fiction Studies*, 21 (1994), 421-426 (p.422).

20. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, 'Science Fiction Courses in Higher Education in Great Britain: A Preliminary Guide', *Foundation*, 59 (1993), 59-69 (p.59).

21. Marleen Barr, *Feminist Fabulation*, p.xvii.

22. Samuel Delany, 'Generic Protocols: SF and Mundane', in *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fiction*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen, and Kathleen Woodward (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980), pp. 175-193.

23. Marge Piercy, *Body of Glass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992); first published as *He, She and It* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1991).

24. Marge Piercy, 'Foreword: Marleen Barr's Lost and Found', in *Lost in Space*, pp.ix-xi (p.x).

25. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.190-233 (p.196).

26. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, 'Editorial Introduction: Postmodernism's SF/SF's Postmodernism', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (1991), 305-308 (p.308).

27. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Editorial Introduction', p.306.

28. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, 'The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (1991), 387-404 (p.396).

29. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'The SF of Theory', p.402.

30. Donna Haraway, 'The Actors are Cyborgs, Nature is Coyote, and the Geography Is Elsewhere', in *Technoculture*, ed. by Constance Penley and Andrew (1991), pp.21-26 (p.24-25).

31. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), pp.192-195.

32. Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (London: The Women's Press, 1979); Samuel Delany, *Triton* (New York: Bantam, 1976).

33. The influence of postmodern-feminist theory on *Body of Glass* is made explicit in the book's acknowledgements in which Piercy remarks that 'Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" was extremely suggestive'. See *Body of Glass*, p.584.

34. Donna Haraway, 'The Actors Are Cyborgs', p.25.

35. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', p.193.

36. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', p.193.

37. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', p.193.

38. Lisa Tuttle, 'Pets and Monsters: Metamorphoses in Recent Science Fiction', in *Where No Man Has Gone Before*, pp.97-108.

39. See Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

40. See Tanith Lee, *Red as Blood, or Tales From the Sisters Grimmer* (New York: DAW, 1983).

40. Suzy McKee Charnas, 'Boobs', in *Skin of My Soul: New Horror Stories by Women*, ed. by Lisa Tuttle (London: The Women's Press, 1990), pp.18-38. First published in a slightly different form in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, 1989.

41. Suzy McKee Charnas, 'Boobs', p.37.

42. Pat Murphy, *Rachel in Love* (Eugene, OR: Pulphouse, 1992) (first publ. in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, 1987). Murphy's story won the Nebula for best novelette in 1987.

43. Maureen Duffy, *Gor Saga* (London: Methuen, 1981).

44. Lisa Tuttle, 'Pets and Monsters', p.101.

45. Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.167.

46. Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature*, p.177.

47. Peter Fitting, 'Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19 (1992), 32-48.

48. Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke It Out', p.197.

49. Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19 (1992) 219-235 (p.220).

50. Lisa Tuttle, 'Wives', in *A Spaceship Made of Stone* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), pp.25-34, (p.32) (first publ. in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, December, 1979).

51. See Virginia Allen and Terri Paul, 'Science and Fiction: Ways of Theorizing about Women', in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, 18 (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.21-36.

52. Stanley Weinbaum, 'A Martian Odyssey', in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame: The Greatest SF Stories of All Time*, ed. by Robert Silverberg and others, 3 vols (London: Sphere, 1972), I, pp.11-38.

53. Gwyneth Jones, *White Queen* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991) and *North Wind* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1994).

54. Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp.46-47.

55. Michael Beekler, 'Border Patrols', in *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction*, ed. by George Slusser and Eric Rabkin (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp.26-42 (p.32).

56. Gwyneth Jones in interview with Amanda Boulter, 27 May 1995.

57. Gwyneth Jones in interview with Amanda Boulter, 27 May 1995.

58. Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke It Out', p.196. All further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

59. Pat Cadigan in interview with Amanda Boulter, 28 May 1995.

60. Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', in *Storming the Reality Studio*, pp.203-218 (p.205).

61. Mary Ann Doane, 'Technophilia: Technology, Representation, and the Feminine', in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses Science*, ed. by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller and Sally Shuttleworth (London, Routledge, 1990), pp.163-176 (p.163).

62. Candas Jane Dorsey, '(Learning About) Machine Sex', in *Machine Sex and Other Stories* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), pp.76-97.

63. William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p.202.

64. Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground', p.228.

65. Samuel Delany, 'Some *Real* Mothers ...: The *SF Eye* Interview', in *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) pp.164-185 (p.177) (first publ. in *Science Fiction Eye*, 1 (1987)).

66. Bruce Sterling, 'Preface' in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. by Bruce Sterling (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp.vii-xiv (p.viii).

67. Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground', p.220; Samuel Delany, 'Some *Real* Mothers', p.177.

68. Samuel Delany, 'Some *Real* Mothers', p.173. Gibson's Molly Millions who appears in 'Johnny Mnemonic' (1981) and the *Neuromancer* trilogy is a paid assassin who has grafted claws under her nails. She strongly resembles Russ's Jael in *The Female Man.*

69. Cadigan in interview with Amanda Boulter, 28 May 1995.

70. Gwyneth Jones, *Escape Plans* (London: Unwin, 1986); Melissa Scott, *Burning Bright* (New York: Tor, 1993); *Dreamships* (New York: Tor, 1992); and *Trouble and Her Friends* (New York: Tor, 1994).

71. Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, p.118.

72. Pat Cadigan, *Synners* (London: Grafton, 1991).

73. Anne Balsamo, 'Feminism for the Incurably Informed', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 92 (1993), 681-712 (p.692).

74. Valerie Smith has criticized the ways in which white feminist writers and theorists present black women as symbols of the material. She argues that, 'it is striking that at precisely the moment when Anglo-American feminists and male Afro-Americanists begin to reconsider the

material ground of their enterprise, they demonstrate their return to earth, as it were, by invoking the specific experiences of black women and the writings of black women. This association of black women with reembodiment resembles rather closely the association, in classic Western philosophy and in nineteenth-century cultural constructions of womanhood, of women of color with the body and therefore with animal passions and slave labor. Although in these theoretical contexts the impulse to rehistoricize produces insightful readings and illuminating theories, and is politically progressive and long overdue, nevertheless the link between black women's experiences and "the material" seems conceptually problematic'. See 'Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the "Other"' in *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women*, ed. by Cheryl A. Wall (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 38-57 (p.44).

75. Balsamo characterizes the other protagonists as 'the body that labors' (Sam); 'the disappearing body' (Visual Mark); and 'the repressed body' (Gabe). See 'Feminism for the Incurably Informed', p.688.

76. Melissa Scott, *The Kindly Ones* (New York: Baen Books, 1987).

77. Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London: Verso, 1991), p.152.

78. Allucquere Rosanne Stone, 'Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures', in *Cyberspace: First Steps*, ed. by Michael Benedikt (London: MIT Press, 1991), pp.81-118 (p.113).

79. Recent conferences in Britain, such as *Virtual Futures*, Warwick University, May 1995, and *Digital Diaspora: 40 Acres and a Microchip*, ICA, June 1995 have focused on just these questions.

80. Gwyneth Jones in interview with Amanda Boulter, 27 May 1995.

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