

‘En usynlig krop’: Transgressing the Boundaries of the Body in Vibeke Grønfeldt’s
Mulighedernes land and I dag

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One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice addressed to the social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations. The cyborg is a kind of disassembled, and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code. (1)

The body is composed of a branching network, decreasing in size right down to the level of molecular tubes at the mitochondrial scale. Geometrically, a body is a ‘space-filling fractal’ of a ‘fourth dimensionality’, between a two-dimensional plane and a three-dimensional volume’ [...] A body lives in three dimensions only at the envelope of the skin. (2)

1. Samsø Cyborgs: National Margins and New Media

Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto insists that late twentieth-century feminisms must be about ‘transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities’. (3) Rather than searching for sameness in the experience of women everywhere, cyborg feminisms are concerned with ‘an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction’. (4) It is this sense of boundaries in process which, I will argue, informs the texts of the Danish author Vibeke Grønfeldt: firstly, boundaries of individual, community and nation; secondly, boundaries between

human and nature; and, thirdly, boundaries between organisms and technologies. The two latter distinctions are Haraway's explicit concerns; the first distinction is implicit in her Cyborg Manifesto, and reflects, too, a tension absolutely central to Grønfeldt's fiction.

This essay focuses on two of Grønfeldt's novels: Mulighedernes land (Land of Possibilities, 1989) and I dag (Today, 1998). (5) Its special concern is the site in these texts where the negotiation of the above boundaries is felt most acutely: the body. Grønfeldt writes the confrontation of the body's boundaries with the environment and with other bodies, the body as a process in biological and historical time, and the pathologies of sickness and death, exploring the contestation of the boundary between the individual's body and the collective environment in which it moves.

Grønfeldt is not normally associated with such concepts as cyborgs and technologies. Most criticism classifies Grønfeldt's novels as writing-from-the-margins, a marginality somehow coded as encompassing history, geography and gender. The 'lokalt bundne livsformer' (forms of life rooted in the local) described in her prose are often assumed to be pitted critically against modern forms of life. (6) Although the author's native Samsø must be the geographical centre of Denmark, Grønfeldt's Denmark is 'othered' by critics as outside and anterior to modernity; in this landscape, it seems, Mother Nature is the passive victim of the Father of Invention, and the countryside's long, slow Fall into the knowledge of metropolitan late capitalism is an allegory for that of national society. Yet, even the beleaguered Danish country bumpkin has access to the media of supermodernity:

In Denmark it is possible for people to be isolated from the rest of society economically, while remaining in the midst of the common media flow, with all the knowledge they could want about world politics, big city life, cultural

trends, and fashion phenomena. Grønfeldt's novels take place in this double world. (7)

In fact, many of Grønfeldt's novels take technology, especially media and communications technology, not only as a theme – writing the virtual space in which the fragmentarily-glimpsed outside world unfolds – but also as a structural fillip, an organising principle suggestive of other logics of time, space and memory that can help us to think the palimpsest of lives and stories that constitute a community. In I dag, events and phenomena of national and international import – the Moon landings, the Berlin Wall, film stars, Grauballe Man – filter into the locals' field of vision via the radio, newspapers, television and teletext; the weave of local tales in Mulighedernes land is punctuated by newspaper clippings and official reports. While this sites the local community in global time, the global flood of images is always mediated, situated, and metonymic: 'De vælger en enkelt forureningskilde, en enkelt atomprøvesprængning, mens stråler og gift fosser ud overalt [...] De skaber orden i kaos, skiller godt og ondt'. (ID, p. 39) (They choose a single source of pollution, a single nuclear test, while radiation and poison are seeping out everywhere [...] They make order out of chaos, distinguish good from bad)

Thus the narrators of these novels are as self-consciously media-savvy as the narratives themselves. In this sense, Grønfeldt's writing – her recent novel Det nye (The New, 2003) furthers her exploration of the interplay of media and material life – fulfils Haraway's exhortation that

[c]yborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (8)

In other words, the traditional – and traditionally gendered – dualities of nature and science, of cyclical, bucolic time and linear, modern time, of dailiness and historical progress (9) can fruitfully be abandoned, or at least problematised. Technology not only bears and stores our stories; it also sculpts them. If Grønfeldt's narrators often regret the invasion of their community by the media of (post)modernity, her narratives embrace it as a trope and an ordering principle. I would argue that Mulighedernes land and I dag were in the vanguard of the pre-millennial literary re-negotiation of national spacetime in Denmark, as the national imagination struggled to accommodate post-national phenomena such as the space-time compression of the glocal era, domestic gender- and ethnicity-based identity politics, and European economic and political integration. (10)

In what follows, the cyborg subjects and bodies in Grønfeldt's texts are explored as they move back and forth over the boundaries identified earlier: individual / community / nation; human / nature; and organisms / technologies.

2. Textual Communities

The homogeneity of the nation (or, indeed, of any community) is a politically expedient mirage, now exposed as such by gender and identity politics, and by recent research into the cultural construction of national identities. We live, after all, in multiple concentric circles of communities, of in-groups and out-groups. Narratives such as 'Danishness' and 'womanness' cross-cut each other, and in turn are intersected by narratives and identities based on age, ethnicity, class and politics; membership of communities is always in flux. Haraway suggests that reading the fictional representations of such narratives can help to reconcile us to the multiplicity of women's experience:

Readings may function as technologies for constructing what may count as women's experience and for mapping connections and separations among women and the social movements which they build and in which they participate in local/global worlds. (11)

However, reading is not just an anthropological activity that can open up other, 'authentic' experiences of the world to the reader: 'reading is itself a practice of memory, because texts are forms of prosthetic social memory by which readers increase and correct their own limited cognitive strengths and participate in a public memorial space'. (12) Narrative facilitates as well as reflects communal sentiments, discourses and behaviours, colluding in the construction of an 'imagined community'.(13)

Mulighedernes land and I dag can both be read as attempts to negotiate the temporal and spatial instability and heterogeneity of a community, or, rather, of a rural town and the shifting social connections which constitute it, and of its intersections with the larger (national/global) community of which it forms a part. In both cases, the town is nameless; the social environment is given limited coherence by the recurrence of various names, or by the regular return to a municipal institution: the plejehjem (care home) or graveyard. Both novels are constituted of a number of discrete but interconnected texts recounting episodes in the lives of the townspeople in the second half of the twentieth century. This formal structure allows for the representation of local, national and global spacetime as other than homogeneous and linear, and as variously experienced by multiple subjects. Accordingly, it also opens up a space for disjunctive hi/stories in which traditional models of causality and chronology are less privileged than the voices of marginal groups, sometimes referred to as 'jarring witnesses' to history. (14)

The narrative voice is also significant; in both novels, a third-person omniscient narrator is interspersed with the first-person comments of one individual local resident, whose interjections appear in italics, and who also seems to be at least intermittently omniscient. Certain interjections render problematic the boundaries between individual and collective memory:

Hun gik en lille tur og så sig omkring, som havde hun ikke set kioskerne og modebutikkerne før.

Hun standsede lige på det sted, hvor den unge mand tre år senere slog sig ihjel på motorcykel. (ID, p. 248)

(She took a little walk and looked around her, as if she'd never seen the kiosks and boutiques before.

She halted at the very spot where the young man, three years later, got himself killed on his motorbike.)

These italicised addenda, though, may be directly or only tangentially related to the story in which they are embedded. The distinction between the general and interposed points of view is hard to grasp until, some way into either text, the density of comment by the local 'jeg' results in some understanding of his or her standpoint. In Mulighedernes land, the italicised voice is that of a local woman as old as the century, a community photographer, and therefore a chronicler of both the private and the public dimensions of local history. In I dag, the voice belongs to Verner, an orderly at the community plejehjem, who hears and re-tells the stories of the residents. Indeed, the two novels are so similar in these structural respects that I dag might be seen as a more compact re-working of the earlier two-volume novel. In a key passage, Verner sums up the contradictions in his narrative position:

Jeg har valgt og delt tingene op. Herunder mig selv. [...] Med dele mener jeg krop og sjæl, bevidsthed og lyster, hænder og hoved, fællesskab og privatliv. Og på grund af opdelningen har jeg ikke andel i de sædvanlige, blandede livshistorier, som består af sammenrodede små og store og gode og onde episoder [...]

Sammenblandingen giver uvægerligt kortslutninger. (ID, p. 285)

(I've made a choice, and divided things up. Including myself. [...] By divided I mean body and soul, consciousness and instincts, hands and head, community and private life. And because of these divisions I'm not involved in the usual, assorted life-stories that consist of mixed-up small and great and good and bad episodes [...] Combining them inevitably results in short-circuits.)

Similarly, the Photographer claims, erroneously: 'min historie skal ikke fortælles'. (ML, p.1) (my story is not the one being told) In both cases, the claim to neutrality and separation from the community undermines itself, not only because the interjections of these supplementary narrators are embedded in the wider narrative, but also because in telling, they are also told; their life-stories are implicated in their accounts of other lives, and they are therefore both synecdoche and collective. These narrators, then, approximate what Fredric Jameson has described as a postmodern 'non-centred subject that is part of an organic group or collective', an alternative to 'the old, closed, centred subject of inner-directed individualism' and 'the new non-subject of the fragmented or schizophrenic self'. (15) For Haraway, too, the blurring of boundaries between teller and told, between individual and collective memory, sidesteps the totalising announcement of the death of the subject, before certain marginal subjects have even managed to speak. In starting to think, for example, 'gendered, racial subjectivities', we must, she argues, 'take affirmative and critical

account of emergent, differentiating, self-representing, contradictory social subjectivities, with their claims on action, knowledge and belief". (16)

Where the two novels do deviate is in their chronology. Whereas the fifty-six texts in Mulighedernes land have no identifiable chronological arrangement, I dag specifies the minute, hour, day and year of each of its episodes, and orders them at regular intervals from 1952 to 1996. This formal play with time and history problematises memory. Non-academic forms of historiography, such as oral accounts, recovered memory, urban legend, and so on, have normally been considered the preserve of women; gossiping is a gendered activity and an unprivileged form of narrative. (17) However, some sociological theories of memory insist on its collective nature. The influential work of Maurice Halbwachs dismisses individual memory as useless until incorporated into a social network of mutually reinforcing remembrance, located in a particular material space. (18) This renders suspect not just the reliability of any one account of an event, but also the boundary of individual and collective thought. The narrators' subversion of the traditional narrative standards of singularity, veracity and linearity might resemble Haraway's cyborg: 'a disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self'. (19)

The spatio-temporal boundary of the community lies at the limits of its interaction. The disjunction between the material architecture of the community in I dag and the rest of Denmark is held up against the town's inexorable integration into the larger world, as a scandal in May 1994 'får byens gamle navn på avisforsiderne og hele byen set fra luften på tv-skærmen'. (ID, p. 182) (makes front-page news of the town's ancient name and brings aerial views of the whole town to the TV screen) The Photographer in Mulighedernes land laments her own calculation that the indigenous population numbers around 400; in summer, the population rises to 10,000, with the

arrival of the summer house owners. These two towns, she muses, share the same space but are not the same place; the new colonised the old, but there has been no war; they have simply never seen each other. (ML, p. 319) On the other hand, the indigenous population is boosted by the presence of the ‘several thousand’ of their number in the graveyard, a space quite other to the cultural spaces of the living, but nevertheless connected inextricably to all the other spaces of the society, for everyone has relatives in this “‘other city”, where each family possessed its dark dwelling’. (20) The lines of collective belonging and history are therefore diachronic as well as synchronic.

Indeed, the boundary between bodily life and death is permeable in these novels. The possibility of burying loved ones alive is a recurring trope, (ML, pp. 20, 33) while the plejehjem constitutes a kind of antechamber to death, where one can, like Stella, wait 4,230 days for death. (ID, p.100) Death does not extinguish the participation of the individual in the textual community, for the deceased is remembered, photographed, or features in another episode set during his or her lifetime.

As a corollary to this ontological boundary, I dag worries at its bodily materialisation. While the brain, the material seat of individual consciousness and memory, might be said to be securely separated from the outside world by the cranium, on a few occasions, the deep time of evolution is invoked, (re)turning the individual (specifically, the human brain) into a link in the evolutionary chain:

I femogfyrre år har der været orden og ro af en anden verden ind i kraniets stilhed. Den bløde, muslingeformede substans har med samme sikkerhed udført store og små opgaver til gavn for manden. En konstant proces

bestående af livets samlede erfaring. Sekund lagt på sekund i millioner af år.

(ID, p. 63)

(For forty-five years, an other-worldly order and peace has reigned in the silence of the cranium. The soft, mussel-formed substance has with consistent certainty performed tasks great and small for the man's benefit. A constant process consisting of life's accumulated experience. Second heaped upon second over millions of years.)

Hvad har de mange millioner år ikke oplagret og gemt i hjernevævet? (ID, pp. 242-3)

(What have the many millions of years not stored up and hidden away in the brain?)

Here we have a sudden appeal to a defamiliarising micro-perspective, an inner biological world, the limits of cognition; the first extract is taken from a passage describing how a cerebral haemorrhage spreads through the brain. The echo of this sudden loss of consciousness is heard in a shocking passage in Mulighedernes land in which a father, concerned that his daughter will compromise her virtue with a local boy, kills her as she sleeps by driving a large nail through her skull. (ML, p. 207) The phallic irony of this gesture hardly needs to be explored; but the collective litanies and rituals of the girl's funeral are iterative, organic, communal:

de samme mennesker igen og igen - mellem en strøm af nye - opsøgte den dragende scene. Blomsterbjerget voksede fra dag til dag, mens duftene hele tiden undergik dybe forandringer fra æblerose, lathyrus, jasmine, nellike (ML, p. 207)

(the same people again and again - amongst a stream of newcomers - sought out the compelling scene. The mountain of flowers grew from day to day, while the scents incessantly metamorphosed from briar rose to sweet pea to jasmine to carnation)

This example of the abuse of women on the grounds of their (purported) sexuality leads us to Sarah Ahmed's observation that communities, such as feminisms, are built on shared pain. While the individual's experience of bodily pain is qualitatively different from those who only identify with it, she argues, the act of identification with an injustice is itself constitutive of group identity, for the pain delineates the surface or limit of the group's 'body':

Pain matters for a collective politics; it matters in so far as the experience of pain is precisely about the bodily life of the process of harm and being harmed [...] we can also say that injustice is unjust precisely in so far as it affects the bodies of individuals and communities, that is, in so far as pain impresses upon the surfaces of those bodies or creates the effect of the surface in the intensity of its affect. (21)

The life-stories in Mulighedernes land and I dag have their marginal geographical provenance in common, and the concomitant 'pain' of the disintegration of rural life in the late twentieth century marks the margin of the marginal. Cross-cutting the textual communities of the towns, though, are the myriad communities of living and dead based on gender, ethnicity, age, or more specific forms of life-experience. It is for the reader to read these connections into the text, and to choose to which textual communities s/he belongs; to let boundaries of belonging coalesce around shared pain, shared affiliation, or shared experience.

3. Body and Environment

In employing the term ‘textual community’ I am also alluding, in addition to the connections between people, to the dimension of the material world which resides in text; in the representations of the landscape, people, customs, histories and stories of a community. Literary depictions of places wend their way over time into the imaginations of the readers who live in or visit those places; the imaginative traffic between landscapes and cityscapes and their representations in ink, oil, celluloid or digital code is not one-way. (22) Our vision of a place is always mediated by what we have read or heard about it. This sharing of environmental information is one interface between the textual and material communities.

But what of the everyday practices that embed us, bodily, in our cultural home; the food, weather, flora and fauna, traditions and rituals, many of which, by virtue of their familiarity, their incorporatedness, go unremarked? Michael Billig’s study of Banal Nationalism (23) suggests that the most potent expressions of national identity are thoroughly banal and environmental. Homi K. Bhabha sees the nation as a daily performance, a constant re-negotiation of the pedagogy of the national narrative: ‘[t]he scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects’. (24) In telling stories of the everyday, non-privileged, iterative activities of community life, as performed by women and men, Grønfeldt’s texts frustrate any easy attribution of a talent for ‘dailiness’, for sustaining ‘the ground of life’ to women alone. As Haraway insists, ‘daily competence’ is mothering and machines. (25)

It is the body’s participation in this dailiness that concerns me here, insofar as movement and affect are caught up in the everyday reiteration of belonging to a place

and to a community, and – also – in reading about a community. Reading about the smell of flæskesteg is, to be sure, an experience that is qualitatively different from physically smelling roast pork, though sense-memory (verbal, kinesthetic, olfactory) is activated by text in currently little-understood ways. (26) Brian Massumi thinks that when we read ‘we directly experience fleeting vision-like sensations, inklings of sound, faint brushes of movement [...] In the experience of reading, conscious thought, sensation, and all the modalities of perception fold into and out of each other’. (27) Grønfeldt’s *Photographer* provides a little meta-textual commentary on the possibility of sensations ‘body-hopping’: ‘hans beskrivelse af alle symptomerne fik hende til at mærke det værste i sin egen krop’. (ML, p. 21) (his description of all the symptoms made her notice the worst in her own body) Affective participation in the textual world implicates the reader in a community of shared bodily experience, (28) which might be gendered or belong to other cultural formations, just as the reader is obliged to participate in certain assumptions about the functioning of space and time in order to make sense of a narrative. In the tension between recognition and exclusion, between familiar and unfamiliar phenomena (both bodily and spatio-temporal), the reader’s engagement in the textual community is negotiated.

Grønfeldt’s novels are renowned for their sensitivity to the natural environment: ‘[y]ou can taste [Grønfeldt’s universe] and feel it tickling and scratching’. (29) The senses are assailed by the taste, feel, sound, and, especially, smell, of food, flowers, animals, the elements, and, often, by the smell of dead bodies. The multi-sensory, mutually-intensifying effects of movement and affect are often emphasised, along with the premonition of their duration:

De måtte spise på vejen, og vandet blandede sig med det øverste, bløde lag is [...]

Den store is ville snart være forbi. Men der var ny nydelse i at tage munden helt fuld

og lade alt smelte ud over tænder og tunge og gane, mens det varme regnvand stadig vaskede gennem den røde kjole[.] (ML, p. 6)

(They had to eat on the way, and the water mixed with the soft top layer of ice-cream [...] The big ice-cream would soon be over and done. But it was a new enjoyment to get her mouth completely full and let it all melt out over her teeth and tongue and palate, while the warm rain was still soaking through her red dress)

It is where these phenomena seem to morph with the body of the receptor that the boundary between human and nature is blurred. At the border of internal, ‘personal’ space and external, ‘public’ space lies the conceptual ‘peri-personal’ space; the plane between the sense-organ and the phenomenon it perceives. (30) In Grønfeldt’s texts, however, there is a concern with challenging the integrity of the human body by focusing on the penetration of or contact with its surface by smells, tastes, surfaces and weather, often couched in atomic or cellular terms. Sometimes, this effect is activated by physical penetration, viz. the filicide recounted above, followed by the week-long evolution of the scents from the funeral wreaths. Hanna’s enforced sexual intercourse with her husband’s colleague is perceived by her as wriggling through a mass of dough; (ML, p. 211) and after Martine Sørensen is raped, she stuffs her dinner of juicy ham, beans and cherries into her mouth, leaving the juices to run down her front. (ID, pp. 270-1) On her confirmation day, a girl receives flowers and buries her nose in the bouquet, inhaling again and again; colours as well as scents are said to ‘brede sig’, (ID, p. 44) (spread themselves) and in fact this verb is frequently used in connection with scents in both novels, establishing the material existence of scents: their molecules spread and move and break down over time and in space. It is when they hit the human sense-organs, in various combinations, that they are registered, begin to ‘mean’, are incorporated into the memory of the associated events. Just

before Emilie sees her dying father being carried from the potato fields, she experiences a curious combination of smells: ‘Snart bredte lugten af middagsmad sig fra den åbne køkkendør, blandedes med blomsterduften. Gyldenlak, ribes’. (ID, p. 66) (Soon the smell of lunch began to spread from the open kitchen door, mixed with the scent of flowers. Wallflowers, redcurrant) This trope of permeation of the body by environmental material is rooted in anatomical reality, for the human body is anything but hermetically sealed off from its surroundings: ‘[i]t folds in at the mouth, ears, nostrils, eyes, anus, urethra, vagina, and pores [...] This is one leaky “box”’. (31) And the ultimate degeneration of the body’s inner and outer fabric through terminal illness is often couched in terms of smell: there is a noticeable stench from sickbeds, (ID, p.107; ML, p. 7) and when, one summer, Albert Svendsen is found dead, the home-help swears that the smell hung around her all day. (ID, p. 39) When nine-year-old Arthur hears about his friend Jon’s imminent death, he registers acutely the lingering smell of apples from a generation ago; the distinctive aromas of their life-cycle, their flowering, ripening, rotting and eventual mouldering co-exist. (ID, p. 187) After her ninety-five years of life, the Photographer is acutely aware of the eternal return of all things to the raw stuff from which they are made, and her description of a photograph of a dead soldier in the mud of the trenches provides a commentary on the fate of her townspeople. The body is already dissolved, its eye-sockets and skull empty; even the army jacket is ‘[n]edbrudt til de oprindelige molekyler, som drengen i den’. (ML, p.194) (broken down to its original molecules, like the boy in it)

In a key passage, which is adopted as the title of this chapter, a teenage girl has realised the import of the molecular community of the living and the dead, an interconnected collective body. She wants to write a novel when she grows up, which will contain ‘vores sanser og vores tro og vores viden. Krop og sjæl’ (our senses and

our beliefs and our knowledge. Body and soul), because ‘[n]år vi er døde, forvandler cellerne sig til en usynlig krop’. (ID, p. 262) (when we are dead, the cells evolve into an invisible body) This invisible body, I would claim, is both the molecular remains of the disintegrated corpse, and the social constellation(s) to which the deceased belongs.

When the senses malfunction, the boundary between outside and inside the body is more clearly perceived. When a second stroke takes Dorothea’s hearing, she laughs, and ‘mærker lyden forplante sig ny og stor i kraniet’, (ML, p. 33) (feels the sound reproduce itself new and large inside the skull) just as Emilie’s father, as the haemorrhage spreads through his brain, hears a new sound, a thunder of blood in the skull, drowning out the sounds of the outside world. (ID, p. 64) Dorothea breaks the monotony of the buzzing in her ears by scraping metal on porcelain, producing a synaesthetic effect: ‘Tonen [...] berører lige akkurat de fine sanseceller som strofer fra en overjordisk sang. Den ses i hendes lyse værelse og strejfer smagsløgene på samme måde som friske jordbær’. (ML, p. 33) (The tone [...] hits precisely the fine sense-cells like stanzas from a heavenly chorus. It can be seen in her light bedroom and caresses the taste-buds just like fresh strawberries) When a wife is struck dumb by shock and anger, she hears and sees more than before: everything is bigger and more detailed. (ID, pp. 59-60) And the loss of perspective engendered by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder translates into a minutely-nuanced and multi-sensory registration of the material phenomena with a precise geometrical proximity to the body. (ID, p. 116)

So this permeable, synaesthetic body echoes Haraway’s call for the construction and deconstruction of boundaries in mapping human and nature. For cyborgs, ‘nature and culture are reworked: the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or

incorporation with the other'. (32) But the texts also factor in another dimension of the body: it is always in process, moving through space and developing in (biological) time. In doing so, it moves through or grows into the community, via norms and rituals and interaction, as the newspaper report on Amory Åkerlund's dance project maintains: "Dansen nedbryder alle barrierer, og der opstår kontakt mellem rig og fattig, gammel og ung. Vi lægger stor vægt på at finde en særlig dansk karnival-identitet". (ML, p. 81) (Dancing breaks down barriers, and provides contact between rich and poor, old and young. We think it's important to discover a special Danish carnival-identity) One girl's journey to adulthood, upon her Confirmation, is described in terms of spatial movement through the community:

Hun levede i forventning. Hele tiden med en fornemmelse af at stige opad og opad og nærme sig byen nedefra. Fra barndommen blev hun løftet ind i det rigtige liv og blev en af dem [...] Hun blev løftet i sin egen krop og fik flere og flere kræfter, mens katekismen og trosbekendelsen sang i hovedet. Hun glædede sig til kjolen, til festen, til flag og hurra, til cykel, ur og cigaretter [...] Hun smilte og hilste på en anden måde på vej gennem byen, og den smilte og hilste på en anden måde på hende[.] (ID, p. 37)

(She lived in expectation. Always with a feeling of moving upwards and upwards and nearing the town from below. From childhood, she was lifted into real life and became one of them [...] She was lifted bodily and gained more and more power, while the catechism and the creed rang in her head. She looked forward to the dress, the party, the flags and hurrahs, to the bicycle, the watch and cigarettes [...] She smiled and waved differently on her way through the town, and it smiled and waved differently back at her)

In both senses, she is aware of being propelled in an upward direction, and both dimensions of the experience of being lifted are felt bodily. The religious teaching and litanies that will make her a part of the Church also mark her as a new (woman) member of the town community, and, indeed, the rituals and symbols associated with the Confirmation are a blend of things to put on her putatively woman's body or consume, and group practices; the flag-flying, in particular, ties the religious, familial and local communities to the national community. Aside from biological maturation and deterioration, the body moves through a socio-cultural spacetime: its physical movements and practices bring it into or out of, closer to or further away from, the gendered, local and national communities.

4. Organisms and Technology

‘Jeg er god til barneportrætter, men ikke til børn’. (ML, p. 20) (I am good at children's portraits, but not children) The Photographer knows that she has contributed to posterity through her technical skill, not her biological potential. It is worth dwelling on the technology of photography for what it reveals about time, memory and the human body, and, by extension, about the exploration of these elements in the two novels. The periodic family portrait is a ritual, capturing a stage on the family's journey through time, and the Photographer frequently muses on the disparity between the fiction suggested by the image and the reality of the subjects' lives and relations. The symbiosis of human and technology inherent in the photograph is neatly captured by Roland Barthes, who explains that ‘from a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here [...] like the delayed rays of a star’. This is made possible by ‘the mediation of a precious metal’. (33) The dead are caught up in the living community through the presence of

their material remains in the earth and in the chemical alchemy of the 10,000 photographs she has taken.

Barthes also attributes a curious twist in the conception of time to the photograph, a conception which, I would argue, informs both novels. He sees a ‘punctum’, a flash of interest in all photographs which, sometimes, is the certainty of past and present, of death. In capturing a moment-in-time, the photograph also implies a past and a future, the certain death of the subject and the observer, ‘the vertigo of time defeated’. (34) Grønfeldt’s Photographer herself has never been sure that ‘nu er nu, og nu findes’; (ML, p. 22) (now is now, and now exists) the photograph is the only way to arrest the constant movement of bodies. Commenting on the ungraspability of the present, Massumi observes that ‘[a] body present is in a dissolve: out of what it is just ceasing to be, into what it will already have become by the time it registers that something has happened. The present smudges the past and the future’. (35) But a photographer, as the Photographer’s mother says, ‘ser ind mellem sekunderne’. (ML, p.169) (sees in between the seconds)

This dynamic temporality – the tension between the incessant becoming of bodies and the artificial instantaneity of the photograph – is crucial to Grønfeldt’s narrative experiment. Although photography does not feature as a trope in I dag, in a sense the photographic logic of Mulighedernes land is more fulfilled here, for each moment-in-time in I dag is precisely defined chronologically: year, day and hour are specified. The measurement of time is one of the most fundamental technological interventions in, or interpretations of, nature. But it is too simple to interpret the haunting presence of ‘rural’, cyclical time as a strategy of resistance or a performance of alterity in defiance of the time of modernity. Rather, the contestation of ‘local’ and ‘modern’

times reveals a liminality within the nation: the rural. Those who are closest to the national landscape return as the Other within.

The century's march brings an insidious spread of the modern to the margins, imposing national or global rhythms, which the Photographer likens to Goebbels' propaganda machine. The media imposes the same dreams and trajectories on millions: not a single island, she says, is immune from the media, motorways, ready-meals. (ML, p. 46) And yet, this apparent technological totalitarianism is undercut by an emphasis on its interaction with the human body; memory, history and sensation are still rooted in the flesh. One of Grønfeldt's television addicts can certainly feel the effects of its hyperreality in her veins, particularly when watching athletics:

Hun opdagede ved at se på atleterne, på de kloge og smukke, at hun kunne løbe og flyve i halvlyset, hade, tilbede, dræbe. [...] Hun mærkede det i kroppen, skiftede køn og svævede over jorden. Og skiftede køn igen. (ID, p. 253)

(She noticed, while watching the athletes, so talented and beautiful, that she could run and fly in the half-light, hate, worship, kill [...] She felt it in her body, changed sex and hovered over the earth. And changed sex again.)

The adverts, meanwhile, are said to hit her in the solar plexus; (ID, p. 257) and media images 'arbejder i kødet natten over'. (ML, p. 76) (work in the flesh overnight) In the plejehjem, Søren Nielsen joins an international club which links pensioners via video-taped messages. This electronic medium is just as suggestive, just as affective, as the traditional pen-pal's letter, though, for on delivery days, the residents' excitement is tangible: '[a]llerede tidligt om morgenen er der en sød uro i cellerne. Der lugter af barbersæbe og parfume, brændt hår fra krøllejern og hårtørere'. (ID, p.172) (from early in the morning there is a sweet unrest in the cells. There's a smell

of shaving foam and perfume, burnt hair from curling tongs and hairdryers) And the scientific discourse of biology, information about advances in transplant medicine, comes via the television. A surgeon makes a televised plea for his theory on the role of bodily cells in the recovery of transplant patients: the cells must be mobilised by spreading among them 'et rygte om glæden' (a rumour of happiness) through positive thinking; the result, he claims, will be 'det nye menneske' – a whole new human. (ID, p. 47) The impact of the media on the discourses of Grønfeldt's characters is suggestive of Haraway's comment that '[c]ommunication sciences and biology are constructions of natural-technical objects of knowledge in which the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred; mind, body and tool are on very intimate terms'. (36)

5. The God of the Earth

Their very location at the rural margins renders the communities of which Grønfeldt writes peculiarly and ambivalently susceptible to the ravages of modernity: they are special victims of the break-down of local community fabric, and the beneficiaries, too, of enormous gains in agricultural productivity and material affluence. In mapping out the Danish twentieth century fragmentedly, Mulighedernes land and I dag are able to hint at the 'cyborg' mentality that allows for an incessant moving across boundaries between human and nature, organism and machine, thus displacing, as Haraway suggests, 'the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities'. (37) The fractal diagram of concentric communities, connections and heterochronies that forms from the myriad 'snapshots' – or biopsies? – in time is a way to write the constant transgression of boundaries of localities and affinities that inform our contemporary ethnic and gender identities. The human body, it turns out, is cellularly spliced with

nature and technology. Indeed, the cyborg, the Photographer affirms, is mandatory for the survival of human life:

Vi kan ikke glemme de mirakler, vi har set i form af hestløse vogne, måneraketter og genteknologi. Det ville stride imod livet. Vi kan ikke forære høsten væk for selv at dø af sult. Jordens Gud er ikke blødsøden. (ML, p. 9)

(We cannot forget the miracles we have seen in the form of horseless carriages, lunar rockets and gene technology. That would rail against life. We cannot give away our harvest only to die of hunger. The God of the Earth is not merciful.)

Notes

1. Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in Donna J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (Free Association Books, London, 1991), p. 163. Hereafter referred to in the notes as ACM.
2. Brian Massumi, Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Duke University Press, Durham & London, 2003), p. 202.
3. ACM, p. 154.
4. Op. cit., p. 181.
5. Vibeke Grønfelt, Mulighedernes land I & II. (Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1989); and Vibeke Grønfelt, I dag. (Samleren, Copenhagen, 1998). Hereafter referred to as ML and ID respectively. All English translations of Grønfelt's book titles and prose are mine.
6. Johannes Nørregaard Frandsen, 'Vibeke Grønfelt', in Anne-Marie Mai (ed.) Danske digtere i det 20. århundrede. Bind III (Gads Forlag, Copenhagen, 2001), p. 214.

7. Torben Madsen, 'Stories from the Fringe' available from www.litteraturnet.dk/danvalg/f_artikellaes.asp?fid=71&aid=73 (Danish Literature Centre, 1991) (accessed 29.3.01).
8. ACM, p. 175.
9. Op. cit., pp. 180-1.
10. As argued in C. C. Thomson, 'Danmarkshistorier': National Imagination and Novel in Late Twentieth Century Denmark (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2003).
11. Donna J. Haraway, 'Reading Buchi Emecheta: Contests for "Women's Experience" in Women's Studies', in Donna J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (Free Association Books, London, 1991), p. 114.
12. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000) p. 5.
13. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (Vintage, London, 1991), pp. 25-7.
14. See especially Robert Holton, Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1994); Cairns Craig, Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture (Polygon, Edinburgh, 1996); Søren Mørch, Den sidste Danmarkshistorie. 57 fortællinger af fædrelandets historie (Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1996).
15. Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Verso, London, 1991), p. 345.
16. Donna J. Haraway, "'Gender" for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word', in Donna J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (Free Association Books, London, 1991), p.147, emphasis in original.

17. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, Gossip (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1985); Robin Dunbar, Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language (Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1996).
18. Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1992), p. 38.
19. ACM, p. 163.
20. Michel Foucault, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 2: Aesthetics (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1998), p. 181.
21. Sarah Ahmed, 'Feminist Futures', in Mary Eagleton (ed.) A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory (Blackwell, Oxford, 2003), p. 244.
22. See Hana Wirth-Nesher, City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994).
23. See Michael Billig, Banal Nationalism (Sage, London, 1995).
24. Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (Routledge, London & New York, 1994) p. 145.
25. ACM, pp. 180-1.
26. Middleton & Woods 2000, p. 6.
27. Massumi 2003, p. 139.
28. See Britta Timm Knudsen, 'Realismespor i 90'ernes kortprosa', in Britta Timm Knudsen and Bodil Marie Thomsen (eds.) Virkelighedshunger – nyrealismen i visuel optik (Tiderne Skifter, Copenhagen, 2002).
29. Madsen, op. cit.
30. Massumi 2003, p. 187.
31. Op. cit., p. 203.
32. ACM, p. 151.
33. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (Vintage, London, 2000; 1981), pp. 80-1.

34. Op. cit., p. 97.

35. Masumi 2003, p. 200.

36. ACM, p. 165.

37. Op. cit., p. 175.